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PROGRESS REPORTS

Confidentiality and privacy aspects of statistical data integration

Submitted by the UNECE secretariat

1. In June 2006, the CES decided that a Task Force be created to examine the confidentiality concerns related to integrated data sets and consider the development of common principles. Brian Pink, then Chief Statistician of Statistics New Zealand, agreed to prepare the TOR for the Task Force.
2. The CES Bureau considered the Terms of Reference (TOR) and approved them at its February 2007 meeting. The TOR for the Task Force on Confidentiality and Privacy Aspects of Statistical Data Integration are provided in the Annex.

ANNEX

TASK FORCE ON CONFIDENTIALITY AND PRIVACY ASPECTS OF STATISTICAL DATA INTEGRATION

TERMS OF REFERENCE

I. BACKGROUND

1. In a number of mainly European countries, integration of administrative data sources (particularly register-based sources) has been an important part of the national administrative and statistical information infrastructure for some time. In more recent years, a number of other national statistical organizations have also been pursuing the development of new statistical datasets constructed by integrating unit record administrative and/or survey data. These integrated datasets can then be used to compile new official statistics and/or support a range of economic and social research not possible using traditional sources.
2. Integration of unit record data from different sources has been seen to have a number of benefits, including the production of new or enhanced statistical outputs that fill identified information gaps; the production of more disaggregated information for measures where some information currently exists; the ability to carry out policy-relevant research using integrated datasets; the potential to use integrated data to improve or confront existing data sources; and the potential to reduce respondent burden or, alternatively, to collect additional information at no extra cost to respondents.
3. At the same time, country experience to date with the process of developing data integration projects has been that they are very resource-intensive, particularly as they require very careful management of privacy and confidentiality in order to try to mitigate any concerns from data suppliers, respondents, the general public and watchdogs such as a Privacy Commissioner or an Ombudsman. In cases such as where taxation or social security data are being used, the supplier agency can often have legislative requirements that place limits on the use of and access to their data. The confidentiality issues related to giving access for researchers to microdata from linked files require special attention.

II. DELIVERABLE

4. A draft set of principles and practices which aim to establish a common framework for assessing and mitigating legislative and other confidentiality and privacy aspects of the creation and use of integrated datasets for statistical and associated research purposes.

III. TASKS

5. To produce a draft set of (a) principles and (b) associated protocols/guidelines for addressing confidentiality and privacy aspects of statistical data integration projects that
 - (a) consider whether these need to vary for individual and business data, and
 - (b) are general enough to be able to be adapted by the countries that participate in the

Conference of European Statisticians,
and

- (c) to submit a draft proposal for the consideration of the 2008 Conference of European Statisticians (CES);
- (d) if accepted, compile a set of current best practices to guide implementation as a second phase of the project post the 2008 CES meeting.

6. The Task Force will build on the CES Guidelines on Managing Statistical Confidentiality and Microdata Access.

7. The United Nations Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics should be used as a guide on length and style for the presentation of the draft principles and guidelines. This work should also be seen in the context, as seen at the 2003 Conference of European Statisticians, of support for research being an important activity of the national statistical offices.

IV. TASK FORCE MEMBERSHIP

8. The Task Force membership has been chosen to represent the varying interests of the members of the Conference of European Statisticians. The membership will be Australia, Canada, Finland, Netherlands (to be confirmed), Poland (to be confirmed), Slovenia, United States, UNECE, and Eurostat. Mr Pink (ABS, Australia) will be Chairman of the Task Force.

V. MODUS OPERANDI

9. During the development of the draft principles and protocols/guidelines, the Task Force will consult with member countries, representatives of the research community, and selected bodies concerned with confidentiality and privacy issues. This does not preclude the Task Force from collaborating with others who may have an interest in the topic. The work of the Nordic countries in their review of best practices in register-based statistics, which had a particular focus on population and social statistics, will also be referenced during this project.

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