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Geospatial information services based on official statistics

In-depth review of geospatial information services based on official statistics

Comments on the outcome of the in-depth review

Note by the Secretariat

Summary

This note summarizes the comments by members of the Conference of European Statisticians on the outcome of the in-depth review on geospatial information services based on official statistics. The Secretariat carried out the electronic consultation in February-March 2016.

A total of 16 countries and international organizations replied and provided comments reflected in the document, which is presented for discussion to the Conference of European Statisticians seminar on “Geospatial information services based on official statistics” (organized by Austria). The seminar will be used to get broader input to the discussion. The CES Bureau will decide on further work on this issue after the seminar.

I. Comments on the outcome of the in-depth review on geospatial information services based on official statistics

1. A total of 16 replies were received in response to the request for comments, from: Armenia, Croatia, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Mexico, New Zealand, Poland, Portugal, Russian Federation, Sweden, Turkey, United States and Eurostat.

2. All responding countries and institutions expressed support to the outcome of the in-depth review by the Bureau based on the paper prepared by the United Kingdom (ECE/CES/2016/7). In addition, the following general remarks were made:

(a) Croatia supports the paper and indicates that merging statistics with geospatial units brings a new look at the statistics. At the same time, when data is easier visualized by users, Croatia alerts for the increased risk of disclosure of individual data.

(b) Germany welcomes the document and expresses its concerns with data confidentiality.

(c) Hungary considers the in-depth review to be a well-structured, comprehensive and proactive document; and expresses the appreciation for the compilation of the papers and responsible approach. In Hungary's view, the reviews play an important role to enhance coordination of statistical work.

(d) Italy provides comments on the value-added of geography to statistical data, the current goals of UNGGIM and its working groups and on Big Data. On the latter, Italy highlights that merging geospatial big data (e.g. from mobile phone locations or GPS sources from users) with statistical data is a new challenge within production and dissemination processes.

(e) Lithuania acknowledges the importance of integrating geographic and statistical information at all levels and supports recent developments concerning geospatial information services based on official statistics, related to integration of GSBPM and CSPA models into geospatial processes. In addition, Lithuania welcomes efforts to coordinate services provided by the geospatial information systems and to harmonize standards and definitions related to geospatial processes. Lithuania also expresses appreciation of the work carried out by the UN GGIM, as NSOs will benefit from the Global Statistical Spatial Framework.

(f) New Zealand indicates that geospatial capability can improve the value of statistics and reduce the risk of disclosure. New Zealand also expresses its support to the work of the UN-GGIM on developing the Global Statistical Spatial Framework (GSSF) and is already committed to implement it nationally, taking into account local circumstances and necessary flexibility. New Zealand believes that implementing a GSSF will deliver benefits to all agencies.

(g) The Russian Federation considers the development of information technologies promising and informs that, in preparation for the 2020 census round, the use of elements of geo-information technologies is under consideration.

(h) Turkey highlights the usefulness of a system of Small Area Statistics which gives more sustainable insights to statistical data, rather than the use of vague aggregations to large area statistics. For this, Turkey indicates that the availability of geocoded statistical data needs strong collaboration between institutions.

3. Germany, Portugal and the United States submitted specific comments on the text of the in-depth review document prepared by the United Kingdom. These comments will be transmitted to the authors of the report.

II. Views on the way forward

4. Some countries made the following comments or suggestions concerning possible future work in the field of geospatial information services in official statistics:

(a) Croatia indicates that it would be useful to work on models of data protection when statistics are shown in grids, and that special consideration should be given both to spatial areas with inhabitants and unpopulated areas.

(b) Finland welcomes the coordinating role of UNECE and suggests the following topics on forthcoming work: (i) promoting the use of geospatial information services on the compilation of SDG-indicators; (ii) improvement and standardization of metadata related to statistics utilizing geospatial information (SDMX+Inspire, among others); (iii) harmonization of the terminology, and (iv) development and harmonization of data protection techniques.

(c) Germany expressed its concerns regarding data confidentiality and expressed interest in the pragmatic approach by Australia and Mexico. General recommendations based on these approaches would be useful for common procedures and with regard to the small-scale data needs for reporting on SDGs.

(d) Italy highlighted that UNGGIM globally (and UNGGIM-Europe and Eurostat) should develop guidelines and best practices to ensure quality and reduce the risk of data disclosure particularly in the context of data at small geographic levels.

(e) Lithuania acknowledges that NSOs have to be more flexible in provision of relevant statistical data for geo-referential purposes, which foresees necessary modernisation activities in official statistics and better user-oriented services. However, offering the potential for provision of information at more detailed levels, data confidentiality issues in small territories have to be taken into account.

(f) Mexico suggests that NSOs could use the standards defined by the UNGGIM for the establishment of Global Geodetic Reference Frame, essential for performing any geo-referencing points.

(g) New Zealand indicates that work is needed to understand the value of geospatial information, harmonise spatial and statistical standards, and increase the level of spatial analysis used in reporting.

(h) Sweden indicates its strong support to the CES Bureau proposal addressed to the High-level group for the Modernization of Official Statistics (HLG-MOS), to consider taking up some geospatial elements in its work and adjust GSBPM from the viewpoint of processing geospatial information. Sweden coordinates the GEOSTAT 2 project which will result in proposals for such GSBPM adjustments in the final report, ready by the end of 2016. Sweden would appreciate it if the HLG-MOS would recognize the GEOSTAT 2 proposals and elaborate them further, with the goal to incorporate the geospatial dimension in the GSBPM.

(i) Turkey expressed its interest to contribute to future activities for geospatial information services, particularly on grid based systems.
