



**Economic and Social  
Council**

Distr.  
GENERAL

ECE/CES/GE.42/2009/2  
2 November 2009

Original: ENGLISH

**ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE**

**STATISTICAL COMMISSION**

**CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS**

Meeting of Group of Experts on Business Registers

**REPORT OF THE GROUP OF EXPERTS ON BUSINESS REGISTERS  
ON ITS ELEVENTH MEETING  
Luxembourg, 6-7 October 2009**

**I. INTRODUCTION**

1. The eleventh meeting of the Group of Experts on Business Registers was held in Luxembourg from 6-7 October 2009. It was organised in cooperation with the Commission of the European Communities (Eurostat) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). It was attended by Albania, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Canada, China, Colombia, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Ecuador, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, Korea, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Mexico, Moldova, Montenegro, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland, Tajikistan, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom, United States of America and Uzbekistan. The meeting was attended by representatives of the Commission of European Communities (Eurostat), Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), International Labour Office (ILO), United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and Pacific (UNESCAP) and United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO).

2. The provisional agenda was adopted.

3. Mr. Fabio Tomasini (Switzerland), Mr Claude Macchi (Eurostat), Mr. Andreas Lindner (OECD), and Ms. Vitalija Gaucaite Wittich (UNECE) co-chaired the meeting.

## **II. ORGANIZATION OF THE MEETING**

4. Information on activities and events since the tenth meeting on business registers in 2007 was provided to the participants by UNECE, Eurostat, OECD. OECD also reported on the outcomes from the 21st meeting of the Wiesbaden Group on Business Registers that took place in November 2008 in Paris.

5. The following substantive topics were discussed at the meeting on the basis of papers presented by international and country experts:

- (a) Profiling practices and related issues (profiling of public sector units, special purpose entities, etc.);
- (b) Sources for identification of enterprise groups (before profiling);
- (c) Business Register as a source for further development of business demography statistics;
- (d) Best practices for publication, dissemination and wider statistical use of BR data;
- (e) Future work: meeting future work and priorities.

6. The meeting was preceded by a one day workshop for the experts from the countries of Western Balkans, Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia. It was organized as a part of the UNECE Technical Cooperation Programme and hosted by Eurostat. The workshop focused on national experiences and expert recommendations concerning (i) legal framework for statistical business registers, (ii) issues of linking units of administrative sources with statistical BR, and (iii) incorporation of enterprise groups into the statistical BR.

## **III. SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION AND THE MAIN CONCLUSIONS REACHED AT THE MEETING**

7. Recommendations for future work are given below. The conveners' summary of the discussion and conclusions that the participants reached at the meeting on the above topics are presented in the annex (in English only). The documentation of the meeting are available on the UNECE website <http://www.unece.org/stats/documents/2009.10.busreg.htm>

## **IV. RECOMMENDED FUTURE WORK**

8. The meeting recommended that a next working session of Group of experts on Business Registers, convened by UNECE in cooperation with Eurostat and OECD, takes place in autumn of 2011. The possible venue can be Paris or alternatively Geneva. The session meetings shall be prepared by the organising committee consisting of the representatives of UNECE, Eurostat and OECD and a country representative from the Wiesbaden Group's steering body.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Wiesbaden Steering group currently include: France, Germany, United Kingdom, USA, and Eurostat, OECD and UNECE.

9. The following substantive topics were considered of greatest interest for possible inclusion in the agenda of the next working session of Group of experts on business registers (BR):

(a) Linking statistical business registers across various agencies, statistical domains and among countries;

(b) Defining statistical units in statistical business register

(c) Reducing respondent burden – role of statistical business register in optimising information flow between respondents, administrative registers and NSOs.

10. The meeting recognized the importance of special workshops/training sessions for the countries with less developed statistical BR and recommended to more actively seek financial support for such activities. The biannual UNECE BR questionnaire may be used to gauge the needs of these countries for expert advice and training.

11. The meeting agreed that the UNECE should continue to conduct its BR survey in alternate years, covering those UNECE and OECD countries not in the Eurostat annual inquiry. The results of the UNECE surveys on BR and their analysis should be made publicly available, for instance, by being posted on the UNECE web site.

[ENGLISH ONLY]

## **Annex**

### **CONVENERS' SUMMARY OF THE DISCUSSION**

#### **A. Profiling practices and related issues (profiling of public sector units, special purpose entities, etc.)**

Convener: Fabio Tomasini, Switzerland.

1. The focus of this discussion was on the implementation of profiling within the framework of public administration. Canada, Italy, Switzerland and the United Kingdom presented papers on their experiences and France introduced the aims and structure of the "ESSnet on profiling large and complex MNEs" project.

2. Based on practical examples, presentations and the subsequent discussion illustrated the specificities of the profiling methods in public administration and underscored the advantages and disadvantages of these methods:

- (a) The public sector is taken into account and is generally treated with a specific method;
- (b) The public sector is heterogeneous, each country has its own problems;
- (c) The profiling in public sector is a necessary and an important activity to update BR;
- (d) The distinction between market and non market activities in the public sector is a central activity of the profiling in public sector;
- (e) The profiling of the public enterprise needs a clear and harmonized methodology;
- (f) Special treatment of the public sector improves the statistical system (coherence).

#### **B. Source for identification of enterprise groups (before profiling)**

Convener: Claude Macchi, Eurostat

3. The goal was to discuss issues relevant to the widening of the function of statistical BRs in response to the worldwide globalization and related developments. The discussion focused on the need to identify and monitor units like the enterprise groups (national and multinational) and on differences in country experiences in this new area of work. China, Mexico, the Netherlands, United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) and Eurostat contributed papers for the discussion.

4. Most countries indicated that information on enterprise groups for BR are based on:

- (a) Administrative sources (tax authorities, social security, customs, etc.);
- (b) Private data suppliers;
- (c) Questionnaires;

- (d) Field surveys.

5. The discussion revealed that there are certain ambiguities in regard of the observed units between countries: The same terms are often used, but not necessarily covering the content (local unit, legal unit, establishment, enterprise, etc.).

6. It was recognized that for including enterprise groups into the statistical BR and monitoring them there is a general need of:

- (a) Standardisation of processes;
- (b) Combination of data from different sources;
- (c) Definition of unique codes of enterprises;
- (d) Reduction of staff burden and administrative costs.

### **C. Business Register as a source for further development of business demography statistics**

Convener: Andreas Lindner, OECD

7. The discussion reasserted the role of business registers in monitoring the compositional trends, shifts and dynamics of main economic actors particularly in the periods of changing economic cycle. The papers presented by Spain, Japan, Eurostat and OECD and the subsequent discussion highlighted the following aspects:

- (a) On Business Register and Manual on Business Demography Statistics
  - (i) A good, comprehensive BR allows, inter alia, to measure firm dynamics of micro enterprises;
  - (ii) Full access to administrative sources (e.g. taxation records) is indispensable for complete coverage;
  - (iii) The BR is a prerequisite for business demography statistics;
  - (iv) BR are at the basis of the economic statistics system;
  - (v) The OECD-Eurostat Manual on Business Demography Statistics is a very useful tool for designing business demography statistics;
  - (vi) Harmonized data collection (includes 0 employees) different from Employer Business Demography (1 to 4 employees).
- (b) On OECD-Eurostat Entrepreneurship Indicators Programme
  - (i) The OECD-Eurostat Entrepreneurship Indicators Programme (EIP) works well and proved useful (better alignment of OECD and EU countries);
  - (ii) OECD expands country coverage for this programme;
  - (iii) There is a broad definition of entrepreneurship, however, there is a need to distinguish between various types of entrepreneurship;
  - (iv) High demand for more timely EIP indicators;

- (v) These indicators form a part of key set of policy relevant data (e.g. Lisbon strategy, economic crisis, etc.).

**D. Best practices for publication, dissemination and wider statistical use of Business Register data**

Convener: Vitalija Gaucaite Wittich, UNECE

8. The discussion on this topic was based on the premise that with client-oriented policies in statistics taking firmer ground and new techniques for dissemination of data becoming available, publication and use of BR for direct production of statistics becomes more widespread. However, the four presentations in this session – by Finland, Russian Federation, Tajikistan and Azerbaijan - referred to very uneven experiences in this respect:

- (a) Very open and active involvement in statistics production and dissemination, and at times tailor-made and chargeable services based in Finland;
- (b) More traditional and narrower BR utility as a sampling frame and periodic listing/catalogue of units available on request by the authorities and in some cases by private businesses in other countries

9. It was recognized that enhancing BR utility for statistics production and increasing the number of published outputs or providing electronic access to its database require:

- (a) Additional work and resources for BR team;
- (b) Widening of scope of BR (coverage & additional variables);
- (c) And, in case of access to the BR micro data, statistical confidentiality issue has to be resolved.

10 The statistical confidentiality and response burden issues remain of high importance in respect of BR utility. It was pointed out that although the attitude in the Finnish society is in favour of open registers, the delivery of BR data to the public has some negative impact on response to surveys.

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