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STATISTICS DIRECTORATE

Working Party on International Trade in Goods and Trade in Services Statistics

**REPORT OF THE WIESBADEN GROUP ON BUSINESS REGISTERS MEETING
HELD 24-27 NOVEMBER 2008 AT THE OECD**

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Note by OECD

1. The 21st Meeting of the Wiesbaden Group on Business Registers took place on 24-27 November 2008 at the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), which had offered to host this event. This 2008 meeting of the Wiesbaden Group (formerly Round Table on Business Survey Frames), with a longstanding history of achievements, has attracted 85 participants from 39 delegations. It is the sole international forum concerned with analysing and comparing the foundations of statistical systems, reflected also in the title of the 2008 meeting "The Central Place of Business Register Systems in Response to Globalisation Needs". The meeting was organized in seven sessions and a description of each session is provided in this report. The Chair of the meeting was Mr. Andreas Lindner, OECD.

2. As is a longstanding tradition, the meeting started with country progress reports under Session 1. Some 32 reports were briefly presented, outlining new developments and solutions found. A synopsis of trends and issues will be prepared in 2009. The session was chaired by Mr. Andreas Lindner, OECD.

3. Session 2 on the "Need for global, integrated, statistical systems – identifying best practices" was divided into two sub-sessions: the producer perspective and user perspective. Session 2a examined the producer's point of view, leading to important key conclusions, such as that new tasks for statistics should begin with feeding first of all into the register system, that the business register is the backbone but requires close co-operation with other statistical services, and that globalization forces statisticians to reconsider what a statistical unit should be. Session chair was Mr. Roland Sturm, Germany.

4. Session 2b looked at the same from a user perspective. Main problems identified were lack of identity across observation units and the increasing need for more statistics, linking trade and structural business statistics (in particular by size-class). Also the need to expand data collection to services was stated. Linkage problems were the main user concern. This session was chaired by Mr. Andreas Lindner, OECD.

5. Session 3 "Costs and Benefit of Profiling" was chaired by Mr. John Perry, United Kingdom. After having examined current practice, the session identified issues for future consideration, such as the role of multinational groups, how to manage monitoring dynamic business structures, quality control and the role of information technology and data sharing needs across countries.

6. Session 4 focused on this latter aspect by looking at "Concepts and Methods for Information and Data Sharing": important conclusions were that the business register system will have to increasingly link to administrative sources and that national statistical institutions (NSIs) through their comparative advantage over other statistical government bodies should be entrusted with the design of the governmental data system. Therefore, NSIs should generally play an even greater role as already today in coordinating, integrating and sharing of the national statistical system. Trust in official statistics is a key issue. Session chair was Mr. Norbert Rainer, Austria.

7. “Projects on the Improvement of Business Registers” was the theme of Session 5. Chaired by Mr. Claude Macchi, Statistical Office of the European Communities (Eurostat), it allowed to identify common problems, such as the lack of standardization of IDs and insufficient data sharing across registers. The quality of business registers as central tool for future statistical design was underlined.
8. Session 6 “New areas of research” was one of the focal topics of the meeting and, hence, composed of three sub-sessions.
9. Session 6a “Entrepreneurship Indicators, Business Demography and Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs)” was chaired by Mr. Hartmut Schroer, Eurostat. Central themes were the measurement and the limitations thereof of high growth enterprises, the harmonized measurement of employment in business demography, and timely release of data. The outlook stressed the need to implement in the European Union/OECD data collection composite indicators on high-growth enterprises and the need to further harmonize employment measures in business demography.
10. “Integrating Economic Business Statistics with Trade” was the theme of Session 6b, Chaired by Mr. Clancy Barrett, Canada. This linking, carried out by both Eurostat and OECD in a harmonized way (Joint Steering group), was met with considerable interest from participants and is an innovative, promising exercise for globalization-related analysis. The difficult matching of trade registers and business registers can be considerably facilitated through linkable register frameworks.
11. Session 6c, chaired by Ms. Dominique Francoz, France, was entitled “Measurement of Multinationals and Enterprise Groups”. The difficulties in distinguishing headquarters, locations, and groups entails delicate decisions for allocation. An important conclusion was that private data sources are inadequate for producing outward foreign affiliates trade in services (FATS) statistics. Work on Enterprise Group Registers in the European Union should be considered as a tool for data sharing amongst European Union member states and also provide a sampling frame for FATS surveys.
12. Session 7 “The needs and solutions in OECD accession countries, BIICS, and developing countries” was again decomposed into three sub-sessions. Session 7a “OECD accession countries’ experiences and responses” was chaired by Mr. Tim Davis, OECD. Countries could showcase successful integration of surveys and ambitious business demography programmes.
13. Session 7b “BIICS countries experience and response”, chaired by Mr. Andreas Lindner, OECD, reported on business register re-design programmes with unique IDs for enterprises and local units, and business register updates and links to census programmes.
14. Session 7c, Experience and response in developing countries”, was chaired by Ms. Vitalya Gaucaite-Wittich, United Nations Economic Commission for Europe. It highlighted cooperation projects between NSIs from developed countries and developing countries. These capacity building programmes aim at helping developing countries to build up viable and comprehensive business register systems. Developing countries were encouraged to harmonize their methodological approaches with international standards.

Conclusion and future plans

15. The meeting provided a rich list of priority actions to be carried forward over the forthcoming years. The Steering Group of the Wiesbaden Group on Business Registers will formulate a multi-year programme. The next Wiesbaden meeting will take place 27-30 September 2010 in Estonia as host country. The terms of reference of the Wiesbaden Group are (included in the Annex) / (provided in a separate background document).

ANNEX: TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE WIESBADEN GROUP

Steering Group of the Wiesbaden Group on Business Registers Wiesbaden, April 8th 2008

Terms of Reference of the Wiesbaden Group on Business Registers – Roundtable on Business Survey Frames -

1. Background

As a result of the 20th meeting in Wiesbaden the Roundtable on Business Survey Frames was renamed to “Wiesbaden Group on Business Registers”, abbreviated to “Wiesbaden Group”. As such it adopts the convention of naming for UN City Groups. The name change also reflects the changing role of business registers, which are increasingly being seen as the backbone of business statistics and as sources of statistical data in their own right, as well as an increased emphasis for the Group in defining a medium-term work programme.

The frequency of the Wiesbaden Group meetings in future will be every two years, starting in 2008.

After the conference the Steering Group met on October 26th 2007 (with delegates from Germany, United Kingdom, Australia, France, OECD, Eurostat, UNECE) and discussed the future of the Wiesbaden Group under the following topics:

- Purpose and objectives.
- Future workplan.
- Composition and role of the steering group.
- Roadmap and next meetings of the Wiesbaden Group.

2. Purpose and objectives of the Wiesbaden Group on Business Registers

The Wiesbaden Group on Business Registers is a UN City Group. Its traditional purpose is to provide a forum for the exchange of views and experience and the conduct of joint experiments related to the development, maintenance and use of business registers to support survey sampling and other statistical activities related to the production of business statistics. The Wiesbaden Group is an informal body and participation is on a voluntary basis. Participants, however, are expected to contribute at an expert level to the programme of the meetings.

The conferences of the Wiesbaden Group are the platform where problems, developments, projects, ideas, concepts and aspects of the construction, maintenance and improvements of business registers are presented and discussed. By this, the Group brings together experts and responsible persons on business registers who could use the experiences of others to promote and bring forward their own ideas for the

development of business registers. In particular the Wiesbaden Group tackles forward-looking aspects and aims to identify new challenges concerning business registers.

The Wiesbaden Group recognises the demand both for information on business register developments and for common guidelines and recommendations on different issues associated with business registers. There is a range of existing and emerging issues that require expert input to develop and promulgate approaches.

Therefore, the Wiesbaden Group intends to produce a range of outputs for different kind of users including international bodies, senior managers in National Statistical Institutions and organisations in the process of developing business registers. The most visible outputs of the group besides the conferences, are the written papers which give an in-depth view of current business register developments. All Roundtable papers are available on the websites of the host organisation and of Eurostat. Additional value could be gained by circulating the summary reports produced by session convenors, the host organisation and/or the steering group to specific international bodies.

Although its mandate does not emanate from a formal body, the Wiesbaden Group has expressed a desire to increase its emphasis on the provision of guidelines, recommendations and approaches for progressing issues related to business registers. The Wiesbaden Group anticipates, on the basis of its discussions and work programme, making recommendations regarding the consideration and/or adoption of certain practices or global level standards for business registers to the United Nations Statistical Commission.

The Wiesbaden Group recognises that it has a dual role. On the one hand many participants are expecting the exchange of experiences and ideas at an advanced level, while on the other hand the Wiesbaden Group is aware that it should be the global forum on business registers and therefore has to respect the needs and interests of countries still developing business registers. The challenge will be to find the right balance.

3. Work plan and major topics of the next conference(s)

The challenges for business registers resulting from globalisation have already been highlighted in previous conferences. The next meeting will progress work on further aspects of globalisation. The focus for the next years (until 2010) will be on the following topics:

3.1 *Profiling (Costs and Benefits)*

Profiling is a method to analyse the legal, operational and accounting structure of an enterprise group at national and global level, in order to establish the statistical units within that group, their links, and the most efficient structures for the collection of statistical data. Profiling improves the quality of the business register, its use as a survey frame and source of information. It improves the cooperation with the respondents and the delineation of the statistical units in reality. The main hindrance to profiling is its cost. With a mandate from the Steering group, Australia and United Kingdom are setting up a work schedule for the development of a measurement tools on the costs and benefits of profiling.

3.2 *Concepts and Methods for Information and Data Sharing*

In the economic sphere, fundamental changes have taken place in organising the process of economic activities more efficiently using different strategies and adapting to new models of national and international operations. Globalization therefore has an enormous effect on data production and fundamentally changes the requirements for data collection and interpretation. In consequence business

registers have to deal with changing requirements on information to be held and shared due to the globalization process.

Business Registers and Business Statistics in Developing Countries

Back-to-back with the 20th meeting of the Roundtable on Business Registers and Business Survey Frames, a special workshop for developing countries was held. The workshop brought together 18 developing as well as developed countries, discussing the prospects of supporting other nations in their developments in the field of business registers and register-based business statistics. In the future, a session within the official agenda of the conference will deal with the needs of the countries starting up business register and register-based business statistics. The main objective is to provide an extensive information database of best practice and, in the longer term, training materials.

4. Composition and roles of the Steering Group

The Steering Group comprises both National Statistical Institutes and international organisations. Current members of the group are Australia, Eurostat, France, Germany, OECD, UNECE, United Kingdom and United States (BLS).

The Steering Group is chaired by the current hosting organisation. The tasks of this group are:

- To assist the host of the next meeting on matters relating to the agenda and the contributions.
- To promote and most visibly disseminate the outputs of the Wiesbaden Group.
- To actively engage the UN Statistical Commission and other senior management forums to promote the work of the Wiesbaden Group and seek their inputs regarding future activities.
- To develop links with other relevant international bodies, for example the World Bank, to ensure support for attendance by developing countries.
- To ensure coordination with meetings on related topics, for example the Joint Meeting of the UNECE or others.

5. Schedule /Roadmap

End of 2007: Draft Terms of Reference

Spring 2008: Report at UNSC Meeting 2008

Autumn 2008: Meeting Wiesbaden Group on Business Registers in Paris hosted by the OECD

2009: Joint UNECE/OECD/Eurostat seminar on business registers

2010: Meeting Wiesbaden Group on Business Registers

2010: Evaluation and Revision of Terms of Reference