



CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS

WP.23

Workshop on Statistical Data Collection: Riding the Data Deluge

23 April 2015

29 April – 1 May, Washington D.C., United States of America

United Nations (UN) Global Working Group (GWG) on Big Data

Nancy Snyder (United Nations Statistics Division)

snydern@un.org

Abstract

Innovations in technology, broad use of electronic devices and the all-around generation of digital information are fundamentally changing the availability of real-time information, such as data from GPS devices, from mobile phones or from social media. These high-volume and sometimes loosely structured data sources, commonly referred to as Big Data, are different from conventional data sources used for official statistics and have many challenges in their application. While the statistical community has recognized the potential Big Data, the business case still needs to be made for many national statistical offices if, why and how Big Data are useful for official statistics. The United Nations (UN) Statistical Commission therefore established in March 2014 a Global Working Group (GWG) mandated to provide a strategic vision, direction and coordination of a global programme on Big Data for official statistics, to promote practical use of sources of Big Data for official statistics while finding solutions for their challenges, and to promote capacity building and sharing of experiences in this respect. The Australian Bureau of Statistics chairs the GWG, which otherwise consists of about 30 members from national and international organizations. The UN GWG met in person for the first time in Beijing in October 2014, at which broad issues of work were identified; namely, the use of mobile phone data; use of satellite imagery; use of social media data; data access and partnerships; communication and advocacy; linking Big Data to the targets for the sustainable development goals (SDGs); training, skills and capacity building; and cross-cutting issues, classifications and taxonomy. The planned deliverables of the GWG include documenting and sharing best practices of Big Data for official statistics; working on concrete and practical examples of Big Data sources; developing proposals for training, skills and capacity building to exploit Big Data sources for official statistics; developing proposals for improving access to Big Data sources and for building partnerships with the private sector; and writing reports on the use of mobile phone data; social media data; and satellite imagery and remote sensing data for official statistics, that provide solutions to methodological, IT and privacy challenges, and include possible uses of these data for monitoring the Post-2015 development agenda, among others. The work of the GWG will build on results from the joint UNSD/UNECE stock-taking survey on Big Data held in 2014 with a new global survey on Big Data practices being planned for summer 2015. The GWG will report on its work to the Commission for its upcoming 46th session in March 2015. The next Global Conference on Big Data and the 2nd GWG meeting will be held in October 2015.

