

WP. 2
ENGLISH ONLY

**UNITED NATIONS STATISTICAL COMMISSION and ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE
CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS** **EUROPEAN COMMISSION
STATISTICAL OFFICE OF THE
EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES (EUROSTAT)**

Joint UNECE/Eurostat work session on statistical data confidentiality
(Bilbao, Spain, 2-4 December 2009)

Topic (i): Harmonization of statistical data confidentiality – legal and methodological aspects

**CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS GUIDELINES
ON STATISTICAL CONFIDENTIALITY**

Invited Paper

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Conference of European Statisticians Guidelines on Statistical Confidentiality

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Abstract: This short paper introduces the new “Principles and Guidelines on Confidentiality Aspects of Data Integration Undertaken for Statistical or Related Research Purposes”, adopted by the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) at its June 2009 meeting. It also summarizes previous standards and guidelines in the area of statistical data confidentiality from the CES and other bodies.

1 Introduction

In 2006, the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) requested that a task force was set up to examine the confidentiality and privacy concerns related to integrated data sets. The Task Force on Confidentiality and Privacy Aspects of Statistical Data Integration, led by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, developed a set of principles and guidelines, with the aim of establishing a common framework for assessing and mitigating legislative and other confidentiality issues relating to the creation and use of integrated data sets for statistical and associated research purposes.

The Principles and Guidelines on Confidentiality Aspects of Statistical Data Integration Undertaken for Statistical or Related Research Purposes were approved at the 2009 CES meeting, and have since been published by the UNECE¹. These principles and guidelines will now be tested in practice, and reviewed by the CES in 2011.

2 Contents and Applicability of the Principles and Guidelines

The introduction to the publication includes the background to the development of the principles and guidelines, and contains eleven key definitions, which are consistent with other international glossaries. The eight principles are then presented, each with a set of detailed guidelines. Finally an example of a business case outline is given in the annex.

These principles and guidelines apply to data integration work carried out in national statistical organizations. Data integration is concerned with integrating unit record

¹ www.unece.org/stats/publications/Confidentiality_aspects_data_integration.pdf

data from different administrative and/or survey sources to compile new official statistics which can then be released in their own right. In addition, these integrated data sets may be used to support a range of economic and social research not possible using traditional sources. These principles and guidelines, whilst having some relevance to the creation and maintenance of statistical registers, do not cover these tasks.

3 Related UNECE Standards and Publications

3.1 Managing Statistical Confidentiality and Microdata Access - Principles and Guidelines of Good Practice

These Guidelines² were prepared at the request of the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) by a Task Force which was also led by the Australian bureau of Statistics.

This publication recognized that although confidentiality protection has been mainly a national issue, increasing data dissemination over the Internet, means that it is now also becoming an international issue. Researchers can be very critical about the use of different access rules and standards in different countries. Often researchers are often not allowed to access microdata from other countries because of confidentiality concerns. International agencies are also increasingly interested in the use of microdata for research purposes, particularly cross-country comparisons.

These guidelines therefore attempt to provide some common principles for dissemination of microdata, and to:

- (i) foster greater uniformity of approach by countries whilst facilitating better access to microdata by the research community; and
- (ii) support case studies to enable countries to improve their arrangements for providing access to microdata.

The guidelines recognise that the precise arrangements for access to microdata will vary from country to country, depending on legislation, public attitudes and the capacity to support the research community. It should not be anticipated that each country will come up with precisely the same arrangements, although these guidelines aim for greater uniformity of approach.

² www.unece.org/stats/publications/Managing.statistical.confidentiality.and.microdata.access.pdf

3.2 Statistical Confidentiality and Access to Microdata (2003), Proceedings of the Seminar Session of the 2003 Conference of European Statisticians

The 2003 session of the CES included a seminar devoted to the issue of statistical confidentiality and access to microdata. This seminar was organized and chaired by Statistics Sweden in cooperation with the CES Bureau. Since the seminar was regarded as very fruitful, the UNECE and Statistics Sweden decided to jointly publish the proceedings of the seminar³.

An important challenge for statistical organizations is to ensure that improved access to micro-data will not undermine the principle of statistical confidentiality. The introduction of this publication includes a brief summary of the discussions that took place at the seminar. The remainder of the publication contains the papers presented at the Seminar, which covered the following four themes:

- (1) Overview and use of micro-data;
- (2) Data confidentiality;
- (3) Legal aspects of micro-data;
- (4) Access to micro-data.

3.3 The Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics

The “Fundamental Principles⁴” were adopted by the UNECE in 1992, and have since been adopted as a global standard by the United Nations Statistical Commission. The ten principles provide the professional framework for the production of official statistics. Principle six covers statistical confidentiality:

Individual data collected by statistical agencies for statistical compilation, whether they refer to natural or legal persons, are to be strictly confidential and used exclusively for statistical purposes.

³ <http://www.unece.org/stats/publications/statistical.confidentiality.pdf>

⁴ <http://www.unece.org/stats/documents/e/1992/32.e.pdf>