



Research access to confidential data

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Improving safe research access to data

- Why increase the use of data by researchers?
- What are the barriers?
- Examples of good practice
- Can this be done for EU-level data?
- Current EU legislation
- New draft EU legislation

Why increase researcher use of detailed statistical data?

- To make the best use of the data
 - topic experts
 - better, more sophisticated, research methods
 - better policy decisions
 - better data
- But the priorities:
 - protect respondent confidentiality
 - be seen to have done so

Potential barriers

- Methodological and operational
- Legal
- Respondent perception
- Administrative
 - ‘...not been done before’
 - Loss of control

Methodological and operational

- Tried and tested methods exist:
 - protected microdata for release
 - controlled access to original data
 - submitted analysis commands
- Methods are not perfect but have been successfully used - they are safe

Legal

- Research access may simply not be allowed
- Old legislation: such use of the data not envisaged
- Solutions:
 - Change legislation
 - Re-interpretation of existing laws

Respondent perceptions

- Whatever is done should be acceptable
- Need for further research in this area
 - particularly in Europe

Administrative

- ‘it’s not been done before’
- Loss of control
 - potential personal risk
- Facilitating research may not be a high priority
- Cost



Examples of good practice

- US Census Bureau - Center for Economic Studies
- Statistics Netherlands - Centre for Research of Economic Micro-data
- European Community Household Panel
- UK ONS - Longitudinal Study



Common themes

- Communication: statistical institute, researchers and respondents
- On-site access seen as more appropriate for business data
- Geographical issues relating to access
- Need for on-going review
- It can be done



Role of Eurostat

- Statistical Office of the European Communities
- Does not generally collect data from individual respondents
- Produces statistics based on data supplied by statistical authorities in member states and other countries



Researcher access to EU-level data

- Why?
 - Increasingly EU economy rather than separate countries
 - Single Market
 - Euro zone
 - Companies increasingly operating across internal frontiers
 - EU policy initiatives



Researcher access to EU-level data

- Potential barriers
 - differing national legislation and procedures
 - who gives permission?
 - who knows best if data are sufficiently protected?



Current European legislation

- Regulation 1588/90
 - Eurostat as a trusted partner may receive confidential data from national authorities
 - decision on data release rests with national authority
- Regulation 322/97
 - Access to confidential data permitted for scientific research
 - with permission of national authority

Draft regulation on access to confidential data for scientific purposes

- Aims:
 - Clarify legal position
 - Simplify process of granting permission for access
 - Maintain high level of protection for confidential data
 - Work with guidance and permission from the national authorities

Draft regulation on access to confidential data for scientific purposes (2)

- Envisages both microdata release and on-site access
- For scientific purposes
 - Defines categories of researcher, research institution, and commissioning organisation
- Confidentiality agreements and contracts
- Specific datasets

Draft regulation on access to confidential data for scientific purposes (3)

- Some element of standing permission from national authorities
 - for social data
 - authorised categories of researchers
 - specific datasets
- Dispersed research centres for on-site access to data

Conclusions

- Need for research access at European level
- Build upon best practice
- Research into respondent attitudes
- Researchers must make their needs for data widely understood
- Statistical institutes need to consider innovative ways of fulfilling these needs