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Coordination of international statistical work**in the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe region****Outcomes of the in-depth reviews carried out by the
Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians****Addendum****Outcome of the in-depth review of data integration****Note by the Secretariat***Summary*

This document provides information on the outcome of the in-depth review of data integration that the Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians carried out in February 2017. It also provides the comments received during the electronic consultation among members of the Conference of European Statisticians.

The in-depth review paper (ECE/CES/2017/8), prepared by the High-Level Group for the Modernisation of Official Statistics, reflects the experience from its 2016 Data Integration Project and provides an overview of the experiments on data integration, and identifies opportunities, issues and challenges in this area.

The Conference will be informed of the outcome of the in-depth review of data integration on 21 June 2017 under item 8(a).

I. Introduction

1. Each year, the Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) reviews selected statistical areas in depth. The purpose of the reviews is to improve coordination of statistical activities in the region of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), identify gaps or duplication of work, and address emerging issues. These reviews focus on strategic issues and highlight concerns of statistical offices of both a conceptual and coordinating nature.

2. The Bureau carried out an in-depth review of data integration in February 2017 based on the paper by High-Level Group for the Modernisation of Official Statistics (HLG-MOS) (document ECE/CES/2017/8).

II. In-depth review discussion and decisions by the Bureau

3. The following points were raised in the discussion at the CES Bureau meeting:

(a) The review is very timely. The Bureau expressed strong support for the HLG-MOS project on data integration, as this topic is high on the agendas of statistical organizations;

(b) In some countries, statisticians are asked to give guidance on cross-government data integration activities. This is part of a wider role of NSOs and linked with the value of official statistics;

(c) There are many different types of data to be integrated and it may be difficult to have general guidelines;

(d) Collecting good practices on data integration will be useful;

(e) The outcomes of the HLG-MOS work on data integration will need to be promoted effectively to maximise the benefit;

(f) One important type of data integration is the integration of statistical and geospatial data. Mexico is a good example of a country where this is facilitated at the institutional level;

(g) Having 1-year projects under HLG-MOS gives flexibility but it is important to ensure continuity because some projects may require a longer time-span;

(h) In data integration, as in other areas, new ideas are being developed under CES. These ideas and the related activities may subsequently be replicated and spread in other parts of the world and it is important to avoid duplication.

4. The Bureau thanked HLG-MOS for the interesting review paper, and asked HLG-MOS to report to the Bureau on the outcomes of the 2017 project on data integration, including the collection of practical case studies and guidelines on data integration, in February 2018. The Bureau will then decide about possible follow-up activities. When the guidelines will be available, it is important to follow-up on their implementation.

5. The Bureau asked the project team to review other global initiatives related to data integration to avoid any possible duplication.

6. The Bureau asked the regular UNECE Meetings of Experts on Data Collection to provide a platform for discussing issues related to data integration.

7. The Bureau asked the Secretariat to raise the issue of the use of scanner data in price statistics with the Inter-Secretariat Working Group on Price Statistics (IWGPS), so that this can be considered in the update of the Consumer Price Manual.

III. Comments received from the electronic consultation

8. The UNECE Secretariat conducted an electronic consultation in April 2017 to inform all CES members about the outcome of the in-depth review of data integration, and to provide all CES members an opportunity to comment on the outcomes of the review, described in Section II of this note.

9. CES members expressed their support and interest in the in-depth review and thanked the authors for preparing this excellent summary of the challenges and experiences related to data integration. The following four countries and organizations provided the UNECE Secretariat with specific comments during the electronic consultation: Hungary, Spain, Turkey and Eurostat.

10. Hungary underlined the importance of sharing information and experiences with data integration techniques throughout the whole statistical business process to develop a useful guide for the community of official statisticians. Data integration is one of the potential options for official statistics increase the potential of the accessible datasets without causing extra burden on respondents. Hungary expressed support for the 2017 Data Integration Project and is actively participating in it.

11. Spain highlighted the relevance of sharing experience on data integration between countries. Many statistical organizations are undertaking data integration projects. Spain noted that their data integration projects focus on using administrative and georeferenced data. It is important to share lessons learned and establish methods and tools so that integration can be done without compromising the quality of statistics.

12. Turkey supports the issues and challenges mentioned in the in-depth review document. Data integration can be hampered by challenges that are hard to overcome and can take some time to resolve. These include limitations set by legislation to safeguard confidentiality and public perceptions that may not be in favour of increased integration of data. New data sources may differ from traditional statistical sources in terms of their coverage, quality of data and classifications used. These should be considered before using new data sources in statistical production. Turkey highlights the challenge of integrating datasets that are not consistent with each other, as well as changes in the administrative data and their structure over time. Cooperation with administrative data providers and statistical organizations is very important to solve such problems.

13. Turkey suggests that future work could include: (i) practical work on record linkage and statistical data matching, (ii) development of guidance on how to improve the quality of data sources and statistics produced, (iii) sharing of best practices on models to resolve the timeliness and differences in reference periods, and (iv) exchange of information on information technology (IT) infrastructure to manage large administrative datasets.

14. Eurostat encourages making a clear distinction between big data and administrative data. The practical experience shows some particular specificities for big data (either in terms of usage, data preparation or access to data). These differences should be highlighted.

15. All comments provided by countries and organizations in the electronic consultation will be considered by the 2017 Data Integration Project and reflected in its work.