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Topic (ii): Challenges and opportunities for statistical offices working in a network environment

**CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF THE NETWORK ENVIRONMENT IN
THE FIELD OF DATA COLLECTION
e-CORD AT THE HUNGARIAN CENTRAL STATISTICAL OFFICE**

Submitted by Hungarian Central Statistical Office ¹

CONTRIBUTED PAPER

SUMMARY

1. Internet is regarded as a new weapon in the arsenal of the Hungarian Central Statistical Office. It can be used to attract publicity with attractively presented, up-to-date and detailed data, inexpensive to publish and less expensive – compared to traditional publications – to consume.
2. But the Web also serves to defend respondents' interests in the process of data collection. There is a good chance that many respondents will feel a much lighter burden when statistical questionnaires can be filled in without paper, typewriter, pen or floppy disc.

¹ Prepared by Tamas Koltai.

3. The application of network tools in data dissemination at the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (HCSO) dates back to the late eighties. The HCSO was able to keep pace with the rapid development in technology, and today more than 20.000 pages (screens or items to be downloaded) await the Internet user; most of them are in Hungarian, many in English, some free for all, others for subscribers only. The service is developed continuously, improving design, contents and functionality.

4. However, in the area of electronic data collection the first steps were made only at the beginning of 1998 with the setting up of an EDI service between the four largest Hungarian companies and the HCSO. Today, detailed data at the unit level of the companies for a growing number of different monthly and quarterly surveys are collected through this system. The service is available via X400, Internet E-mail and FTP. The data is secured by proprietary encryption procedures. Messages in RDRMES format are converted to in-house format to be accepted by programs originally designed for manual data entry only.

5. The EDI service is based on mutual agreements, tailor-made software on the client's side and an important piece of an EDIFACT message clearing software on the EDI server at the HCSO.

6. The new wave of e-banking, e-commerce and other members of the e-family overrode this robust technology. Both from the marketing viewpoint and to keep pace with the comfort and functionality of the new software tools in the area of e-business, new approaches are necessary for electronic data collection as well.

7. This fact was recognised in the decisions of the HCSO to turn toward Internet solutions in its EDI. It also includes a strong determination to bring electronic data collection up to the level of electronic dissemination and to merge them into a homogenous Internet solution.

8. This year the development of an Internet service began. It will correspond with the emerging requirements of the coming legislation on electronic documents and electronic signature. The pilot project is a common effort by HCSO and the Hungarian Telecom. The latter holds the role of Certification authority and WEB-EDI provider. The service will go into operation early next year. It will be available for all companies and private entrepreneurs with a choice of three different security levels.

9. To match the claims from a growing number of respondents, HCSO will provide a less developed but still useful method of data collection to avoid the need for typewriters or "hand-writers" to fill in a statistical questionnaire. For the first time in reality, this method will be available for the annual infrastructure survey of 2000. The same facility can also be used from February 2001 for the monthly integrated economical survey. The EXCEL/WORD questionnaires will be available on the net to be downloaded, filled-in on a PC then printed, signed and sent in by post as usual.