



**Economic and Social
Council**

Distr.
GENERAL

CES/AC.71/2001/25 (SUM)
4 October 2000

Original: ENGLISH

**STATISTICAL COMMISSION and
ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE**

**COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN
COMMUNITIES (EUROSTAT)**

CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS

Joint ECE/Eurostat Meeting on the Management of Statistical Information Technology
(Geneva, Switzerland, 14-16 February 2001)

Topic (iv): Integration of statistical (survey) data with registers (administrative) data

**THE USE OF ADMINISTRATIVE SOURCES FOR STATISTICS AND INTERNATIONAL
COMPARABILITY**

Submitted by INSEE, France¹

INVITED PAPER

SUMMARY

1. This paper will address the three terms in the title of the paper -- the use of administrative sources, statistics, and international comparability -- with reference to actual cases whenever possible. Most of the examples refer to France, but could be of interest to the other national statistical institutes. The first section shows how significant use of administrative sources has contributed to shaping INSEE's culture. The second section examines the necessary conditions for producing a genuine statistical object from an administrative source. The third section examines the compatibility of that object with the imperative of building an

¹ Prepared by François Elissalt: this paper was originally presented at the forty-eighth plenary session of the Conference of European Statisticians, held in Paris on 13-15 June 2000 (CES/2000/17).

integrated European statistical system.

2. The French public statistical system uses administrative sources to a considerable extent, both in business statistics and in the area of demographic and social statistics.

3. Seen from a strictly statistical viewpoint, administrative sources have a number of specific qualities. First, these are generally mandatory declarations, and the response rate is practically equal to one. Second, the administrative sources provide remarkably consistent within-year data, despite their broad scope of coverage. Third, most of these sources correspond either to long-standing obligations, or to the filers' right to receive something and are therefore generally highly acceptable to reporting entities. Finally, they provide an inexpensive source of information.

4. Some of the drawbacks of administrative sources are the price to pay for their positive qualities. In particular, the huge amount of the information collected can make management cumbersome and can take longer to process, thereby reducing the freshness of the data. High acceptability is also due to the fact that administrative questionnaires are familiar to respondents; but it is often hard to make any changes in the questionnaires. Further, use of several administrative sources can lead to different analyses, which depend on the specific administrative concerns at the origin of each source. Last, and most significantly, the variables that are important for the statistician -- and which determine the "quality" of the product -- are not always the same as for the administrative manager.

5. It requires considerable work to transform the administrative sources into genuine statistical data. This work consists in reprocessing the administrative data, in providing overall consistency, and in enriching the data through specific surveys.

6. In its day-to-day work, INSEE fully appreciates the importance of being able to call upon numerous administrative sources. Surveys and administrative sources form a very good fit. This significantly improves the quality of statistical output. The fact that two sources are available also makes it possible to satisfy a broad range of requests, while limiting the constraints imposed on respondents.

7. Major use of administrative sources unquestionably raises issues in the perspective of building an integrated European system. Harmonising concepts is a difficult but necessary first step, if we wish to avoid harmonizing methods and products only on paper, in a purely formal way. In the area of business statistics, harmonisation is clearly imperative, especially for statistics on enterprise groups. On the other hand, there exist several fields of social statistics where harmonisation is not currently feasible, either because national realities are dissimilar, or because the additional costs of harmonisation are too high, in light of the potential benefits.