Economic and Social Council

Economic Commission for Europe

Conference of European Statisticians

Group of Experts on Business Registers

Twelfth session

Paris, 14-15 September 2011

Report

Note by the secretariat

Summary

The Conference of European Statisticians, at its fifty-ninth plenary session in June 2011, approved the activities undertaken under the UNECE Statistical Programme 2011, and endorsed the list of meetings planned to be organised from June 2011 to June 2012, as provided in document ECE/CES/81 (Report of the fifty-ninth plenary session of the Conference of European Statisticians, ECE/CES/81, para. 61). This list included a meeting of the Group of Experts on Business Registers, which was held in Paris on 14-15 September 2011.

The present document is the report of that Group of Experts and is provided to inform the Conference of European Statisticians of the organization and outcomes of the meeting.

I. Introduction

1.   The twelfth meeting of the Group of Experts on Business Registers was held in Paris from 14-15 September 2011. It was organised in cooperation with the Commission of the European Communities (Eurostat) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

2.   The meeting was attended by Albania, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Canada, Colombia, Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, India, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, Korea, Kosovo, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Mexico, Moldova, Mongolia, Montenegro, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland, United Kingdom and United States of America. The meeting was attended by representatives of the Commission of European Communities (Eurostat), Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), United Nations Statistical Division (UNSD) and United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO).

3.   The provisional agenda was adopted.

4.   Mr. Norbert Rainer (Austria) chaired the meeting. Mr. Peter Ottosen (Denmark), Mr. Eddie J. Salyers (United States), Mr. Giuseppe Garafalo (Italy), Ms. Anita Vaasen-Otten (Netherlands) and Mr. Rico Konen (Netherlands) acted as organisers of the substantial sessions.

II. Organization of the Meeting

5.   An introduction was made by Martine Durand, Director, Chief Statistician OECD. The introduction was followed by reports from UNECE, Eurostat and OECD on activities and events since the tenth meeting on business registers in 2009 and their plans for the future. The hosting country of the next Wiesbaden Group meeting on Business Register, the United States, reported that the next meeting is to be held in Washington D.C. 27-30 September 2012.

6.   The following substantive topics were discussed at the meeting on the basis of papers presented by international and country experts:

    (a)   Linking statistical business registers across agencies, statistical domains and among countries;

    (b)   Reducing respondent burden - the role of statistical business registers;

    (c)   The role of business registers in industrializing the production of statistics;

    (d)   Future work: meeting future work and priorities.

III. Summary of discussion and the main conclusions reached at the meeting

7.   Recommendations for future work are given below. The session organisers' summary of the discussion and conclusions that the participants reached at the meeting on the above topics are presented in the annex (in English only). The documents of the meeting   are   available   on   the   UNECE   website www.unece.org/stats/documents/2011.09.busreg.html.

IV. Recommended future work

8.   In his summary the chair highlighted a number of topics that would need to be addressed, including definition of units; linking of registers and data sharing; the use of administrative data sources and the need to cooperate with the owners of these data sources; balancing the response burden and the quality of the statistics; and the changing role of statistical business registers as an integrated part of the statistical production process. The chair stressed the need of the statistical office to meet the growing and changing user demands and explore new ways of organising, or "industrialising", work processes. Sharing of experiences and good practices will be required to bring work forward. To this end and to help countries the development of international guidelines would be most useful.

9.   The participants recommended that a next meeting in the Group of Experts on Business Registers should take place in autumn 2013 in Geneva, Switzerland. It should be organized by UNECE in cooperation with Eurostat and OECD. The meeting should be prepared by the organising committee consisting of representatives of UNECE, Eurostat and OECD and a country representative from the Wiesbaden Group's steering body.[1]

10.   For the next meeting of the Wiesbaden Group on Business Register in September 2012 the following substantive topics were considered of greatest interest for possible inclusion on the agenda:

(a)   Creation and maintenance of business registers in developing countries

(b)   Effective use of administrative data and/or other sources

(c)   Business registers quality, consistency and output

(d)   Technology and output in statistical business registers

(e)   Geostational tools

(f)   Profiling international enterprise groups

(g)   Expanding the business register

(h)   Households

(i)   Use of systems that support meta data

11.   For the meeting of the Group of Experts on Business Registers in autumn 2013, it was proposed to discuss statistical units; cost-efficiency; and quality and consistency (data derived from business registers may differ from other statistics). In addition to this the meeting should follow-up on issues emanating from the Wiesbaden Group meeting in 2012.

12.   The participants of the meeting supported the development of a set of international guidelines on business registers. The proposal to develop international guidelines was also supported by the Wiesbaden Steering Group. The guidelines should:

(a)   Be targeted at both developed and less developed statistical system;

(b)   Take into account existing materials, including the Eurostat Business Registers –Recommendations Manual.

(c)   Include country experiences and examples of good practices whenever appropriate.

(d)   Clarify typology, concepts and definitions, including on statistical units.

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[1] Wiesbaden Steering Group currently include: France, Germany, United Kingdom, USA, Eurostat, OECD and UNECE.

(e) Provide practical guidance on core SBR issues (development and maintenance).

(f) Link to other statistical subject areas, such as national accounts and trade statistics.

(g) Address issues raised by the High-Level Group for Strategic Directions in Business Architecture in Statistics.

(h) Provide guidance on the use of administrative sources in the SBR, including guidance on cooperation with owners of administrative data sources.

(i) Provide guidance on how to combine survey and administrative data sources.

(j) Provide guidance and practical examples on how to use the SBR in its own right for the production of statistics.

(k) Provide guidance and practical examples on the integration of business registers in the statistical production process.

13. The meeting agreed that the UNECE should draft a proposal for terms of reference for a task force to be established by the Bureau of the Conference of European Statistician (CES) to undertake the work. Drafts from the task force should be circulated to the meetings of the Wiesbaden Group and the Groups of Experts on Business registers for comments.

Annex

Summary of the discussion

A. Linking statistical business registers across agencies, statistical domains and among countries

Session organiser: Peter Ottosen, Denmark.

1. The first session looked into different ways and purposes of linking business registers and data. Five presentations were made. The first two addressed the work within the European Union to improve statistics on multinational enterprises. Eurostat presented the new developments in the European Groups Register (EGR) – an European cross country business register for multinational enterprises and INSEE, France, presented the work that has been done in the EU ESSNET on Profiling large and complex MNEs. The aim of the work that is still on-going, has been to get a common description of a MNE in all EU countries; to create common statistical units for short term statistics; and to operate with a common unit for dissemination.

2. The last three presentations showed linking of national data. From Denmark a presentation demonstrated the possibilities of creating new statistics by linking different registers, taking entrepreneurship indicators as example. The National Statistical Committee, Belarus, presented the construction of the statistical business register in Belarus using a huge variety of administrative data all linked through a "one stop" administrative registration system for businesses in Belarus. Finally Statistics Finland presented the method used in Statistics Finland to link employees with enterprises and establishments and the method of estimating the number of employees using administrative and survey data.

B. Reducing respondent burden - the role of statistical business registers

Session organisers: Eddie J. Salyers, United States & Giuseppe Garafalo Italy.

3. The session focused on three central aspects connected with the role of the BR in reducing statistical burden: The BR as a tool for the integration of data collection, data sharing, and the use of administrative sources.

(a) The BR as a tool for the integration of the statistical collection system

4. INSEE and Statistics Canada in their presentations focused on the integration of the BR and business statistics in the production architecture where the BR plays a central role and facilitates better coordination between the various statistical domains and improvement of timeliness and efficiency. In the development of the integrated architecture two elements related to reducing respondent burden have been identified: The first is the possibility to implement methodologies for coordination of sampling, the second is the possibility to develop system for response burden management.

(b) Data sharing

5. The U.S. Census Bureau (CB) and the US Bureau of Labour Statistics (BLS) are working together exchanging micro data to support and implement the contents and coverage of each agency's business register, a kind of "mirror approach". Even if in presence of legislative and disclosure constraints, the exchange of data facilitates an improvement of the quality in both registers and a reduction of the respondent burden (and

agency's cost), thanks to the reduction of the sample size of the surveys devoted to the BR updating.

(c)   The use of administrative sources

6.   Two presentations from the US Bureau of Labour Statistics (BLS) and Statistics Germany (Destatis) looked into the role of the BR in the use of administrative data sources. The main points that emerged included the following:

(a)   Neither administrative data nor survey data can a priori be taken to representing the final truth.

(b)   Both data sources contain errors and the identified divergences are the results of different concepts and definitions used, different timing of data collection, different methodologies used for data editing and imputation and different reporting procedures.

(c)   A better identification of these differences is the first step that statistical offices have to develop for the use of administrative data for statistical purposes.

(d)   A general approach, in terms of methodologies, procedures and quality analysis, in using administrative data is difficult to identify. Individual models are suggested, referring to the economic sectors and/or the statistical domains and data sources.

7.   The session concluded that the use of administrative data offers a possibility to reduce respondent burden. It was underlined that a successful reduction of the respondent burden implies developing of technological (EDI, TDE, Web applications, others) and organizational (greater integration in statistical collection system, data sharing) models, that are also capable of facilitating an easy and "friendly" approach with the respondents.

8.   The statistical offices are faced with big challenges in the development of the production process in terms of organisational changes and implementation of new methodologies, procedures and information systems. Such changes will also require reallocation of the budget resources with less spending on survey activities and more spending on technologies, software and methodologies and work with owners of administrative data sources to develop and maintain cooperation on data exchange.

C.   The role of business registers in industrializing the production of statistics

Session organiser: Anita Vaasen-Otten, Netherlands.

9.   Session 3 focussed on the role of the business register in industrializing the production of statistics. The demand for coherent statistics and the need to increase efficiency in the statistical production process and reduce costs, in combination with the superabundance of digital information, will force statisticians to redesign their statistical processes. This affects also the use and the role of statistical business registers as a production tool for statistics where the business register may have an extended role in the statistical production processes of the future.

10.   UNECE provided a brief overview of the strategic vision developed by the High-Level Group for strategic developments in Business Architecture in Statistics (HLG-BAS) and the relations with other international initiatives in this field. In this vision the Generic Statistical Business Process Model (GSBPM), which describes the nine phases of a generic statistical business process, is used as a starting point to describe common methodologies in the production of statistics (e.g. maintenance of business registers).

11.   Eurostat explained the importance of business registers in the production of coherent global statistics. Business registers help to ensure the consistency and take care of

coordinated application of statistical units among countries. It provides targeted services to statistical compilers to exchange information.

12.   Statistics Netherlands presented the Dutch Business Architecture for transforming raw data into statistical information with some examples on how business registers could be used as an instrument to coordinate statistical information and processes.

13.   Inegi, Mexico, demonstrated how geographical information in their National Statistics Directory of Economic Units (DENUE) is visualized in cartography and can be consulted by a web-application. The legal framework, the consultation system for users, the sources and the update strategy of information in DENUE was presented.

14.   Statistics Israel contributed with a room document on the information that is needed to improve the business register before it can fulfil an important role in industrializing the production of economic statistics in Israel.

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