

CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS

Approved

Meeting of the 2023/2025 Bureau  
Geneva, Switzerland, 14-15 February 2024

Item III (b) of the Provisional  
Agenda

**TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE TASK FORCE  
ON THE CHANGING ROLE OF NATIONAL STATISTICAL OFFICES IN DATA  
ECOSYSTEMS**

**Prepared by the Secretariat**

*In October 2023, the Bureau discussed future work on data stewardship. The Bureau highlighted the importance of continuing work on this topic and decided to establish a task force to work on the proposed priority areas. The UNECE Secretariat prepared the present terms of reference for the Task Force in this area, in consultation with members of the previous Task Force and countries who have indicated interest in the work.*

*The Bureau reviewed and approved the terms of reference for the Task force on the changing role of national statistical offices in data ecosystems.*

**I. BACKGROUND**

1. In February 2021, the Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) set up a Task Force on data stewardship. The aim of the Task Force was to clarify the terms related to data stewardship and public data governance, and the tasks of national statistical offices (NSOs) in different settings.

2. In June 2023, CES endorsed the report [Data stewardship and the role of national statistical offices in the new data ecosystem](#), prepared by the Task Force.

3. The document included a section with further work proposals. Countries provided comments on the proposals, suggestions on priorities and additional further work items through the consultation (see ECE/CES/2023/2/Add.1). Twenty-seven countries indicated that they would be interested in participating in future work on data stewardship (and further seven countries possibly). From the list of possible further work items proposed, countries indicated the following as the highest priorities:

- (a) Provide more specific guidance, recommendations and tools for implementing data stewardship;
- (b) Provide a forum for exchange of experience in implementing data stewardship;
- (c) Identify a core set of responsibilities of NSOs as data stewards in national data ecosystems;

(d) Compile a knowledge base of best practices and examples of successful data stewardship implementation, including more detailed examples of how data stewardship is implemented, and the data services provided in practice.

4. During the discussion at the CES in June 2023, CES members highlighted that data stewardship extends the traditional role of NSOs as a producer of statistics to a data service provider to a wide variety of stakeholders. Future work should assess the capacity of NSOs to take on such a system-wide role, especially when it goes beyond the national statistical system (which includes public sector bodies in their capacity as producers of official statistics, e.g., central banks) to the public sector in general, and even to private data holders. The Conference considered country examples very valuable to show how the data stewardship functions can be implemented in different settings, as there is no one-size fits all solution applicable to all countries. CES members also emphasised that any future work on this topic under CES should be well coordinated with the global working group on data stewardship.

5. The CES in June 2023 supported the Task Force's proposals for further work and requested the CES Bureau to decide on priorities in this work, taking into account the feedback from the electronic consultation and the discussion at the CES 2023 plenary session.

6. Estonia, Canada and the Secretariat submitted a proposal (ECE/CES/BUR/2023/OCT/10) for further work to the CES Bureau in October 2023. The Bureau supported establishing a task force to work on the proposed priority areas and requested that terms of reference for the Task Force are submitted in February 2024 for approval.

## **II. MANDATE**

7. The Task Force on the changing role of national statistical offices in data ecosystems reports to the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) through its Bureau. The Task Force will be created for a period from February 2024 to June 2026.

8. The Task Force will align its work with other ongoing international initiatives on this topic, including the UN Global Working Group on Data Stewardship, the OECD Working Party on Data Governance and Privacy in the Digital Economy, the OECD Working Party of Senior Digital Government Officials (E-Leaders) and any other relevant groups.

## **III. OBJECTIVE**

9. The Task Force will work on two priority areas:

(a) Identifying core responsibilities of NSOs as data stewards in the national data ecosystem addressing points 4 (a) and 4 (c) above;

(b) Providing a forum for systematization and exchange of experience in implementing broader ecosystem responsibilities, addressing points 4 (b) and 4 (d) above.

10. Taking on a more comprehensive role (such as data stewardship) in the national data ecosystem beyond the national statistical system has been identified as an essential task to ensure that national statistical offices stay relevant in the evolving data ecosystem. The priority area (a) will focus on those responsibilities that will enable NSOs to remain relevant by positioning themselves in the ecosystem so that it can more effectively serve society with impartial, relevant and accurate information, upholding the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics.

11. The Task Force will put a strong focus on implementing the broader data ecosystem responsibilities in practice. Of particular interest to the Task Force will be activities outside of the national statistical system, carefully considering the associated opportunities and risks.

#### IV. PLANNED ACTIVITIES AND OUTPUTS

12. Under the priority area (a) ‘Identifying core responsibilities of NSOs as data stewards’, the Task Force will continue to explore the following **themes**:

- (a) Challenges/barriers and opportunities for a leadership role in data stewardship by NSOs, paying particular attention to varied contexts, and keeping in mind the emerging opportunities and risks;
- (b) Scaling up the role that NSOs perform for the national statistical system (NSS) to the digital data ecosystem more broadly;
- (c) The role of an NSO’s Chief Data Officer (CDO) compared to other kinds of CDOs (including the role of a CDO vs. Data Steward, how they interact/intersect, etc.);
- (d) Partnerships and collaboration with stakeholders in the data ecosystem (including communication, exploring the public-private-academic sector relationships that can be leveraged, etc.);
- (e) The role of data stewardship in the context of new technological developments (such as algorithmic pre-processing, statistical modelling, Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning, and Big Data);
- (f) The role of international organizations in facilitating NSOs taking up broader responsibilities in the data ecosystem.

13. The main **deliverable** resulting from the work in priority area (a) will be a report identifying and describing a core set of responsibilities of NSOs as data stewards in data ecosystems. The outputs may also include:

- (a) A generic roadmap for how to increase NSOs leadership role in data stewardship (taking as a starting point a [paper by Estonia et al.](#), presented at the 2020 CES plenary session);
- (b) Guidance materials for different audiences or focusing on responsibilities in specific areas – information and research services, administrative data, open data, privately held data, geospatial data, governance models etc.;
- (c) Communication materials to raise awareness of data stewardship and NSOs role in it;
- (d) Recommendations regarding data stewardship ‘as a service’;
- (e) Risk assessments and NSO risk profiles related to data stewardship in the digital data ecosystem;
- (f) Frameworks, policies, and other instruments related to NSO trust and reliability.

14. For priority area **(b)** ‘Providing a forum for systematization and exchange of experience’, the Task Force will assist in **organizing expert meetings, workshops or webinars** on the following possible **themes**:

- (a) Practical examples/country case studies, success stories, lessons learned, organizational solutions and comparative analyses;
- (b) Data governance operating models (including the management of different data sources such as administrative data and privately held data);
- (c) Data stewardship related best practices, guiding principles, frameworks, examples of policy instruments, implementation activities, and data literacy promotion (including those related to data governance, data ethics, data strategy, administrative data, data quality etc.);
- (d) Methodologies and tools (can include technologies or not), such as those related to data literacy, data sharing, privacy and confidentiality, communication with stakeholders, data interoperability and other tools related to data stewardship implementation and measurement, etc;
- (e) Identification and promotion of skills among NSO staff that are required to fulfil the changing role in the data ecosystem.

15. Potential **deliverables** resulting from these discussions may include:

- (a) Analysis of country examples of implementing core responsibilities of NSOs related to data stewardship;
- (b) A knowledge base of best practices and examples of successful data stewardship implementation, including more detailed examples of implementing data stewardship, overcoming the obstacles, and the data services provided in practice;
- (c) Examples of maturity models and other assessments of data stewardship, as a basis for developing a generic maturity model for the assessment of NSO data stewardship.

16. At a later stage, the experience acquired from the meetings and practical implementation examples could lead to developing basic/guiding principles of data stewardship by monitoring and analysing implementation of data policies and data governance initiatives by NSOs.

17. The Task Force will also contribute to the maintenance of the previous report’s glossary in collaboration with the UN Global Working Group on Data Stewardship and will facilitate the translation of key terms into other languages.

## **V. METHODS OF WORK**

18. The Task Force will primarily work via email and online meetings. In-person meetings may also be organized.

## **VI. TIMETABLE**

19. The activities of the Task Force are planned for the period from March 2024 to June 2026, according to the following tentative schedule:

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March-May 2024	Establishment of the Task Force and drafting of a work plan with activities, timing and division of work
May-Sept 2024	Discussing the responsibilities of NSOs as data stewards to identify a core set
Sept-Dec 2024	Possible webinar/workshop on the core responsibilities, and to share experience in practical implementation of data stewardship
Jan-Feb 2025	Progress report to the CES Bureau
Jan-Dec 2025	Developing materials to support NSOs in their leadership role in data stewardship
Sept-Nov 2025	Possible webinar/workshop on specific aspects of practical implementation of the data stewardship role
Nov 2025-Jan 2026	Draft report on the core responsibilities of NSOs as data stewards in the national data ecosystem and other outputs envisioned in the workplan
Feb 2026	Discussion of the draft report by the Bureau
Feb-March 2026	Revising the report based on the comments by the CES Bureau
April-May 2026	Electronic consultation among all CES countries
June 2026	Expected endorsement of the report by the CES plenary session

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## **VII. MEMBERSHIP**

20. The following countries and organizations have expressed interest in participating in the Task Force: Albania, Belarus, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Hungary, Italy, Ireland, Mexico, New Zealand, Poland, Serbia, Sweden, Switzerland, Eurostat, Bank of International Settlements (BIS) and the OECD. Estonia is ready to Chair the Task Force. Other CES members and international organizations are welcome to express their interest to become a member of the Task Force.

21. UNECE will act as Secretariat to the Task Force.

## **VIII. PROPOSAL TO THE BUREAU**

**22. The Bureau is invited to review and approve the terms of reference and to identify priorities in this work.**

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