

CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS

Third Meeting of the 2012/2013 Bureau
Luxembourg, 5-6 February 2013

For discussion and recommendations

Item 4(i) of the Provisional
Agenda

**PROGRESS REPORT OF THE TASK FORCE ON INTERNATIONAL
GUIDELINES ON STATISTICAL BUSINESS REGISTERS**

Note prepared by the secretariat

I. BACKGROUND

1. At its meeting in November 2011, the Bureau agreed to establish a Task Force on statistical business registers (SBR). The objective of the Task Force is to produce a set of international guidelines and recommendations of good practices on SBR to help countries in developing and maintaining their SBR. The guidelines should be targeted at both developed and less developed statistical systems and provide practical guidance and recommendations on the establishment and maintenance of SBR.
2. According to its time plan, the Task Force will submit its final draft report to the Bureau for its meeting in October 2013. The Task Force will prepare a final report to be circulated to countries for consultation in early 2014 and presented to the CES plenary session in 2014 for endorsement.
3. The following countries and organizations participate in the Task Force: Austria (chair), Australia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Columbia, Denmark, Egypt, France, Italy, Mexico, Netherlands, South Africa, Switzerland, Ukraine, United Kingdom, the African Development Bank (AfDB), Eurostat, OECD and UNSD. UNECE provides the secretariat.

II. PROGRESS OF WORK

4. The Task Force met at teleconferences in January and April 2012 where it agreed on a detailed work plan and an outline of the report of the Task Force. The updated versions of the work plan and the outline of the report are attached. The report will consist of 9 chapters, each with lead and contributing authors, as shown in Table 1 below. The report will also include a research agenda for possible future work.
5. The draft outline of the report of the Task Force was presented to the meeting of the Wiesbaden Group on Business Registers on 17-20 September 2012 and received comments and proposals from the participants. A number of countries with less developed statistical systems participated in the meeting, which helped to ensure that also issues of particular importance to these countries were raised.

Table 1. Chapters of the Report of the Task Force on SBR

	Lead Author	Contributing authors
Chp 1: Introduction	Austria	OECD
Chp 2: Roles of the SBR	Netherlands	Italy, Mexico
Chp 3: Coverage of the SBR	Australia	Italy
Chp 4: Units in the SBR	France	Chile, UNSD
Chp 5: Characteristics of the units	France	Canada, Colombia, UNSD
Chp 6: Data sources for the SBR	UK	Brazil, Chile, Denmark, UNSD
Chp 7: Maintenance of the SBR	Switzerland	Colombia, Egypt, Ukraine
Chp 8: Quality of SBR	Italy	Switzerland, Denmark
Chp 9: Establishment of SBR	Canada	Mexico
Glossary	Eurostat	UNECE

6. The Task Force met face-to-face on 21 September 2012 where it went through the proposed chapters of the report and updated the work plan. Issue papers outlining the structure and the content of each chapter have been provided for the chapters. The lead authors are currently in the process of drafting the first complete draft versions of the chapters of the report which are due by the end of February 2013. There are some delays with chapters 3, 4, 5 and 8 to be drafted by Australia, France and Italy.

7. The Task Force will ensure coordination with the joint ECB/Eurostat/OECD Task Force on the statistical treatment of holding companies, head offices and SPEs that was established in November 2012. The ECB/Eurostat/OECD Task Force will deal with several issues that involve SBR, including procedures for attributing ISIC/NACE codes and the treatment of HCs, HOs and SPEs in business registers.

8. In September 2012, AfDB launched its *Guidelines for Building Statistical Business Registers in Africa*. The Task Force on SBR will ensure communication and coordination with the AfDB on issues on business registers.

9. The Task Force will continue to work through exchange of e-mails and teleconferences. It will meet face-to-face in conjunction with the joint UNECE/Eurostat/OECD Expert Group meeting on SBR on 2-4 September 2013 in Geneva. A final draft of the report of the Task Force will be presented and discussed at this meeting. EFTA and AfDB have indicated that they will finance participation of a number of transition/developing countries, thus offering these countries an opportunity to comment on the draft report.

10. The Bureau expressed support for the work of the Task Force on business registers.

Second revised draft outline of International Guidelines on Statistical Business Registers (SBR)

General remarks:

- These international guidelines should serve both for countries with experience in running a statistical business register as well as for countries that have no or less experience so far.
- In the same sense, the guidelines should help in cases where a statistical business register is to be established as well as in cases where an already existing register is to be reviewed or restructured.
- Therefore, the guidelines should be as practical as possible while not ignoring the theoretical and conceptual issues.
- In each chapter, the wide range between good practices and minimum requirements should be considered and explained, so that the statistical business register would be able to serve the main uses while further expansions or additional features might be implemented in future steps.
- While principally, good practices should guide the drafting of the single chapters; the guidelines should not directly refer or describe concrete practices of a single country, but be kept in generalized form. (However, country examples that might illustrate a certain issue, concept or good practice, are certainly welcome and would be shown in boxes.)
- In order to underline the intended character of the guidelines, the formatting of the chapters should also depict this character: concepts, definitions, implementation recommendations, examples of good practices, etc. should be shown in form of separate boxes or the like.
- These guidelines should supplement already existing manuals, such as the European recommendation manual, but should be a full manual considering all relevant issues of SBR. However, certain chapters of the European manual could more or less directly serve for the purpose of these guidelines.

Chapter 1: Introduction

The introductory chapter should explain

- the background and objectives of the guidelines,
- underline the general importance of statistical business registers within the statistical system,
- explain the need for future developments and harmonisation,
- and give an overview of the whole guidelines.

Chapter 2: Roles of the SBR

In considering in which part of the guidelines the various and increasing roles of SBR should be explained, it is proposed to do this already at the beginning. It is supposed that this would help to understand the concepts and requirements of SBR in the later chapters of the guidelines. However, these roles should be described in a way that detailed knowledge of the concepts and definitions of SBR, which are explained in the later chapters, are not necessary in understanding the functions.

In general, the importance of SBR as a backbone in the statistical production process, not only directly by deriving survey frames from SBR, but also indirectly as a general data base for various purposes supporting the statistical production processes, is the main topic of this chapter. Emphasis should also be given to the emerging and futures use of SBR.

In the later chapters, these roles should be referred to in order to link the guideline chapters and make them consistent. Also, in these chapters more detailed information might be given to the respective role, if required.

The following roles should be outlined in this chapter 2:

- Linkage to administrative data (most important for the maintenance of SBR, as well as for the quality and the possibility to use data from these sources, such as turnover of employment)
- Central source for population frames (it should be recommended that all surveys use the SBR for deriving their sample frames; how the population frames are provided should be the content of the maintenance chapter)
- Survey support tool (in addition to ID variables also further information to support surveys might be added)
- Response burden documentation (SBR should also be used for documentation which units were part of which survey in which time period; this could be used for survey holiday measures as well as a basis for response burden information)
- Micro data linkage (data collections both from administrative sources as well as from statistical sources might be linked on a micro basis, if the SBR is used as the central frame)
- Statistics based on SBR or combination of SBR with other statistical registers and/or other sources (SBRs are data bases which could be utilized to establish register based statistics, as well as register-supported statistics).

In all these subchapters above, the important coordination role of the SBR for integrated economic statistics, their consistency and quality should be emphasised.

Chapter 3: Coverage of SBR

This chapter is primarily of technical nature and should explain and describe the concepts of coverage of the SBR for all the various branches, such as

- Market sector
- Households engaged in economic activities
- Agricultural sector/activities
- Government sector
- Non-profit sector
- Exterritorial organisations and bodies

According to the general nature of these guidelines, emphasis should be given also to the importance of the various branches with respect to the fulfilment of the coverage goals, in the sense that not all branches might be covered in a SBR from the beginning. Thus, recommendations should be given on probable stages of implementation of coverage goals.

Further, the concept of active units needs to be explained; considerations should also be given to borderline cases, the issue of thresholds, the informal sector and units for which the data situation might not be so favourable (e.g. self-employed professionals sector).

Chapter 4: Units in the SBR

Similar to the above chapter, this one on units is quite a basic one considering the strategic role of the statistical units for the statistical system and with a view on coordination/harmonisation across countries. Starting from the distinction between administrative and statistical units and an overview of the unit model, for each unit appropriate definitions and the relations between the units should be explained and practical recommendations be given on the actual identification of the statistical units:

- Legal unit
- Enterprise group
- Enterprise unit
- Local unit
- Establishment

Explanations should also be given of certain kinds of units that do not necessarily fall under the above listed ones or which might be regarded as special cases thereof, such as captive units, special purpose entities, joint ventures, etc.

Based on the basic definitions, explanations should be given to units in certain branches, such as units in agriculture, government, non-profit sector, etc.

This chapter should also contain how the statistical units should be delineated (Profiling). Also the importance of each unit in the context of the user needs should be discussed and guidance given on the implementation plans of the units.

Chapter 5: Characteristics of the units

The various variables for each type of unit and their importance should be described. The variables are usually grouped into the following categories:

- Identification variables, including unit relation and identifiers
- Start and end dates
- Economic variables
- Stratification variables/classification variables
- Linkage to source registers and other registers

Some of the variables need more explanations and guidance, such as the classification variables, which cover at least three types of classifications: activity classification, sector classification and size-classes. For the first two not only the basic classification concepts need to be outlined, but also how to implement these classifications in practice.

It should be explained which variables fall under “core” variables, meaning that such variables are indispensable for the functioning of the SBR; whereas there are variables that

could be added in a later stage, such as for example geographical coordinates as additions to the address variables.

Chapter 6: Data sources for the SBR

Data sources depend on the specific country situations, such as the availability of certain administrative data and registers, or the statistical system. However, the most common sources should be described and grouped into three categories:

- Administrative sources
- Statistical sources (incl. feedback from surveys)
- Other sources (e.g. private data suppliers)

The advantages/disadvantages for the various sources should be explained as well as probable problems related with each source. Issues here are different definitions of units and variables, problems of coverage of units, branches, size classes, etc.

Administrative data are today usually the most important source. Therefore, providing guidance on how to establish and maintain good cooperation with the owners of administrative data will be important.

Chapter 7: Maintenance of the SBR

This is a main chapter not only because of its importance but also because in the other manuals there is not much concrete description. This is also a topic where best practices and the like should be of importance and concrete and practical guidance be given as much as possible. It should start with some principles of maintenance (e.g. user orientation), develop on record matching and on IT support for automatic maintenance (versus clerical maintenance).

The main part of this chapter should deal with the handling of changes in detail. Here we can distinguish between:

- Changes in the variables
- Changes in the population
- Demographic changes and continuity

This chapter should also include the handling of errors.

Chapter 8: Quality of SBR

The handling of errors is the bridge to the big issue of SBR quality. The first part of this chapter should explain the quality criteria and how to measure them (reliability, timeliness, accuracy, etc.). The other part should focus on quality check and improvement policy as a permanent task. Also the issue of the quality of the (administrative) data sources needs to be taken care of in this chapter.

Chapter 9: Establishment of SBR

This last chapter should deal with issues of establishing a SBR from conceptual as well as from a technical perspective. Most of the issues dealt here are not explicitly covered in other manuals.

This chapter should mainly deal both with conceptual and technical issues. But it should also deal with other issues of great importance for the establishment and running of a SBR. So, again, the emphasis should be on practical guidance.

Conceptual issues are for instance the basic data model, the ID system and the requirements for documentation and history. Also the issue of confidentiality should be dealt with. Furthermore, also guidance on the IT system will be very useful for less developed statistical institutes.

Organisational aspects could be relations to the data providers (e.g. administrative registers and survey statisticians), register cooperation (for instance with the National Bank or other (administrative) institutions) and similar issues.

Dissemination issues and policy (how can/should register data be made available to users outside the statistical system) might also be a topic for this chapter.

Glossary

Work Plan of 21 September 2012

Date	Activity
21 September 2012	Task Force meeting: Feedback from Wiesbaden and planning of future work
12 October 2012	Deadline for providing issues papers for all chapters with 1) list of issues to be covered, and 2) table of content
October 2012 – February 2013	Drafting of chapters
November 2012	Progress Report to the CES Bureau. 1-2 pages, if we are in line with the TOR and if there are particular issues where we would like to ask for feedback
February 2013	Deadline for submitting 1 st complete draft of chapters
March 2013	Review of drafts by the TF members
	Drafting of chapters
May 2013	Deadline for submitting 2 nd draft of chapters
June-Aug. 2013	Drafting of chapters
August 2013	Deadline for submitting 3 rd draft of chapters: 31 August
October 2013	Presentation and discussion of draft report at the joint UNECE/Eurostat/OECD Expert Group meeting on BRs 16-18 October in Geneva. One full day should be allocated to this purpose. The draft may be distributed to a wider group for soliciting comments.
October 2013	Task Force meeting on 18 October, afternoon.
November 2013	Consultation of final draft with the Bureau members, to have their green light to be circulated to CES member countries and organizations for comments
Nov.-Dec 2013	Incorporating comments from the Bureau members
Jan. - Feb. 2014	Written consultation with CES members and others that may be relevant to consult
March - April 2014	Incorporating comments from the consultation and preparation of final report
June 2014	Presentation of the final report to the CES plenary session for endorsement (should be ready to be send out in early May)
End 2014	Publication. UNECE will do the formatting of the final report. Electronic and/or printed publication to be decided.

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