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## **Administrative data in production of official statistics – an initiative on how to enhance national data coverage in relation to the SDG and the statistical systems in general**

**Introduction** In connection to the ongoing discussion on the Sustainable Development Goals and the need to monitor those, Statistics Denmark has in the recent time advocated for a broader use of administrative data in production of official statistics in order to strengthen the statistical base in the Member States. This strengthened statistical base would form a better point of departure in order to improve data coverage in relation to monitoring of the SDG as well as in relation to national statistical systems in general. In this regard, please find below a short description of the initiative that aims at improving the data coverage.

**The goal** Global initiatives such as *the 2030 agenda* have to be corroborated by a sound and credible statistical system that can monitor realization of the global ambitions. The main goal of this initiative is to contribute to the process of strengthening the statistical base in the Member States for monitoring the SDG by drawing more attention to one particular area of statistics – **production of statistics based on administrative registers**. The specific target is to use the unique opportunity created by *the 2030 agenda* to increase statistical capacity-building in the Member States in order to improve the data coverage for monitoring the SDG by a more **extensive use of administrative data in production of official statistics**. Furthermore, this initiative has further application than solely the SDG – it will **improve the national statistical systems in general** as well as **ensure national ownership of the post-2015 monitoring system** and a national system to support data-driven policy development and monitoring. A concrete example of a possible goal of importance for several SDG areas could be improvement of birth or education statistics (including data disaggregation) by a wider use of administrative data.

**Advantages** First and foremost the production of statistics based on administrative registers is an effect of a national country specific initiative for the establishment of one or more registers for the support of administrative practices. This support of administrative practices is the main goal. Good administrative data will contribute to empowerment of local administrations and knowledge-based political decision-making. And statistics based on administrative data will improve the basis for a data-driven political development and monitoring.

Using administrative data in statistical production has many advantages. One of the main advantages is low costs, good quality and high flexibility of the data from the moment the statistical register has been established. Statistical data based on administrative registers can be linked across the statistical domains as well as linked to other types of data.

Secondly, statistics based on administrative data ensures continuity and coherence.

Thirdly, once established, running a statistical register is a ‘never-ending’ story, implying that data will be reported to a register continuously. In the first place, in order to support the administrative processes but also as a subject to quality assurance and documentation by the NSOs before it is used as the basis for official statistics.

And last but definitely not least, statistics based on administrative data meets the much sought ambition of disaggregation by age, gender, income, geography etc. hereby allowing measurement of the crucial ambition of *the 2030 agenda* on ‘leaving no one behind’.

The outcome It is proposed that this initiative firstly focuses on improving population statistics, subsequently education statistics. The aim is to achieve the following:

- (1) Improve the data coverage and data disaggregation for monitoring the SDG and national statistical systems in general for the participating countries by a more extensive use of administrative data in production of statistics – specific targets of the initiative, like for example birth statistics and/or education (two core issues crosscutting many of the SDG targets to be monitored as part of the process) can be considered;
- (2) Pave the way for the future ambitions of improving production of statistics by the use of administrative data in other Member States;
- (3) Outline the best approach for improving the data coverage on the basis of administrative data as well as identifying the paths not to be followed, while being aware of the differences between national statistical systems.

Realizing these ambitions requires different forms of cooperation and transferring the knowledge between the participants of the initiative, as there is no one-size-fits-all solution. The ambition is that close and tailored cooperation between the partners will ensure a high degree of national ownership of the initiative and create tangible results. It is important to note in this context that the Member States should set the objective of the initiative and be in the ‘driving seat’ in outlining the main targets of capacity-building and knowledge-sharing.

Legislation is a very important aspect of the work with administrative data. This initiative aims primarily at using administrative data in accordance with the existing legislative framework on data protection and statistics in the respective Member States.

Challenges There are many challenges in improving statistical production based on administrative registers and the primary obstacles lie outside the statistical systems. The first challenge is convincing the decision-makers that in order to strengthen evidence-based policy-making investment in statistical capacity-building is the way forward. The considerations about improving statistical system have also to take into account the different points of departure among the Member States.

Production of statistics based on administrative data presupposes also cooperation between different governmental agencies and there can be different traditions in this regard across the Member States. It is also very important to clearly define who can access the statistical data based on different administrative registers– there can be a pressure for administrative use of this kind of data.

It is our conviction, however, that those challenges can be overcome with due amount of groundwork and information to the involved parties.