

Instructions for international data exchange

International data exchange and purpose of these instructions

The instructions have been compiled to support exchange of confidential data with statistical authorities in different countries in order to ensure the quality of statistics. The instructions concern ad-hoc and small-scale exchange of unit-level data with ESS authorities or other organisations. These instructions can be applied both in bilateral discussions and in data exchange over encrypted email. More extensive and regular release of information to foreign countries still requires separate decisions. These instructions also describe the documentation related to data exchange with which the activities can be monitored.

Background of data exchange and nature of data to be exchanged

Transactions between Finland and foreign countries increase their importance in a globalised world. High quality statistics mean that these items are recorded in a uniform manner in the statistics of different countries. In recent years, asymmetries between the statistics of different countries have been noted, which are mainly caused by one of the parties not covering the item in question at all or, alternatively, the parties using different recording or valuation principles.

Because it is difficult to arrange extensive exchange of unit-level data securely and following the statistical disclosure control practices of different national statistical authorities, various international organisations have recently tried to promote bilateral discussions between countries on the asymmetries of statistics. These discussions are useful but experts have asked for guidelines on what they are permitted to reveal in these discussions about the data we possess and how they are processed.

It is not always necessary to release unit-level data as validation of statistical figures involves many other methods that can be used to investigate the reasons behind deviating figures. The level of detail and confidentiality of exchangeable data can be roughly grouped as follows:

1. Aggregate-level data, e.g. released data or data delivered to an international organisation. Releasing or discussing such data does not usually involve any restrictions.

“The exports of this industry deviate by this much from the counterparty country’s imports, a clear level shift is visible in the time series during this period.”

2. Classification data describing units and methodological and other metadata connected with processing of figures. Such data refer to data describing units that are not as sensitive by nature as the actual figures and their release does not usually cause confidentiality problems.

“The figures of company x are included in this aggregate, we classify company x in this category, the business of company x is of this nature.”

3. Figures describing units collected with statistical inquiries or from administrative files, whose confidentiality must be ensured.

“The turnover of company x was EUR x in this period, our estimate on the value of company x is EUR x, we have made a coverage revision of EUR x to this figure.”

Legislation related to data exchange

The Statistics Act and the Regulation on European statistics (EC) No 233/2009 allow data exchange between agencies belonging to the European Statistical System and the European System of Central Banks when the data concern European statistics, that is, statistics that belong to the ESS’s statistical programme or the work programme of the European System of Central Banks.

Similar regulations do not exist for countries outside the EU.

Data exchange between ESS and ESCB authorities (+ Nordic countries)

Unit-level data (classifications and figures) can be exchanged and shared with authorities belonging to the European Statistical System (ESS) and the European System of Central Banks (ESCB) and Nordic statistical authorities if the sharing is necessary for efficient development, production and dissemination of statistics or for improving the quality of the statistics.

Examples of data that can be released/revealed

- Unit name
- Our data source related to the unit
- Classification data related to the unit
- Theory of international manuals that we apply to the unit
- Selected recording method and valuation principles
- Period in which the transaction is visible in our statistics
- Business model publicly revealed by the enterprise
- Estimated figures related to the unit
- Actual figures related to the unit

Data that cannot be released/revealed

- Data on the business model and trade partners provided by the enterprise separately to the statistical office
- Names of the unit’s contact persons

Data exchange with statistical authorities outside the EU

To other authorities than those mentioned in the previous section, unit-level figures cannot be released without a separate decision. Release of aggregate level figures and classification data describing the units is, however, allowed.

Examples of data that can be released or revealed

- Unit name
- Our data source related to the unit

- Classification data related to the unit
- Theory of international manuals that we apply to the unit
- Selected recording method and valuation principles
- Period in which the transaction is visible in our statistics
- Business model publicly revealed by the enterprise

Data that cannot be released/revealed

- Actual figures related to the unit
- Estimated figures related to the unit
- Data on the business model and trade partners provided by the enterprise separately to the statistical office
- Names of the unit's contact persons

Documentation of data exchange and confidentiality agreements

Departments must ensure that the data exchange is documented so that it is possible to find out later to whom the data have been released and for what purpose. At minimum, the following must be documented concerning the data exchange:

- Date
- From which statistics the data were released
- Who released the data (name and contact information)
- To whom the data were released (name and contact information)
- For which purpose are the released data used

In connection with the release of confidential data (actual or estimated figures), a confidentiality agreement must be required from the counterparty. How is this solved in practice?

- Case-specific confirmations by email that indicate who will see the data and that they are committed to keeping the data confidential?
- General agreements between the organisations within the scope of which experts can exchange data?

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Appendices

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