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Item 5 (c) of the provisional agenda

Data collection, methodological development and harmonization of transport statistics: Common questionnaire

Data Provision Through the Web Common Questionnaire

Note by the secretariat

I. Background

1. At its sixty-ninth session in 2018, the Working Party shared experiences in using the Web Common Questionnaire (WebCoQ) application, which allows countries to simultaneously provide inland transport statistics to three organizations of the Intersecretariat Working Group (IWG) – the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), International Transport Forum (ITF) and the Statistical Office of the European Union (Eurostat). This document covers the following topics:

- (a) Suggested improvements from the IWG and member States that have already been made;
- (b) Expected changes in 2020 due to IT infrastructure modifications at Eurostat;
- (c) The timetable of WebCoQ opening, updates and checks;
- (d) Common reporting problems.

Documentation

ECE/TRANS/WP.6/175

II. Identified potential improvements

2. At its sixty-ninth session, Working Party delegates identified several recurring issues with certain aspects of WebCoQ. For example:

- (a) Countries indicated that even when using the bulk upload function, it was necessary to subsequently validate each data cell;
- (b) The vehicle register module has been noted as being one of the most time consuming, and also one where member States often encounter technical problems. This seems to come from the large size of the table to fill in, and often involves the system crashing due to a large number of indicators being updated at the same time;

- (c) Some countries also noted the print function does not always work correctly.

Eurostat have flagged all these issues with their IT team and it is hoped that these issues will be fixed in the near future. It should also be noted that the road vehicle module can be filled in a few sub-sections at a time, which reduces the risk of a technical issue.

III. Changes in Application to 2020

3. Eurostat expect to migrate to a new IT system from 2020 onwards. As such, it is not envisaged to make significant structural changes to the application before then. However, any persistent technical problems should continue to be flagged.

IV. Recent Timetable

4. As part of the 2017 data cycle (requesting data up to calendar year 2016) the secretariat conducted a renewed data outreach to countries, concentrating on data availability. Following its regular database update in January 2018 with newly available WebCoQ data, the secretariat contacted countries that had not provided WebCoQ data in recent years, countries that had provided data for some WebCoQ indicators but not others and/or those that had provided suspect data that required follow-up. A particular focus was to improve data availability on passenger-km and tonne-km, that are relevant for measuring Sustainable Development Goal indicator 9.1.2.

5. As a result of this outreach and subsequent correspondence with countries, many countries submitted new or additional 2016 data to WebCoQ in 2018. In May 2018 and also in September 2018 the secretariat again updated its database, according to its planned update schedule, to reflect the improved WebCoQ data availability and quality.

6. Having conducted this outreach, the secretariat in the 2018 cycle (data collection for 2017) shifted the focus of the queries from data availability to data quality. Time series checks were conducted, focusing primarily on data from 2010 onwards, and feasibility and consistency checks were also made. In addition, the ITF conducted its own checks on the WebCoQ data, making comparisons both with other data collected by the ITF and with national sources where available. Queries were sent to member States in February 2019.

7. In the cases where data needed to be changed, the secretariat encouraged countries to update the WebCoQ directly. In previous cycles when an error has been identified, the querying organization updated only its own database rather than the WebCoQ itself, which may have caused data discrepancies between the three organizations and reduced the usefulness of the joint questionnaire exercise. In the future, if countries (or members of the IWG) update the WebCoQ as and when corrections to errors are identified, data provenance and organizational consistency can be maintained.

V. Timetable moving forward, scheduled updates and checks

8. Based on the improvements to data quality and availability seen in the 2017 and 2018 cycles, the IWG proposes to update its timetable for opening the annual WebCoQ data collection, deadlines for data submission, publication of data by each respective organization, and coordinated dispatch of data queries to countries after data validation. It is hoped that improved clarity will help member States understand the data cycle and the consequences of data submission by different dates.

9. Specifically, the IWG proposes that starting from the 2019 cycle (with data collection for calendar year 2018) the WebCoQ is opened for data submissions from the time of the Working Party session in June 2019. This will allow any countries with data already available to provide them from that point onward. As it has been noted that many member States only have data available towards the end of the year, the existing practice of setting a suggested deadline of end-October will continue.

10. After the deadline of end-October and following reminders, the secretariat will start the process of data download and updating its online database (w3.unece.org/PXWeb/en) This process is expected to be completed in January and following this the secretariat will conduct data validation checks. Eurostat will also conduct its own validation checks in February-to mid-March, with data publication taking place mid-March to mid-April.

11. Member States are encouraged to update WebCoQ where any changes are needed, including historical updates, as a response to queries raised during the data validation phase. Where countries either do not respond to queries or do not have the time to update historical time series, it is proposed that an IWG organization will make the changes in the WebCoQ directly, either upon confirmation from the member State or after a certain amount of time has elapsed following a formal notification. This will provide for greater certainty in data quality.

12. These changes will only occur when there is a reasonably obvious problem with the data that can be fixed easily. For example, data reported in units rather than thousands, an obvious transposition of two digits, or two series being transposed would be candidates for a direct update of the WebCoQ by the IWG.

13. Member States are invited to reflect whether they agree to have their data overwritten by an IWG member in these cases.

14. To guide more efficient interactions with countries the IWG has begun to systematically track correspondence with countries and changes to data through a shared database of country queries, responses and actions. This means that if an organization does make a change in data that turns out to be wrong, there will be a full record of this and it can thus be easily fixed.

15. Following this set of queries in February and March, the secretariat will again make further database updates in May and September.

VI. Common reporting mistakes

16. The IWG sees similar reporting errors for many countries, and so wants to increase awareness of these in order to reduce them in the future. Three examples are:

(a) Data reported in the wrong units (data often out by a factor of one thousand or one million). This is general problem but is particularly common in the vehicle units module (WebCoQ indicators starting B-II), and specifically in lorry load capacities. This is likely due to a reclassification of these data in the 2013 data cycle, that has not been sufficiently communicated to member States by the IWG;

(b) Countries are reminded to use the check at the bottom of the screen with previous time series when data are entered. This can often help spot unit errors, assuming that the previous data were entered correctly, and is also a useful check against entering data under the wrong indicator;

(c) Data for goods road vehicle load capacity (WebCoQ indicators starting B-II-06-25-, B-II-16-24- and B-II-16-25-) are sometimes reported in the wrong units as mentioned above, but some member States also report data according to the wrong concept, namely number of vehicles with each respective capacity, rather than these vehicles' capacity in tonnes.

VII. Conclusions

17. The Working Party is invited to consider:

- (a) Sharing their experiences in using the WebCoQ;
- (b) Reviewing their WebCoQ submission of indicators that are often reported in the wrong unit;
- (c) The timetable proposed by the IWG for WebCoQ updates and queries;

(d) The proposal of the IWG that the secretariat, ITF or Eurostat may edit data directly in WebCoQ when an obvious error is spotted;
any further streamlining of indicators that are poorly reported or less analytically useful. The IWG will always strive to make the WebCoQ as efficient as possible.
