



Economic Commission for Europe**Conference of European Statisticians****Seventieth plenary session**

Geneva, 20-22 June 2022

Item 4 (a) of the provisional agenda

Coordination of international statistical work**in the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe region:****Outcomes of the recent in-depth reviews carried out****by the Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians****In-depth review on collaboration with private sector data providers****Addendum****Outcome of the electronic consultation on in-depth review on collaboration with private sector data providers****Prepared by the Secretariat***Summary*

This document presents the outcome of the in-depth review on collaboration with private sector data providers that the Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians carried out in February 2022, and summarises the feedback from the electronic consultation on the review among members of the Conference of European Statisticians in April–May 2022.

The in-depth review paper (ECE/CES/2022/11) was prepared by a group of experts led by Poland. The paper examines the factors that facilitate cooperation with private sector data providers, as well as the impediments, and concludes with a set of recommendations at the international and national levels in this area.

The Conference will be invited to endorse the outcome of the in-depth review on collaboration with private sector data providers (ECE/CES/2022/11/Add.1) and the position statement on access to data held by private sector (ECE/CES/2022/27) on 22 June 2022 under item 9.



I. Introduction

1. Each year, the Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) reviews selected statistical areas in depth. The purpose of the reviews is to improve coordination of statistical activities in the region of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), identify gaps or duplication of work, and address emerging issues. These reviews focus on strategic issues and highlight concerns of statistical offices of both a conceptual and coordinating nature.
2. The Bureau carried out an in-depth review on collaboration with private sector data providers in February 2022 based on a paper by a group of experts led by Poland (provided as document ECE/CES/2022/11).
3. The UNECE Secretariat conducted an electronic consultation in April–May 2022 to inform all CES members about the in-depth review on collaboration with private sector data providers and provide an opportunity to comment on its outcomes.
4. The following 12 countries and organizations replied to the electronic consultation: Canada, Costa Rica, Italy, Kyrgyzstan, Lithuania, Mexico, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Switzerland, Ukraine, and the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD).

II. Outcome of the Conference of European Statisticians Bureau discussion in February 2022

5. The Bureau made an in-depth review of collaboration with private sector data providers at its February 2022 meeting.
6. The Bureau agreed with the recommendations proposed in the paper by Poland et al. and asked for the paper to be widely shared. The topic will be discussed at the CES plenary session (under item 9).
7. The Bureau decided to prepare a document to express a common standpoint of official statistics on the access to privately held data, serving as an effective communication tool to address the concerns of the public and the private sector and establishing a social license. This document could be used in communications with government agencies, private sector and other stakeholders to facilitate access by statistical offices and other parts of the national statistical system to data held by the private sector. The CES plenary session is planned to discuss and adopt the text during session 9 ‘Collaboration with private data providers’ on 22 June. A draft text is provided as document ECE/CES/2022/27.
8. The Bureau will consider the outcome of the June 2022 CES session and the need for follow-up work at its October 2022 meeting.

III. General comments received in the electronic consultation

9. Countries expressed support for the in-depth review and praised the quality of the paper. The analysis of country practices was considered very useful, with valuable insights on the challenges and opportunities for collaboration with private sector data providers based on lessons learned from national statistical offices (**Mexico, Switzerland, and UNSD**).
10. Countries highlighted the importance of legislation in promoting access to privately held data for administrative and statistical purposes (**Canada, Slovakia, and Switzerland**). Apart from the legal framework, there are ethics issues related to the access to and the use of privately held data (e.g., privacy, trust, and social licence) (**Canada**). It was stressed that concepts such as proportionality and public interest should be discussed as foundational elements in requests to access privately held data (**Canada and Mexico**).
11. There is a need to provide a clearer definition of “privately held data” (**Italy**). The uncertainty of regular access to privately held data was considered as one of the most important risks in the usability of these data in statistical production (**Portugal**). It was noted that each data source presents its own set of challenges and particular characteristics

regarding its usability, and thus each of them should be evaluated to design more detailed strategies. Meanwhile, it is important to investigate how to link the privately held data with traditional data to generate synergies (**Mexico**).

12. The recommendations in the paper were supported. The call for strengthening cooperation between different groups under the auspices of international organizations and adopting a coordinated approach from the international community were particularly welcome (**Mexico, Portugal, Switzerland, and UNSD**). The agreement of the European Commission with collaborative economy platforms on data sharing was considered as a good reference to recommend international organizations to play a role to establish cooperation with multinational companies (**Italy**). It would be helpful for the international community to identify some basic common elements (e.g., procedural specifications, agreement frameworks, and ethics committees) for national statistical offices to adopt and adapt locally (**Mexico**). At the national level, it is important to invest in partnership with private companies, especially through their representative associations, to facilitate national statistical offices to obtain data from enterprises (**Italy**).

13. Detailed substantive comments are provided in the Annex. Countries also sent editorial corrections and additional information which are not listed here. The comments will be taken into account in the CES discussion and in further work in this area.

Annex

Detailed substantive comments received from electronic consultation

<i>Country / Organization</i>	<i>Comments</i>
Canada	<p>The following statement is representative of StatCan’s position through the years that although we have a legislation that allows and provides the authority, the interpretation by private data holders may be presenting an obstacle. <i>Statements (para 54): “The national legislation in most of the survey respondent countries neither assists nor hinders access to privately held data. However, the lack of a solid legal basis is perceived by many NSOs as an obstacle to engaging with private sector data providers and gaining sustainable access to their data for statistical purposes.”</i></p> <p>While in Canada we have a legal framework to obtain privately held data, there is much discussions on the ethics issue of not whether we can collect data but whether we should and how? Further, Statistics Canada has developed a Privacy Framework, which is a collection of approved practices, procedures and governance related to privacy. Together, these elements of privacy protection provide the full scope of privacy controls within the operations of Statistics Canada. The Agency has also developed a Necessity and Proportionality Framework to enable Statistics Canada to meet the information needs of Canadians while working to reduce the response burden on survey respondents.</p> <p>Trust is mentioned several times in the paper and it could be noted that Canada has a Trust Centre for the purposes of engaging with data providers and Canadians (section 44 and section 62 h).</p>
Italy	<p>On paragraph 60, the experience of the agreement (2020, March) of the European Commission with four collaborative economy platforms (Airbnb, Booking, Expedia Group and TripAdvisor) on data sharing could be considered as a very good reference point to recommend international organizations to play a role to establish cooperation with multi-national companies, that could be very helpful also to achieve national objectives for official statistics.</p> <p>On paragraph 61 (b), the recommendation about partnership could be enlarged and further detailed. Partnership is a key point to invest on to get access to privately held data. In Italy we built a partnership with the Association of Modern Distribution to obtain scanner data for CPI from the chains of large-scale retail trade market of groceries. Building partnership with the enterprises through their representative association is a useful approach to avoid bilateral time-consuming relationships, when data are referred to wide markets where several big subjects are the players that detain the data. In this perspective, it is very important to stress the public role of the cooperation with the NSOs, given that such cooperation could enhance the prestige of the associations. Associations can facilitate NSOs to obtain the data from the enterprises in the framework of a general agreement that establish some general rules of transmission. As in the case of scanner data in Italy, a third party (such as Nielsen) to which the enterprises deliver the data to develop market analysis, could act as intermediary between the enterprises and the NSOs in a “triangle shaped” cooperation. Other possible ways to establish partnerships could be recommended or, at least, suggested.</p>

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	<p>On paragraph 61 (c), the National Data Strategy in Italy promotes the coordinated access and use of privately held data by the public sector. However, it is relevant to discuss and plan what is the role that NSOs could have in this direction. In particular, NSOs do have technical capabilities that could be put at the service of other subjects, including metadata and quality management, as well as more recently also capabilities related to the use of privacy preserving techniques for data access.</p> <p>On paragraph 62 (b), it seems that a better specification of what is meant by “privately held data” is actually necessary also looking to some steps of this paper. In paragraph 38 there is a list of examples of collaboration models with companies and one of this is “outsourced data collection”. This model seems to be out of the scope of the topic discussed in this paper. The point is not how to get access to privately held data but the relationship between NSOs and private companies to carry out data collection within the framework of an agreement usually of commercial type and based on monetary compensation of the services provided (even if it implies the use of big data sources). It should be re-considered to list this as an example of collaboration model.</p> <p>On paragraph 62 (g), the lack of quality assessment of privately held data pushes for setting up common and shared quality standards, better if per Big Data source, so as to provide enough technical details.</p>
Mexico	<p>INEGI congratulates the team that prepared this in-depth review, since, through the analysis of individual topics and works and their subsequent conjunction, the document facilitates the construction of a big picture on the possibilities, challenges and needs for access to privately held data. It shows the advances at the international level on the subject, but also captures the complexities arisen before, during and after the approaches of various institutions with private-data holders.</p> <p>As it has been pointed out in various reports and works carried out by the statistical community, each data source presents its own set of challenges and particular characteristics regarding its usability; therefore, specialization in each of them, particularly the most relevant and with the greatest challenges, should be evaluated as a way to allow us to design more detailed strategies and to identify technological needs, training requirements, strategic partners, incentives, among others.</p> <p>Based on the different national experiences that the document recovers, we can identify central elements that deserve our attention and reflection:</p> <p>Most NSO do not contemplate explicit access to non-traditional data sources within their legal framework, changes in this matter will depend on individual contexts. However, it is possible to identify basic common elements that, based on recommendations from the international community, can be adopted and adapted locally. For example, procedural specifications, framework agreements or ethics committees.</p> <p>Concepts such as Proportionality and Public Interest must be discussed as foundational elements in requests or requirements to access privately held data. The NSO can identify those non-traditional private data sources that are most relevant to our statistical work and whose collection can mean an important input for the better fulfillment of our mandate, and therefore, for better decision making that promote social and economic development.</p> <p>Although access to privately held data presents new opportunities both to generate new statistics and to support traditional ones, the usability of this data poses its own challenges. Identifying the limitations in the respective</p>

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	<p>source of information will help us to apply or develop methodologies for better exploitation. We have a pending task on linking this privately held data with traditional data to generate synergies, new opportunities, and incentives for greater and better collaborations.</p> <p>It will be important to increase support and to create specialized and coordinated working groups to address the various aspects of access to private data; as well as to establish collaboration agreements between NSOs and International Organizations with the purpose of sharing Big Data collection tools, and thereby raising the level of maturity of countries with a lower level of maturity in this area.</p> <p>The issue of data quality and data exchange are relevant factors, given that the data by itself does not contain quality the required for official statistics.</p> <p>We agree with the 5 recommendations for application in the national and international context.</p> <p>In paragraph 32, it would be interesting to know if there is a success story in relation to private taxi platforms (UBER, CiTy, DIDI, Cabify, etc.), where that type of companies provided their information and if the legislation allowed it, since it is important information for mobility statistics.</p> <p>Regarding the characteristics of the information provided by the companies, in a large part of the document it is classified as good or bad, but the criteria used are not mentioned, so it is important to consider a catalog with the criteria, for a better analysis.</p> <p>Concerning Paragraph 62: g)-we propose to consider the terminology: "third-party data held by private parties". This term refers to the information obtained from private agents as a result of the economic activity they carry out. As paragraph 62 mentions, the data held by private parties contains a lot of information, so the requests made to the agent about "privately held data" can generate in the informant the confusion that the National Statistical Offices (NSOs) may seek to delve into the private agent's knowledge of facts of a different nature than statistics.</p>
Portugal	<p>Statistics Portugal generally supports the document on "Collaboration with private sector data providers" and the forward-looking recommendations made therein. We fully support the importance and the need to strengthen cooperation between the various groups dealing with access to privately held data under the auspices of international organizations, in order to achieve greater specialization. Strengthening the role of international organizations to facilitate access to privately held data is also very important, to have economies of scale and to promote collaborations that would not be possible if NSIs worked alone for this purpose. We would also like to stress the uncertainty of regular access to privately held data as one of the most important risks in the usability of these data in statistical production. This is really an important issue and, in many cases, the main cause behind the long and complicated transition from experimental to official statistical production.</p>
Slovakia	<p>We unequivocally support the conclusions and recommendations in this document. Priorities of the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic in this area are the following:</p> <p>in terms of the international context, the legislative enshrining of the possibility of using privately held data by national statistical institutes at European level (Data Act, the revision of Regulation No. 223/2009),</p>

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	<p>in terms of internal affairs, in the future strategy, to identify the areas on which the SOSR will focus in view of the possibility to use privately held data for statistical purposes,</p> <p>provide adequate sources for the use of privately held data, in particular as regards qualified staff, which will be able to process and use these data for statistical purposes.</p>
Switzerland	<p>The paper is really well written and gives a good picture of the current situation in terms of access to private data.</p> <p>Good practices, with type of collaboration and name of countries, are really useful. They also show that the situation changes a lot according to countries/regions and that it can still be a complicated collaboration;</p> <p>A coordinated approach (within and beyond the statistical community) from the international community should be undertaken to pursue this matter:</p> <p>There are relatively few private actors, these are consequently in a comfortable position;</p> <p>As such, a coordinated approach, operationally and legally, is necessary to provide some counter-weight;</p> <p>National legislation also has to be adapted to allow access to these types of data for administrative and statistics purposes.</p>
UNSD	<p>The report is well written and provides good insights in the topic of acquiring access to privately held data. Based on lessons learned from success stories and failures by national statistical offices, the report points out relevant facilitators for getting access to private sector data, such as good and open communication, looking for win-win situations, a good legal framework and openness for cost compensation. UNSD agrees with the main recommendations, namely (1) strengthening collaboration and clear division of work at the international level, and (2) secondments of staff, investment in partnerships and involvement of relevant ministries at the national level.</p> <p>UNSD also welcomed in the report the references to the work of the UN Committee of Experts on Big Data and Data Science for Official Statistics (the UNCEBD) and its UN Global Platform, which serves the statistical community to enable international collaboration on new data, methods and applications. The UNCEBD recently established a task team on facilitating access to privately held data. Jointly with the network on economic statisticians, this task team conducted a global sprint on data access with a focus on data sources related to global value chains. Over the coming months five sub-groups will elaborate on specific GVC use cases regarding horticulture, semi-conductors, e-commerce, retail trade and tourism, respectively.</p>