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**Joint UNECE/Eurostat work session on statistical data confidentiality**  
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Topic (vii): Trans-border access to microdata

## **Update on UNECE Principles and Guidelines**

Prepared by Steve Vale, United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE)

# Update on UNECE Principles and Guidelines

Steven Vale

UNECE Secretariat, Palais des Nations, CH-1211 Geneva, Switzerland, [steven.vale@unece.org](mailto:steven.vale@unece.org)

**Abstract:** This paper outlines the current status of UNECE work regarding principles and guidelines for statistical confidentiality. The current work programme has been approved by the conference of European Statisticians and its Bureau. The main elements are an update of the 2007 publication “Managing Statistical Confidentiality and Microdata Access: Principles and Guidelines of Good Practice” and a review of the implementation of the “Principles and Guidelines on Confidentiality Aspects of Data Integration Undertaken for Statistical or Related Research Purposes” provisionally adopted by the Conference of European Statisticians in 2009. Proposals for future outputs are also sought.

## 1 Introduction

At its plenary session in June 2011, the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) considered two proposals from its Bureau related to statistical confidentiality.

The first decision concerned the “Principles and Guidelines of Good Practice for Managing Statistical Confidentiality and Microdata Access”, adopted by the Conference in 2006. The Bureau expressed concern that whilst the principles and guidelines themselves remain relevant, some of the case studies in this document were becoming out of date, and proposed that the secretariat should ask countries to update them, or provide new ones.

The second decision concerned the “Principles and Guidelines on Confidentiality Aspects of Data Integration Undertaken for Statistical or Related Research Purposes” endorsed by the Conference in June 2009. These principles and guidelines were developed by a Task Force chaired by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. The Conference decided that the Guidelines should be tested over a period of two years, and should be reviewed in 2011. In a written consultation exercise, countries were invited to inform the secretariat about any problems encountered with the practical implementation of the principles and guidelines.

## **2 Managing statistical confidentiality and microdata access: Principles and guidelines of good practice**

National and international statistical organisations are invited to review the case studies presented in the publication “Managing Statistical Confidentiality and Microdata Access: Principles and Guidelines of Good Practice”. The CES Bureau has noted that the country case studies included in the Guidelines have been very useful but now need updating. For example, new information technology solutions are available for managing confidentiality, and there are new developments regarding remote access to microdata.

The UNECE Secretariat has written to the authors of these case studies inviting them to provide updates. Other statistical organisations are also invited to propose new case studies to add to the range of experiences presented.

Proposed updates and additions to the case studies should be notified to the UNECE secretariat by the end of January 2012. The method of publication of these case studies will be considered, as UNECE policy has moved from paper to electronic publications. The most likely solution is to publish the revised version electronically via the UNECE wiki platform, thus facilitating more frequent updating in the future.

## **3 Principles and guidelines on confidentiality aspects of data integration undertaken for statistical or related research purposes**

A consultation exercise was launched in March 2011, where countries were invited to send their observations and report any problems with the practical implementation of these Principles and Guidelines. Twenty-six countries and two international organisations responded as follows:

- Eight countries had no comments and endorsed the principles (Armenia, Belarus, Bulgaria, Finland, Latvia, Netherlands, Sweden and Switzerland).
- Fourteen countries provided comments on national implementation of the Principles and Guidelines, often referring to the relationship with national legislation or practices, but did not make any specific proposals for change (Australia, Azerbaijan, Canada, Croatia, Czech Republic, Italy, Lithuania, Mexico, New Zealand, Slovakia, Slovenia, Tajikistan, Turkey and Ukraine).

- Four countries (Denmark, Greece, Romania and the United States), and the two international organisations (Eurostat and the IMF) made proposals for changes or clarifications to the principles and guidelines.

The detailed comments are presented in a room paper for the 2011 plenary session of the CES, which is available at:

<http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/stats/documents/ece/ces/2011/10Add1.e.pdf>.

The Conference welcomed the comments provided by countries through the written consultation, and agreed that they were mainly seeking further clarification of the principles and guidelines, and did not indicate any fundamental problems with their implementation or use. The secretariat was requested to retain the comments for use in a future review of the principles and guidelines. The Bureau will assess the organization and timing of such a review at its meeting in November 2011, and will report back to the Conference as appropriate.

#### **4 Next steps**

A new version of “Managing Statistical Confidentiality and Microdata Access: Principles and Guidelines of Good Practice” will be published electronically in 2012, and is expected to become more of a living document, with the possibility of regular updates and additions to the case studies.

If the CES Bureau decides that the “Principles and Guidelines on Confidentiality Aspects of Data Integration undertaken for Statistical or Related Research Purposes” need to be revised, a timetable and task team will be established.

There is an increasing demand from chief statisticians to show concrete outputs from groups reporting to the CES, so the participants at the Work Session on Statistical Confidentiality are invited to propose topics for which further guidelines could be useful, or other possible outputs that would be of benefit to the international statistical community.