

CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS

Approved

Meeting of the 2023/2025 Bureau  
Cardiff, UK, 9-10 October 2023

Item III (c) of the Provisional  
Agenda

**TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE  
TASK FORCE ON HARD-TO-REACH GROUPS IN ADMINISTRATIVE SOURCES**

**Prepared by Denmark and the Secretariat**

*In February 2023 the Bureau carried out an in-depth review on hard-to-reach groups in administrative sources, based on a paper by Denmark, with contributions by Canada, Italy, New Zealand and United States (ECE/CES/BUR/2023/FEB/2). The Bureau supported further work in this area and agreed with the establishment of a new task force, as recommended in the paper.*

*The Bureau approved the Terms of Reference for a Task Force on hard-to-reach groups in administrative sources.*

**I. BACKGROUND**

1. Across all areas of social statistics as well as some areas of economic statistics there is a widespread and rapid trend towards the use of administrative sources, either to complement traditional census and survey sources, or to replace them. This shift has been accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic during which NSOs have had to seek out administrative sources to make up for the absence or shortcomings of data collected by traditional means. There are many advantages to this overall trend, including reduced respondent burden, faster production of statistics, and the concomitant reduced costs. There are of course also well-known drawbacks, such as a dependence on the content of administrative sources and the challenges in gathering data on subjective characteristics or other variables that are not recoded in administrative sources.

2. The drive to ‘leave no-one behind’, enshrined in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, has come to provide the backdrop for many efforts at improving the quality and coverage of statistics. Calls abound for multiple disaggregation of data, to permit analysis of the impacts of intersecting vulnerabilities. Yet many of the dimensions along which users would like data to be disaggregated concern population groups that are considered to be ‘hard-to-reach’: that is, groups that tend to be under-represented either because they are **numerically very small**; because they are **hard to identify**, e.g. due to a lack of standardized definitions or because of a lack of data collection on the relevant variables; because they **choose not to be identified**, e.g. due to stigma associated with group membership; because they are **systematically excluded from standard collection techniques** and sampling frames, e.g. people living in institutions; because they are **physically hard to reach**, e.g. those living in remote areas or without a fixed abode; or because they are **hard to enumerate even once identified and sampled**, e.g. people living with dementia, people who do not speak the national language, and young children.

3. The general shift towards use of administrative sources for censuses and surveys heightens some of the challenges encountered when trying to safeguard and improve the availability of data and statistics on hard-to-reach groups. Some examples include: ensuring inclusion of the primary and secondary homeless and undocumented migrants in statistics derived from administrative registers; representing marginalized ethnic, religious and gender minorities and people with disabilities in statistics if administrative sources are not able to or do not routinely capture these characteristics; and producing sex-disaggregated statistics to permit gender analysis of crucial topics such as poverty, when the administrative sources used to provide the information are gathered at the level of the household rather than the individual.

4. The term “hard-to-reach” is often used with reference to **specific variables** that are lacking in administrative sources, rather than to **population groups** that are totally lacking from the administrative sources. The two issues are interlinked and both deserve to be investigated.

5. These challenges in producing statistics on hard-to-reach groups are not necessarily unique to administrative sources, and some of them are outweighed by other challenges seen when using traditional sources. At a time of gathering momentum towards administrative data-based social statistics, however, the Bureau felt the need to discuss the implications of this trend, and how the efficiency gains offered by the shift risk being offset by these challenges unless ways to overcome them are explicitly developed.

6. In February 2023 the Bureau carried out an in-depth review on hard-to-reach groups in administrative sources, based on a paper by Denmark, with contributions by Canada, Italy, New Zealand and United States (ECE/CES/BUR/2023/FEB/2). The Bureau supported further work in this area and agreed with the establishment of a new task force, as recommended in the paper.

7. The Bureau is invited to review and approve the Terms of Reference for a task force on hard-to-reach groups in administrative sources (hereafter called Task Force), presented in this note.

## II. MANDATE

8. The Task Force on hard-to-reach groups in administrative sources reports to the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) through its Bureau. The Task Force will be created for a period from October 2023 to June 2025.

## III. OBJECTIVE

9. The objective of the Task Force is to investigate what types of hard-to-reach groups are there in different countries, considering both persons that are totally lacking from the administrative sources (unit non response), and variables lacking in the administrative sources (item non response). The Task Force should also investigate ways aimed at improving the access to hard-to-reach groups in administrative sources.

10. The Task Force should try to identify cross-cutting issues faced by countries and focus on specific groups particularly relevant for policy purposes, such as homeless, undocumented immigrants or other groups, depending on the findings.

11. The delimitation of hard-to-reach populations could serve as a point of departure for further investigation of whether there is a common ground for an analysis of how to better identify those groups in administrative sources. If such a common ground is lacking, the Task Force should identify best practices in getting access to hard-to-reach populations in administrative sources in different countries.

12. Based on the findings of its work, the Task Force could develop basic principles, focusing on certain policy relevant groups, such as people with a disability, migrants, ethnic minorities, homeless, children, and older persons.

#### IV. PLANNED ACTIVITIES AND OUTPUTS

13. The Task Force will carry out the following activities:

- (a) Delimit the range of hard-to-reach groups and identify selected specific groups that are particularly relevant for policy purposes.
- (b) Collect information and material on existing experience in national statistical offices on the availability of data and statistics on hard-to-reach groups in administrative sources, focusing on the groups identified in activity *a*;
- (c) Investigate whether there is a common ground for an analysis of how to better identify those groups in administrative sources, develop basic principles and if possible, a conceptual framework;
- (d) Draft a report on the work conducted and the main findings, including a list of good practices in getting access to hard-to-reach populations in administrative sources in different countries.

#### V. TIMETABLE

14. The activities of the Task Force are planned for the period from November 2023 to June 2025, according to the following tentative schedule:

November-December 2023	Establishment of the Task Force and drafting of a work plan with activities, timing and division of work
January-March 2024	Delimit the range of hard-to-reach groups and identify selected specific groups that are particularly relevant for policy purposes (activity <i>a</i> )
May-June 2024	Collect information and material on existing experiences in national statistical offices, focusing on selected groups (activity <i>b</i> )
June-October 2024	Analysis of material collected and development of basic principles and, if possible, a conceptual framework (activity <i>c</i> )
September-December 2024	Draft a report on main findings, including a list of good practices (activity <i>d</i> )
January-February 2025	Review of the report by the CES Bureau
February-March 2025	Revision based on the comments by the CES Bureau
April-May 2025	Electronic consultation among all CES countries
June 2025	Expected endorsement of the report by the CES plenary session

#### VI. METHOD OF WORK

15. The Task Force will primarily work via e-mail, wiki workspace, and online meetings. No face-to-face meeting of the Task Force are planned.

## **VII. MEMBERSHIP**

16. The following statistical offices have expressed interest in participating in the Task Force: Canada, Denmark (Chair), France, Ireland, Italy, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, United Kingdom, United States, Eurostat, OECD, UNICEF and UNSD. Other countries and organizations are welcome to join the Task Force.

17. UNECE will provide the Secretariat to the Task Force.

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