

**QUALITY ASSURANCE, ARRANGEMENTS WITH COMMON
QUESTIONNAIRES AND CONFLICTING STATISTICS**

Note by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, Statistics Division
(UNECESD)

UNECESD maintains databases of macro-economic statistics to support the analysis and production of the Economic Survey for Europe, as well as socio-economic statistics used in the publication Trends in Europe and North America. These databases are also used to support special purpose studies on various social and economic issues, and to respond to ad hoc queries from the public for information.

For the 55 countries of the ECE Region, these databases cover subject matter areas such as:

- Income and expenditure accounts
- Production by industry
- Balance of Payments
- Imports and exports
- Government Fiscal situation
- Employment, unemployment totals, and by age and sex
- Wages and salaries by industry
- Unit labour costs
- Consumer prices
- Industry prices
- Exchange rates, purchasing power parities
- Interest rates
- Population
- Life expectancy
- Infant mortality
- Incidence of certain diseases
- Major causes of death
- Education: indicators of supply, participation, attainment
- Vital statistics, births, deaths by various categories
- Marriages, divorces
- Male-female participation in certain influential or powerful professions and vocations.
- Male-female convictions of various crimes, and participation in prison population

Much of the data are collected through questionnaires sent to national statistical agencies, either directly by UNECESD, or jointly with other international partners such as EUROSTAT, OECD, or more recently UNSD. The questionnaires are sent to countries pre-filled with data previously provided, to encourage consistency over time. In order to reduce response burden, where feasible data are collected from publications put out by the national statistical agencies.

The following actions are taken in order to address issues of (i) data quality, (ii) consistency with data disseminated by other international organizations and (iii) consistency with nationally supplied data.

I. QUALITY ASSURANCE

Besides the data themselves, sufficient metadata are also collected to ensure that we have received what we asked for and that we understand its conceptual basis, to permit us to evaluate the quality and international comparability of the source data, and to enable us to pass on to our clients relevant information about the data.

Data are subject to a variety of consistency and plausibility checks such as

- (i) comparison with previously supplied data for the same period,
- (ii) comparison of component sums with totals
- (iii) comparison with data from other sources
- (iv) reasonableness of derived series such as shares, productivity, implicit deflators, rates, incidence, etc.
- (v) conformity with related series
- (vi) reasonableness of growth rates
- (vii) plausibility of implied economic or social behaviour

If necessary these data review activities are followed up with queries to the data source to clarify concepts, resolve ambiguities and inconsistencies, verify anomalies, etc. The data source may be a partner international organisation such as EUROSTAT with whom UNECESTAT has a joint collection agreement, or in the case of most Eastern European and CIS countries, the national statistical agency or the relevant ministry. An important aspect to this part of the quality control exercise is maintaining close contact and good lines of communication with our data sources.

Data are published with glossaries that define the conceptual content of the series and/or with footnotes that indicate methodological breaks in time series and methodologies used by the UNCECED to construct regional aggregates. Adjustments to national series to bridge methodological breaks or to enhance international comparability are also footnoted.

II. CONSISTENCY WITH DATA DISSEMINATED BY OTHER INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Formal data sharing agreements with EUROSTAT, OECD and imminently with UNSD go a long way to ensuring consistency with other international organisations. Working with client organisations such as UNDP, to ensure they use the most appropriate source data also helps enhance consistency across the international community.

III. CONSISTENCY WITH NATIONALLY SUPPLIED DATA

Generally UNCECED does not modify official data supplied by national statistical agencies. As noted above, however, adjustments to national series may be made to bridge methodological breaks or to enhance international comparability. Such adjustments are flagged with appropriate footnotes.