
DRAFT INTERNATIONAL GUIDELINES FOR THE PRESENTATION AND REPORTING
OF STATISTICAL DATA AND METADATA

Background note by OECD¹

a. Background

1. The CCSA is invited to provide comment on the *Draft Data and Metadata Reporting and Presentation Handbook* provided as a separate document to this brief background note.
2. The 2003 meeting of the CCSA held in Geneva on 8-10 September 2003 discussed and endorsed a proposal prepared by the OECD for the preparation of a handbook outlining guidelines and recommended best practice for the presentation of statistical data and metadata disseminated by national agencies and international organisations on various dissemination media. The CCSA also requested the OECD to submit the proposal for discussion at the March 2004 Statistical Commission highlighting the need for the articulation of a comprehensive set of international presentation guidelines, and some initial thoughts on what such a handbook could contain.
3. Unfortunately, the tight agenda in March precluded any discussion of the proposal at the Statistical Commission, though some NSIs did offer suggestions which were incorporated into the draft Handbook.

b. Scope of the draft Handbook

4. The draft Handbook presented to the CCSA provides recommendations covering the two broad dimensions in which all data may be reported, namely:
 - Types of data – absolute figures, indices, growth rates, ratios.
 - Form of data – raw (original or non-seasonally adjusted series), working day adjusted, seasonally adjusted, trend-cycle.
5. The Handbook also emphasises the need for national agencies and international organisations to prepare adequate metadata describing concepts, collection and processing practices as well as reporting and presentation practices. Such metadata must also be readily accessible and understood by users with different degrees of statistical expertise.

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Recommendations here pick up on previous work (and work to be undertaken over the next 12-18 months) by METIS.

6. In addition, there are a small number of key data reporting practices that also have a significant impact on data interpretability where different approaches currently used by national and international agencies complicate comparisons of national data. These include different:

- data revision presentation practices;
- reporting practices for the presentation of series breaks;
- practices for the reporting of sampling and non-sampling errors;
- base years in the presentation of indices;
- citation practices;
- presentation of administrative data.

7. The Handbook outlines key recommendations and/or good practice with regard to these. Such practices are consistent with sound governance in statistics encompassed, either implicitly or explicitly, in the UN *Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics* and the UN *Handbook on the Operation and Organisation of a Statistical Agency*. The range of reporting practices outlined in an initial version of the Handbook could be expanded in subsequent versions cover other emerging issues.

8. The draft Handbook contains both background material and recommendations on the areas outlined in paras. 4-6 above. The draft also makes extensive use of links and references to relevant national and international documents and publications, e.g. IMF work on data revision, UNESCO work on citation, UNCTAD work on rebasing, etc.

c. Issues to note in current draft of Handbook

9. The Handbook is still very much work in progress and should be viewed in this light. The draft includes a number of annotations where text is still to be prepared – e.g. foreword, linking of time series, recommendations (if any) specific to the presentation of qualitative survey data. It is also intended to provide a summary of the recommendations contained throughout the Handbook in an Annex at the back.

10. Use is also being made of input from national delegates to the OECD Short-term Economic Statistics Expert (STESEG), particularly with respect to terminology and the presentation and reporting of growth rates and seasonally adjusted data. The Handbook still includes a number of inconsistencies in these areas which to some extent is a reflection of the difficulty in reaching agreement on a number of key areas such as the presentation of seasonally adjusted v. trend-cycle estimates and the use of the annualised form of presentation for infra-annual time series. It is also intended to include recommendations that may also be specific to qualitative business and consumer opinion survey data.

d. Future work

11. Work on the Handbook will continue over the next 12 months and will incorporate comments and suggestions from both NSIs and other international organisations. The timeline for the future evolution of the Handbook is as follows:

	<i>Critical dates</i>
Submission to CCSA for discussion at the 1-3 September 2004 meeting in New York.	5 August 2004
Incorporation of CCSA comments.	
Submission to the OECD Member countries and 2005 Statistical Commission for comment.	17 December 2004
Incorporation of Statistical Commission comments and preparation of a final version of the manual	End April 2005
Submission to OECD Committee on Statistics for approval	June 2005

e. Specific areas where comments are sought from CCSA

12. Comments are now sought from CCSA members with regard to the following aspects of the draft Handbook:

- the scope of issues currently included;
- any specific data and metadata presentation issues not currently covered, particularly those relating to annual statistics and/or social statistics;
- identification of any relevant or more recent reference material on presentation issues prepared by either national agencies or international organisations which CCSA members believe would be of use in the preparation of future versions of the draft Handbook;

13. As mentioned at the CCSA meeting last year, assistance is also sought from members to enable the OECD to obtain access to existing organisational publication or database author manuals (if not confidential) that contain guidelines, etc., on any of the presentation issues outlined in the draft Handbook. Access to such manuals has already been obtained from: Eurostat; IMF; UK ONS; Statistics Canada; Australian Bureau of Statistics.

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