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PUBLICATION AND DISSEMINATION POLICY, INCLUDING CO-ORDINATION OF  
STATISTICAL DATA BASES

Use of UN/EDIFACT for transmission of statistical data

Report prepared by EUROSTAT-Luxembourg

## Use of UN/EDIFACT for transmission of statistical data

The work undertaken in the framework of UN/ECE Trade Facilitation Programme for the automation of trade data interchange is of major importance for the future work of all agents willing to improve their data communication; all sectors of activity of national and international economies have to cope with this evolution. And since all sectors in all countries are involved, standards are necessary.

The UN/EDIFACT set of standard defines data messages to be sent from one computer to another and allows these messages to be used by the applications programmes as soon as they arrive in the target computer. This set of standards is composed of a syntax (ISO 9735 EDIFACT Message Syntax) which defines the rules to be used in order to build the messages, data elements from a Trade Data Element Directory (TDED) which is itself a standard (ISO 7372 EDIFACT Trade Data Element Directory) and from which segments and their messages are derived forming new standardized directories. The Trade Data Element refers itself to standardized codes whenever they exist.

The relevance of Electronic Data Interchange (EDI) for statistics is obvious as EDI will facilitate enterprise/administration data exchanges and the interconnection of information systems. EDI technology will speed up the modernisation of statistical information systems while the standardisation process linked to the development of statistical messages will improve the quality and reliability of data. EDI will improve raw data collection both in speed and in quality but it will also help statistical institutes to manage their data flows which become more and more numerous and difficult to handle.

Statistics and EDI will take advantage of their respective stock of information : statistical nomenclatures are good candidates for data element code lists, and the TDED will be updated if necessary to match statistical needs. On the other hand, code lists developed for trade messages could be introduced in the statistical methodology to produce new statistics if necessary.

In the past, EUROSTAT has been involved in European Commission programmes, such as CADDIA, INSIS and TEDIS aiming at facilitating data communication between EUROSTAT and EEC Member States. International co-ordination is a key factor for the success of these activities. On the 10th November 1989 a meeting was held in Luxembourg to launch a statistical group under the framework of the Western European EDIFACT Board, with participants from the 12 EEC Member States but also from EFTA countries, Poland, Canada and OECD, representing national statistical institutes as well as statisticians from private companies; all types of statistical sectors were represented.

The first meeting of this statistical messages development group (MD6) was held in Brussels on 1st February 1990; four groups of interest have been formed with the following assignment :

1. Exchanges of aggregated statistical data definition of standard messages which can be used in electronic data dissemination or interchange between statistical bodies.
2. Development of statistical messages based on other existing UN standard messages, e.g. external trade statistics based on customs declaration message, balance of payments .....
3. Methodology: definition, usage and dissemination of code lists and nomenclatures of statistical relevance; coverage of UNTDID including TDED relative to statistical needs.
4. New ways of collecting raw statistical data from information systems, surveys, enterprises, .....

The work in this group will continue defining a more precise workplan, identifying data flows and fixing priorities for standardisation. Pilot projects in statistical teletransmission have already been started in the past and no doubt that new ones will appear in the near future. National coordinators will be appointed to ensure the coordination of the standardisation work at national level.

EDI brings then new hopes for the future, hopes that more complex and more relevant statistics can be reliably produced in less time, and without increasing the burden of form filling that enterprises are more and more reluctant to bear.

The MD6 meetings will be held every 6-8 weeks in Brussels, Luxembourg or other EEC or EFTA cities, depending on members or meetings location, or room availability.

Those wishing to be kept informed on the MD6 activities should contact :

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