

Inter-Secretariat Working Group on Household Surveys (ISWGHS)

Task force on

Standards and Best Practice for Survey Data Documentation

DRAFT Terms of Reference

The ISWGHS was established by the UN Statistics Commission in 2015, with the mandate to “promote the development of international statistical standards and other methodological documents related to all relevant phases of survey implementation (design, sampling, data collection, data editing, data processing and analysis, data curation and dissemination).” The ISWGHS work program is decided by the ISWGHS Management Group, and implemented through Task Forces. The proposed Task Force on Standards and Best Practice for Survey Data Documentation is established in this context. It will operate under the supervision of the ISWGHS Management Group, benefit from the expertise of the ISWGHS Advisory group, and submit its final output to the UN Statistics Commission.

Rationale

Household survey data are increasingly made accessible to researchers, who conduct diverse analysis and often re-purpose datasets. For these data users, metadata are critical to:

- **Find the data they are interested in.** Any cataloguing and resource location system—whether manual or digital—is based on metadata.
- **Understand what the data are measuring and how the data have been created, and make proper use of the data.** Without proper descriptions of the survey design and the methods used when collecting and processing the data, the risk is high that the user will misunderstand and even misuse them.
- **Assess the quality of the data.** To know whether data are suitable for a research project, researchers need information about the data collection process, as well as any deviations from the planned process.

There is also a strong push from within the national and international statistical systems for better integration of data from different sources. This integration requires in-depth understanding of the way surveys have been designed, and how data were collected, edited, and analyzed. Detailed metadata are needed to provide such understanding, to build institutional memory, and to guarantee full transparency of the data production and analysis process.

The availability of comprehensive and high quality metadata is important for both users and producers of survey data. Metadata must cover the whole life cycle of the survey, and include explanatory material, contextual information, and cataloguing material.

Goal and Objective of the Task Force

The goal of the Task Force is to improve the quality and availability of survey metadata generated and published by national, regional and international organizations. The specific objective is to formulate recommendations on survey data documentation standards and best practices, and to propose a common, structured framework to organize the content, presentation, transfer and preservation of metadata.

Activities

Task 1: Identification and assessment of relevant metadata standards, and review of best practice in leading survey data archives. The implementation of this task will be facilitated by the extensive work already accomplished by the International Household Survey Network (IHSN) in this area. An important component of this task will be to:

- (i) Assess the relevance and use of the commonly used Codebook and Lifecycle versions of Data Documentation Initiative (DDI) metadata standard.
- (ii) Consult with the custodians of the DDI, the DDI Alliance, on the features of upcoming version 4 of the DDI standard and assess its usefulness for the community's needs.
- (iii) Assess how well and how best to ensure inter-operability between metadata standards, in particular geo-spatial metadata standards.

Task 2: Assessment of good practice in documentation of often “challenging”, but important and generally neglected areas of metadata description. Examples include the proper description of sample design, flow/skip patterns in electronic questionnaires (CAPI surveys), data editing, and statistical disclosure control applied to public use files.

Task 3: Formulation of a report on “Recommendations on standards and good practice for the documentation of household surveys”.

NOTE: Although the focus is on household surveys, the recommendations are expected to be valid for other types of microdata generated by statistical agencies.

Deliverable

The output of the Task Force will consist of a report on “Recommendations on standards and good practice for the documentation of household surveys” to be submitted to the UNSC in 2018. Prior to its submission to the UNSC, the report will be reviewed by the ISWGHS Management Group and Advisory Group.

Composition

Team Leader: Olivier Dupriez (Lead Statistician, World Bank)

Other members (to be confirmed; consultation with proposed members has not taken place yet):

- Wendy Thomas (IPUMS International, and DDI Alliance)
- Matthew Welch, World Bank (Senior Statistician, manager of the World Bank's Microdata Library)

- Matthew Woollard (UK Data Archive/UK Data Service and Vice-Chair CESSDA)
- T.b.d. (DANE, National Statistics Office of Colombia)
- 2 other members t.b.d. (one representing a statistical agency in a European country)
- (additional experts will be consulted on an ad-hoc basis)

Calendar

- Inception meeting of the team (video conference): October 2016
- Review of data documentation standards and practices: by end-February 2017
- Consultation with the DDI Alliance on DDI 4: by end-February 2017
- Draft report: by end-June 2017
- Review of the report by the ISWGHS Advisory Group: by end-August 2017
- Submission of the report to the ISWGHS Management Group: end-September 2017
- Submission to UNSC: February 2018

Funding

The Task Force will be supported by the World Bank Data Group and the IHSN Trust Fund (DfID) managed by the World Bank. An amount of US\$50K has been tentatively allocated to the project.