

**7th Meeting of the Advisory Expert Group on National Accounts,
23-25 April 2012, New York**

Agenda item 4

International Guidelines on Statistical Business Registers

Second revised draft outline of International Guidelines on Statistical Business Registers (SBR)

General remarks:

- These international guidelines should serve both for countries with experience in running a statistical business register as well as for countries that have no or less experience so far.
- In the same sense, the guidelines should help in cases where a statistical business register is to be established as well as in cases where an already existing register is to be reviewed or restructured.
- Therefore, the guidelines should be as practical as possible while not ignoring the theoretical and conceptual issues.
- In each chapter, the wide range between good practices and minimum requirements should be considered and explained, so that the statistical business register would be able to serve the main uses while further expansions or additional features might be implemented in future steps.
- While principally, good practices should guide the drafting of the single chapters; the guidelines should not directly refer or describe concrete practices of a single country, but be kept in generalized form. (However, country examples that might illustrate a certain issue, concept or good practice, are certainly welcome and would be shown in boxes.)
- In order to underline the intended character of the guidelines, the formatting of the chapters should also depict this character: concepts, definitions, implementation recommendations, examples of good practices, etc. should be shown in form of separate boxes or the like.
- These guidelines should supplement already existing manuals, such as the European recommendation manual, but should be a full manual considering all relevant issues of SBR. However, certain chapters of the European manual could more or less directly serve for the purpose of these guidelines.

Chapter 1: Introduction

The introductory chapter should explain

- the background and objectives of the guidelines,
- underline the general importance of statistical business registers within the statistical system,
- explain the need for future developments and harmonisation,
- and give an overview of the whole guidelines.

Chapter 2: Roles of the SBR

In considering in which part of the guidelines the various and increasing roles of SBR should be explained, it is proposed to do this already at the beginning. It is supposed that this would help to understand the concepts and requirements of SBR in the later chapters of the guidelines. However, these roles should be described in a way that detailed knowledge of the concepts and definitions of SBR, which are explained in the later chapters, are not necessary in understanding the functions.

In general, the importance of SBR as a backbone in the statistical production process, not only directly by deriving survey frames from SBR, but also indirectly as a general data base for various purposes supporting the statistical production processes, is the main topic of this chapter. Emphasis should also be given to the emerging and futures use of SBR.

In the later chapters, these roles should be referred to in order to link the guideline chapters and make them consistent. Also, in these chapters more detailed information might be given to the respective role, if required.

The following roles should be outlined in this chapter 2:

- Linkage to administrative data (most important for the maintenance of SBR, as well as for the quality and the possibility to use data from these sources, such as turnover of employment)
- Central source for population frames (it should be recommended that all surveys use the SBR for deriving their sample frames; how the population frames are provided should be the content of the maintenance chapter)
- Survey support tool (in addition to ID variables also further information to support surveys might be added)
- Response burden documentation (SBR should also be used for documentation which units were part of which survey in which time period; this could be used for survey holiday measures as well as a basis for response burden information)
- Micro data linkage (data collections both from administrative sources as well as from statistical sources might be linked on a micro basis, if the SBR is used as the central frame)
- Statistics based on SBR or combination of SBR with other statistical registers and/or other sources (SBRs are data bases which could be utilized to establish register based statistics, as well as register-supported statistics).

In all these subchapters above, the important coordination role of the SBR for integrated economic statistics, their consistency and quality should be emphasised.

Chapter 3: Coverage of SBR

This chapter is primarily of technical nature and should explain and describe the concepts of coverage of the SBR for all the various branches, such as

- Market sector
- Households engaged in economic activities
- Agricultural sector/activities
- Government sector
- Non-profit sector
- Exterritorial organisations and bodies

According to the general nature of these guidelines, emphasis should be given also to the importance of the various branches with respect to the fulfilment of the coverage goals, in the sense that not all branches might be covered in a SBR from the beginning. Thus, recommendations should be given on probable stages of implementation of coverage goals.

Further, the concept of active units needs to be explained; considerations should also be given to borderline cases, the issue of thresholds, the informal sector and units for which the data situation might not be so favourable (e.g. self-employed professionals sector).

Chapter 4: Units in the SBR

Similar to the above chapter, this one on units is quite a basic one considering the strategic role of the statistical units for the statistical system and with a view on coordination/harmonisation across countries. Starting from the distinction between administrative and statistical units and an overview of the unit model, for each unit appropriate definitions and the relations between the units should be explained and practical recommendations be given on the actual identification of the statistical units:

- Legal unit
- Enterprise group
- Enterprise unit
- Local unit
- Establishment

Explanations should also be given of certain kinds of units that do not necessarily fall under the above listed ones or which might be regarded as special cases thereof, such as captive units, special purpose entities, joint ventures, etc.

Based on the basic definitions, explanations should be given to units in certain branches, such as units in agriculture, government, non-profit sector, etc.

This chapter should also contain how the statistical units should be delineated (Profiling). Also the importance of each unit in the context of the user needs should be discussed and guidance given on the implementation plans of the units.

Chapter 5: Characteristics of the units

The various variables for each type of unit and their importance should be described. The variables are usually grouped into the following categories:

- Identification variables, including unit relation and identifiers
- Start and end dates
- Economic variables
- Stratification variables/classification variables
- Linkage to source registers and other registers

Some of the variables need more explanations and guidance, such as the classification variables, which cover at least three types of classifications: activity classification, sector

classification and size-classes. For the first two not only the basic classification concepts need to be outlined, but also how to implement these classifications in practice.

It should be explained which variables fall under “core” variables, meaning that such variables are indispensable for the functioning of the SBR; whereas there are variables that could be added in a later stage, such as for example geographical coordinates as additions to the address variables.

Chapter 6: Data sources for the SBR

Data sources depend on the specific country situations, such as the availability of certain administrative data and registers, or the statistical system. However, the most common sources should be described and grouped into three categories:

- Administrative sources
- Statistical sources (incl. feedback from surveys)
- Other sources (e.g. private data suppliers)

The advantages/disadvantages for the various sources should be explained as well as probable problems related with each source. Issues here are different definitions of units and variables, problems of coverage of units, branches, size classes, etc.

Administrative data are today usually the most important source. Therefore, providing guidance on how to establish and maintain good cooperation with the owners of administrative data will be important.

Chapter 7: Maintenance of the SBR

This is a main chapter not only because of its importance but also because in the other manuals there is not much concrete description. This is also a topic where best practices and the like should be of importance and concrete and practical guidance be given as much as possible. It should start with some principles of maintenance (e.g. user orientation), develop on record matching and on IT support for automatic maintenance (versus clerical maintenance).

The main part of this chapter should deal with the handling of changes in detail. Here we can distinguish between:

- Changes in the variables
- Changes in the population
- Demographic changes and continuity

This chapter should also include the handling of errors.

Chapter 8: Quality of SBR

The handling of errors is the bridge to the big issue of SBR quality. The first part of this chapter should explain the quality criteria and how to measure them (reliability, timeliness,

accuracy, etc.). The other part should focus on quality check and improvement policy as a permanent task. Also the issue of the quality of the (administrative) data sources needs to be taken care of in this chapter.

Chapter 9: Establishment of SBR

This last chapter should deal with issues of establishing a SBR from conceptual as well as from a technical perspective. Most of the issues dealt here are not explicitly covered in other manuals.

This chapter should mainly deal both with conceptual and technical issues. But it should also deal with other issues of great importance for the establishment and running of a SBR. So, again, the emphasis should be on practical guidance.

Conceptual issues are for instance the basic data model, the ID system and the requirements for documentation and history. Also the issue of confidentiality should be dealt with. Furthermore, also guidance on the IT system will be very useful for less developed statistical institutes.

Organisational aspects could be relations to the data providers (e.g. administrative registers and survey statisticians), register cooperation (for instance with the National Bank or other (administrative) institutions) and similar issues.

Dissemination issues and policy (how can/should register data be made available to users outside the statistical system) might also be a topic for this chapter.

Glossary