

Draft Principles for Access to Big Data Sources
prepared for the Global Conference on Big Data for Official Statistics
Abu Dhabi, 20-22 October 2015

Preamble to the Principles for Access to Big Data Sources

The [name of the appropriate international body]

Taking notice of the high and urgent need for access to Big Data sources for the production of official statistics, such as indicators for the Sustainable Development Goals and statistics on phenomena related to modern society, and the social responsibility already shown by private organizations to provide access to Big Data sources, free of charge, for purposes such as disaster relief and the fight against epidemics,

Bearing in mind that in using such data the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics, as endorsed by the UN General Assembly¹, unconditionally apply, and that the statistical community has pledged to adhere to the professional ethics, as stated in the Declaration on Professional Ethics, as adopted by the International Statistical Institute², thereby creating the foundation for sharing Big Data,

Recognizing the legitimate interests of businesses, including respect for their business model and value proposition, and the need to guarantee a level playing field for businesses considering the burden created by requesting access to Big Data for official statistics, as well as the legitimate interest of organizations in charge of compiling official statistics to have equal access,

Stressing that the burden to businesses resulting from data requests for official statistics must be fair in proportion to their envisaged public benefits and that the data should be adequate and relevant in relation to the purposes for which they are requested,

Considering that legislation specifically aimed at accessing and using Big Data is at an early stage of development, that existing national and international legal frameworks fully apply but need interpretation in view of Big Data, especially concerning privacy, data ownership, reuse of data by third parties, and liability in case of breaches of confidentiality, and that there is thus a need for agreed principles,

Highlighting the need to create public trust by applying full transparency in the use of Big Data for official statistics, in particular in view of privacy concerns, given a number of well-publicized cases of likely abuse outside the realm of official statistics, and the need to provide clarity concerning the possible use for statistical purposes of personal data in customer contracts with businesses, for instance by referring to the Principles for Access to Big Data Sources set out below,

Acknowledging that Big Data sources are diverse in many respects, such as owning the data versus providing a platform for the data of others, that source and branch specific principles and operational rules and guidelines may be needed for dealing with access to Big Data sources, that such rules and guidelines should be based on the Principles for Access to Big Data Sources set out below, that before access is requested for the purpose of

¹ Resolution 68/261, adopted by the General Assembly on 29 January 2014.

² This declaration was adopted by the Council of the International Statistical Institute in its session of 22 and 23 July 2010, in Reykjavik, Iceland.

producing official statistics data exploration may be necessary in collaboration with the Big Data source, and that this requires the development of partnerships between businesses providing and statistical agencies using data,

Endorses the Principles for Access to Big Data Sources for the production of official statistics set out below.

Principles for Access to Big Data Sources

Principle 1. The role of national and international systems of official statistics is to provide relevant, high-quality information to society in an impartial way. This role is indispensable to the well-functioning of societies. To this end, data is needed from individuals, households, businesses and institutions as inputs to these systems. These members of society have the social responsibility to make the data that is needed available to the statistical agency concerned, free of charge.

Principle 2. The data needed for official statistics may only be collected and processed if the statistical agency concerned acts in full accordance with the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics³. These principles guarantee, among other things, the professional independence and accountability of the statistical agency, and the strictly confidential use of the data, exclusively for statistical purposes.

Principle 3. When data is collected from businesses for the purpose of producing official statistics, the fairness of the distribution of the burden across businesses has to be considered, in order to guarantee a level playing field.

Principle 4. Data requests for official statistics must acknowledge and take into account the role of data in the business model and value proposition of businesses, in particular if their data has market value. There must be a fair balance between public and business interests when data is requested and possible harm to business interests has to be kept as low as possible.

Principle 5. The data must be adequate and relevant in relation to the purposes for which it is requested from the business. No more data should be requested than needed for these purposes. Operational arrangements have to be agreed on between the business and the statistical agency concerned, taking into account business concerns and data adequacy for official statistics. The metadata must also be adequate.

Principle 6. The cost and effort of providing data, including possible pre-processing, must be reasonable compared to the expected public benefit of the official statistics envisaged.

Principle 7. When businesses operate internationally, they are expected to treat requests for data from national statistical systems in a non-discriminatory way, unless different treatment is justified by differences in the national legislative frameworks concerned, and provided that adherence to the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics and the Principles for Access to Big Data Sources is guaranteed in theory as well as practice.

Principle 8. Full transparency about the provision of data to national and international statistical systems has to be exercised by businesses as well as statistical authorities in order to ensure public trust and to support a level playing field for businesses and an equal treatment of national statistical systems by businesses. In particular, businesses have to make sure that their customers are aware of the possible use of their data for the purpose of official statistics, in full adherence with the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics.

³ <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/dnss/gp/fundprinciples.aspx>