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OECD'S QUALITY QUESTIONNAIRE ON DATA CAPTURE

-Note by Secretariat-

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OECD'S QUALITY QUESTIONNAIRE ON DATA CAPTURE

-Note by the Secretariat-

1. Introduction

As part of the OECD's commitment to improving the quality of its statistics, a Statistics Directorate wide initiative was conducted to examine the quality of the data capture process for short-term economic indicators, national accounts and international trade figures. A qualitative survey was conducted with the aim to obtain information on the adequacy of current reporting arrangements with national and international organisations.

This internal questionnaire requested Statistics Directorate staff to provide summary information on data capture, data revisions, data quality, etc. Questions were generally qualitative in nature to enable quick and easy response on the issues covered. A separate questionnaire was completed for each source agency for each country (or for each international organisation) from which data and metadata are obtained for each of the annual and sub-annual Statistics Directorate outputs. The questionnaire is reproduced in Annex 1.

This analysis of the results of the survey would be used to:

- determine priorities for negotiations/discussion with individual organisations regarding the need for improvement;
- monitor improvements or degradation in arrangements with organisations over time - i.e. staff would be asked to update their responses at regular intervals.

2. Central objectives

- In particular, the questionnaire would be used to identify cases where there are real problems in obtaining data from the source agency, especially where these problems are common across the various Statistics Directorate outputs.
- Moreover it is also hoped to reduce the burden on the source agencies by detecting patterns across statistical subjects and by streamlining the various data requests received from different sections of the OECD or from various international organisations.

Initial overall analysis has yielded some interesting results comparing the situation in different countries (for example, in terms of best systems for data transmission) and identifying the most critical cases. The expected result of this more systematic approach (which will be applied also to other fields) will be an

efficiency gain in data capture and verification, which will improve the overall quality of OECD publications and user satisfaction.

3. Quality of International Trade Statistics

The remainder of this paper is limited to the detailed findings in respect of the data capture procedures for 'monthly statistics of international trade' and 'international trade by commodity statistics'. The responses to each section of the questionnaire are summarised in turn.

In the case of monthly statistics the timeliness and efficiency of transmission and processing are crucial factors. This is becoming even more pressing in the case of 'live' updating on the OECD website and the proposed quarterly press release. Other key quality issues are the completeness and consistency of the data held in particular the revision and finalisation of trade data.

From an annual point of view, the consistency of file formats from year to year and/or detailed information on structure, codes and definitions is important in maintaining the efficiency of the processing procedures. In addition, in order to respect the year round publishing timetable timeliness is key with the aim to reduce the lag between the end of the reference year and the availability of the data. In this case the increased use of provisional data is an important step.

4. Monthly Statistics of International Trade

Contact details

In most of the Member States the source agency is the National Statistical Office, although fills the data provision role. In a number of countries (Finland, France, Korea, Spain, Switzerland and the UK) the Customs authority either is the main point of contact or is the supplementary source to the NSO. The Central Banks can also act as a data provider, for example, the National Bank of Belgium for all Belgian data and the Banks of Korea and Mexico as online sources of trade indices.

The contact person within the various organisations is generally split between either a central coordinating unit (e.g. in Australia and New Zealand) or in the unit that collates the foreign trade data. In some cases though the location is unknown.

The main problems arise where data is delivered as hard copy/diskette/CD and as such there is no regular contact for technical/data enquiries by email. This is the case for France, Switzerland and the UK.

Additionally the move towards providing data on-line via the Internet has removed the regular contact from the country, which may pose certain problems and delays in the case of data queries. This is the case with Germany, Spain, Mexico and Turkey. In the case of the latter two the use of the Internet as a sole source has been necessitated by the lack of a regular contact person in the agency itself. Although we are working on this area to improve the situation.

Greece stands out alone as a case where there is a severe lack of a point of contact and no backup via Internet.

Current data reporting arrangements

In the large majority of cases, data is supplied on a monthly basis, although for a number of countries indices are supplied on a quarterly basis (Australia, Belgium, Denmark, Hungary, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland).

Hungary is the sole country to supply all data on a quarterly basis causing some timeliness problems.

Spain and Ireland are more irregular in the release of data, but again greater problems remain with Greece and Korea in general, and with Austria and Poland in the case of indices data.

Around 70% of the respondent countries provide all or part of their data by email, being the most important data transfer medium for partner data. 10% continue to supply such data via CD or Diskette and the Internet is also a source for partner data, although more particularly for Indices data via downloadable documents.

Paper publications continue to be an additional source of information for around 25% of the Member countries, predominantly for indices data.

Technical aspects

Focusing on the data retrieval methods - in the case of retrieval by active on-line databases, either web-based or not, in most cases the functionality and efficiency is adequate. In some cases (Germany for example) the complexity and the number of steps could be reduced. In other cases, such as for CANSIM or the ONS the on-line access could play a greater role to rationalise the data collection in one source.

The main criticism for other web-based retrieval methods is the format and inefficiency of the download - in most cases simply replacing a paper publication and requiring either laborious cut and pasting (Turkey, Mexico) or subsequent manual input (Ireland, Italy, etc). Obviously the data retrieved from paper publications also requires manual input and is therefore time consuming.

Generally, publication on the Internet is in parallel with the general release of information and serves to increase the timeliness of data reception. However regular checking of sites is required to establish release dates, etc. Work is needed to obtain release calendars.

Data format

As already mentioned, the main sources of data are files received via email. In the majority of cases the file is manipulated and processed using Access and/or Excel to produce a *csv* file ready to import directly into the Oracle Express database. Since the format of the files (including the number of files, split by import/export or SITC/partner) is invariably specified by the source agency there is generally a level of initial work involved in creating a unique process for each one and the complexity varies accordingly. Once created though the processing of the data should be routine, independent of the complexity of the original file. However any small variation in the format of the file will cause a problem with the operation of the macro, and again depending on the source file(s), can be time-consuming to rectify- though changes are relatively rare.

Quality issues

Transmission errors are generally rare and for the most part unimportant - normally related to sending previous month's file, omitting or not attaching a file or wrong labeling of series etc.

Generally, reliability is good with files received on a regular basis although evidently this varies from country to country with a minority of countries requiring occasional reminders. Korea, Greece, Turkey and Mexico currently require more frequent reminders than the others.

Most of the concerns relating to consistency of data can be linked to the reliability of the source agency in providing final/updated data over time (see Provision of Preliminary Data). Any problems will be reflected in discrepancies between data held in the database and data (totals in particular) published elsewhere. The degree of inconsistency varies from country to country with preliminary data close to final data in the case of Norway, Iceland, etc to more severe consistency problems for Greece and Turkey.

On a particular note, there have been specific errors noted in the calculation of indices for Poland and Austria over the past year.

Revisions and definitive data

In all cases the data provided includes preliminary data and one of the main challenges will be the provision of final or definitive data. In around 40% of cases final data is either provided automatically, whether a separate transmission, included in the regular file(s) or readily available on line for example. However in a majority of cases, OECD must specifically ask for final data with a varying degree of response.

There is not extensive response on how each country deals with changes in methodology or definition of trade data time series. Past examples relate to the change from Belgo-Luxembourg to Belgium and Luxembourg or changes to the definition of German series following unification. Recent experience is more related to indices data - the rebasing of series, the change to definition - in these cases the result varies from country to country.

An example being Finland where for a length of time there was no update to the series held and no forthcoming explanation. The subsequent changes in definition under a new base year only provided a limited amount of historical data which was insufficient to allow the series to be published using OECD's Base Year.

On the other hand, countries such as Canada, Germany and the Czech Republic have kept the OECD informed and have provided an adequate overlap period.

Query response

The reliability and efficiency of technical or statistical response generally follows the same pattern as for the reliability of transmission with most countries generally good. Factors affecting this can be linked to the location of the contact (unit responsible for data or central distribution) as well as the regularity of contact (i.e. whether data is extracted from a database without active involvement from the source agency i.e. Spain, Germany, etc.).

The main source of methodological information is gained from the publications, the source agencies' websites and other international websites, in particular IMF. Again recent experience with metadata

requests are limited, but for example information from the Slovak Republic was forthcoming in the form of text files and information from both publications supplied and the Website.

Country specific comments

- Austria - Provision and revision of indices data needs improvement.
- Belgium - Delays in providing Section/Indices - available on Internet slightly quicker
- Canada - Possible rationalisation between CANSIM system and what is currently received by email
- Denmark - On line access or email receipt of indices would be preferable.
- Finland - Data available online but as part of a private subscriber service
- France - More efficient to receive by email/direct access. 2 separate bureaus supply partner and section data
- Germany - SITC and Indices still received on paper
- Greece - No data forthcoming - estimate data from Eurostat is unreliable
- Hungary - Delays in updating due to data received only quarterly
- Iceland - Indices unavailable
- Ireland - Timeliness improving. SITC/Indices manual entry. Disaggregated indices unavailable.
- Mexico - No data by SITC. Limited indices data.
- Netherlands - No indices data.
- Portugal - No usable indices available.
- Slovak Republic - No indices data.
- Spain - Initial reservations of system - however generally efficient.
- Switzerland - Access to online system would be an advantage.
- Turkey - No SITC data. Partner data online limited detail. Long delays.
- UK - Split between Intra- and Extra-stat from 2 different agencies complicates procedures.

5. Yearly International Trade by commodity statistics

Contact details

In most of the Member States the source agency is the National Statistical Office, although in Belgium the National Bank of Belgium fills the data provision role. In a number of countries (Finland, France, Korea, Spain, Switzerland and the UK) the Customs authority either is the main point of contact or is in addition to the NSO.

The contact person within the various organisations is mainly in the unit collating the foreign trade data. Countries for which the contact person is in a central coordinating unit are mainly outside of Europe (e.g. in Australia, New Zealand, Japan, Canada but also Poland).

Additionally, Spain has moved towards providing data on-line via the Internet and thus has removed the regular contact from the country. This change causes certain problems and delays in the case of data queries. New contacts in Spain have been established which should resolve partially such kind of problems.

In some cases, contact names are held but replies are not received. This is the case for Greece and Austria obliging the OECD trade unit to receive the data from UNSD. Concerning Turkey, the contact name tends to change each year making it difficult to communicate directly with them without the help of Turkish delegation.

For the UK, the split between Intra- and Extra-stat from 2 different agencies can complicate procedures. It was difficult to receive Extra-stat statistics in an electronic format (CD-ROM). This year, it was finally received for the first time, for 2000 data.

Current data reporting arrangements

In all cases, data is supplied on an annual basis, although for France detailed trade data is received on a monthly basis although only the December issue is used.

Around 60% of the respondent countries provide all or part of their data by email. 40% supply data on CD or Diskette. The Internet is a single source for Spain where data are downloaded directly from the site.

Technical aspects

As mentioned Spain is the only case where data is directly downloaded from Internet site. The functionality and efficiency is adequate.

Most information about monthly figures is published on Internet. However this information changes every month and it means that regular checking of sites is required to establish when the annual trade is available and keep the necessary information before it disappeared.

Data format

As already mentioned, the main sources of data are files received via email or CD-ROM. In the majority of cases the file is manipulated and processed using Express to obtain a unique format file. In some cases Access and/or Excel is also used to clean up the file before using Express.

Since the format of the files (including the number of files, split by import/export, quantities, partner) is invariably specified by the source agency there is generally a level of initial work involved in creating a unique program in Express for each one and the complexity varies accordingly. Once created though the processing of the data should be routine, independent of the complexity of the original file. However any variation in the format of the file will cause a problem if the country provides no layout. Manipulating such big files and identifying the format could be time consuming when no information is provided.

Quality issues

Transmission errors are generally rare and, for the most part, insignificant. The exception was Luxembourg for which it was difficult to provide correct figures for the first time after their separation from Belgium. Sometimes the support is also not adequate.

70% of the countries are reliable with respect to their data transmission to OECD even if it is necessary for 40% of them to send a reminder. The exceptions are currently Korea, Turkey and Mexico where constant reminders are needed.

Most of the problems relating to consistency of data can be linked to the quantity data (Mexico, USA for historical figures) or Intrastat for EU countries. Confidential trade could also be a problem when it is not included. This is the case for the Netherlands where the total trade could be sometimes under-estimated.

Provisional and definitive data

36% of the countries provide preliminary data but only 16% do so on a regular basis (Australia, Czech republic, Germany, Sweden). Since 2001, it will be possible to have preliminary data for Spain directly through the Internet. Unfortunately no information related to the status (preliminary or final) of the data are available on the site. So it is difficult to determine whether the data are final or not.

Query response and metadata

The reliability and efficiency of technical or statistical response generally follows the same pattern as for the reliability of transmission. The results are generally good for 60% of the countries. Factors affecting this can be linked to the location of the contact (unit responsible for data or central distribution) as well as the regularity of contact.

Most countries provide information when the methodology or definition of trade data changes. The separation from Belgo-Luxembourg in 1999 to Belgium and Luxembourg was linked with a change on methodology. Belgium provides adequate historical series, unfortunately Luxembourg was unable to apply backwards the change so only 1999 is available.

The main sources of methodological information are the source agencies' publications and websites. Only a few countries provide any information on methodology together with the data. 53% of countries reply immediately on a question related to metadata of OECD queries. The time spent in receiving such information from other countries obviously has a knock on effect in the final updating.

Country specific comments

- Austria: No data received
- Canada: Problem in having an exhaustive list of unit of quantity
- Denmark: Data are received later than by UNSD
- Greece: Data are received later than UNSD
- Mexico: Problem on quantity data
- Netherlands: Confidential trade not included in total trade
- Spain: Lack of information (status of data, metadata) on the web site
- Turkey: Difficult to have a more permanent contact
- UK - Split between Intra- and Extra-stat from 2 different agencies complicates procedures.

6. Conclusions

In terms of current contact details and reporting arrangements there are some common conclusions to be reached for both monthly and annual trade statistics. The most common method of receiving data i.e. by e-mail works well in most cases. In the cases where file formats change from period to period, the changes and specification need to be well documented to ensure the efficiency of the processing.

The timely and regular delivery of information needs to be maintained by clear procedures overcoming any change in contact person due to changes in responsibilities, holidays, sickness etc. The cases where contacts are weak or non-existent are listed and need to be strengthened. In addition, where data retrieval is via on-line databases or by CD/Diskette it is important to maintain a contact in the source directory when additional information is needed or inconsistencies need to be discussed and resolved.

On a technical aspect, although the move to the Internet is welcome in making the information more freely available and on a more timely basis, the lack of efficiency in processing the data can be the main drawback. This refers mainly to the monthly statistics at present but the complexity of extracting data on the one hand or the format of downloadable files (i.e. restricted to pdf or txt) holds little or no advantage over the paper publications they replace.

Data errors or transmission errors are seen to be rare and generally unimportant. Again the majority of the countries supply on a regular basis, although reminders are needed to a number of countries, particularly in the case of annual statistics.

An important point to come out of this study was the treatment of provisional and final data. In the case of monthly statistics it is important to emphasise that revisions and final data should be provided when available to ensure the consistency and accuracy of the data held. It was observed that often it is only at the request of final data that it is forthcoming, rather than supplied on an automatic basis. It would be an advantage to document what the procedure is for each of the Member States.

From the annual commodity statistics point of view, the supply of provisional data would help to reduce the time lag between the end of the reference year and the date of availability or publication of statistics. Countries are encouraged to supply the provisional data where available.

Generally, in terms of response rate and queries related to data or methodological issues obviously the results are variable and the problem areas listed. Source agencies are encouraged to make more methodological information available, particularly related to changes or revisions in series and classifications.

In conducting this survey on data quality the Secretariat hopes to highlight areas where joint progress can be made both on a case by case basis but also generally across the board.

In 2002, the Secretariat will launch a data quality initiative aimed at:

- improving timeliness and accuracy of data.
- rationalising and optimising transmission aspects.
- reducing the reporting burden in the Member countries.
- further fostering of close and permanent contacts with the Member Countries.

DATA QUALITY/DATA CAPTURE QUESTIONNAIRE

Country:

OECD output:

There may be instances where the same questionnaire may cover more than one output (e.g. MEI/HOT). Where this occurs specify each output above.

1. Frequency of output

- weekly
- monthly
- quarterly
- annually
- when data are released by source agency
- other (specify)

2. Name of source agency:

.....

In some cases the source agency specified above may co-ordinate the collection of data from other agencies within a country and not have responsibility for initial data collection and compilation for (some of) the series obtained from the agency named above. Where this occurs please provide the appropriate information in Question 6 (following completion of Questions 3-5)

3. Type of source agency

- national statistical office
- national central bank
- other government agency/department)
- non-government institute/organisation*) specify
- international organisation)
- other)

* including private research institute, university, etc

Contact person(s) arrangements

4. Is the contact person(s) at the source agency

- Located in a central co-ordination unit within the organisation
- Located in the unit responsible for the initial collection/processing of the data
- No current contact person
- Don't know

Comment(s) – if any:

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5. Are there any problems with current source agency contact person(s) arrangements, e.g. changes frequently, current contact unable to provide required information about agency series, etc?

- Yes (specify problem(s))
- No
- Don't know

Comment(s) – if any:

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6. Does the source agency covered in this questionnaire co-ordinate the collection of any of the series you receive from other agencies within the country for subsequent dispatch to the OECD?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

7. If the answer to the above question is “yes”, does this arrangement cause any specific problems from your perspective with respect to the data and or statistical methodological information you receive.

- Yes(Specify problem(s):.....)
- No
- Don't know

Current data reporting arrangements

8. How often is statistical data collected from the source agency?

- weekly
- monthly
- quarterly
- annually
- when data are released by source agency
- other (specify)

9. How do you access statistical data from the source agency?

If more than one, rank all instruments that are actually used in order of importance, beginning with “1” as most important

Data are retrieved by OECD (i.e. OECD active, source agency passive):

- Active on-line database (i.e. no intervention required by source agency)
- Active on-line database from website (i.e. no intervention required by source agency)
- Semi-active on-line database (OECD required to specify additional series needed)
- Manually from websites (pdf files, doc., xls, csv, HTML)
- Paper publications
- Other (specify)

Data are sent to OECD (i.e. OECD passive, source agency active):

- File by email (specifications previously specified by OECD)
- File by email (specifications determined by source agency)
- (Shared) questionnaire from other international agency
- Diskette/CD-ROM
- Cartridge
- Fax
- Electronic questionnaire
- Paper questionnaire
- Data shooting??
- Other (specify)

Comment(s) – if any:

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Answer questions 10-12 only if data retrieval by OECD is one of the collection instruments. If there is more than one such instrument, answer for the most important.

Hardware and transmission

10. How would you rate the current technical facilities for obtaining statistical data from the source agency (i.e. the source agency's hardware and transmission facilities, the possibility to save selections, speed of transmissions etc.)?

- Good
- Adequate (no significant change/improvement required)
- Room for improvement (briefly specify areas where improvement is required)
- Unsatisfactory (briefly specify areas where improvement is required)
- Don't know
- Question not applicable

11. Is the way in which data are downloaded from source agency databases:

- Complex requiring many manipulations, but not necessarily time consuming
- Time consuming, but not necessarily complex (e.g. slow transmission time)
- Both complex and time consuming
- Simple, requiring little effort by OECD
- Don't know
- Question not applicable

Comment(s) – if any:

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Delays in OECD accessing “published” data

12. Are data sometimes available in press releases, publications, etc, before they are made available in source agency databases, thus perhaps requiring OECD staff to obtain the required data from other sources, e.g. newspapers, etc?

- Always
- Frequently
- Seldom
- Never been observed yet
- Don't know
- Question not applicable

Comment(s) – if any:

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Answer questions 13-18 only if data transmission by source agency is one of the collection instruments. If there is more than one such instrument, answer for the most important.

Format of data received (i.e. the way data are presented in the final file(s))

13. Are data normally received from the source agency in more than one file for each statistical output (e.g. MEI, HOT, MSIT, IIS)?

- Yes (if “yes” please specify the number of files)
- No
- Question not applicable

Comment(s) – if any:

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14. Are the statistical data presented in the file(s) sent by the source agency generally:

- Complex and requiring high initial investment of time by the OECD preparing programs/macros to receive the data
- Simple, not requiring any or only little effort by the OECD
- Don't know
- Other (specify)
- Question not applicable

Comment(s) – if any:

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15. Does the format and content of the file(s) sent by the source agency vary frequently requiring considerable effort each (week, month, quarter) by the OECD?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know
- Question not applicable

Comment(s) – if any:

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16. If the answer to the above question is "no" (i.e. the content and format of the file do not change frequently), please specify how many times (approximately) changes have occurred in the past six months.

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- Don't know
 - Question not applicable

Comment(s) – if any:

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Errors in file preparation by the source agency

17. Does the source agency make frequent errors in the file(s) you receive (e.g. mix-up of two series, sending the same file twice, inversion of figures, etc)?

Note: This question relates only to errors in actual file preparation and transmission to the OECD. Errors relating to the data in the files are reported in Question 28 below.

- Never make errors
- Occasional errors but seldom a problem
- Frequent errors that cause inconvenience to OECD (specify nature of errors)
- Don't know
- Question not applicable

Comment(s) – if any:

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Reliability of transmission

18. How reliable is the source agency with respect to the timing of their file transmission to the OECD?

- Very reliable, file always received on time without reminder action by the OECD
- Requires reminder action occasionally
- Always requires reminder action
- Never provide the required data
- Don't know
- Question not applicable

Comment(s) – if any:

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Source agency response to OECD query action

19. How reliable is the source agency with respect to their response to queries (technical or statistical) by OECD?

Do not include assessment of response to queries on metadata. These are covered in Question 26 below.

- Reply immediately
- Frequently need reminders
- Never reply
- Don't know

Comment(s) – if any:

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Provision of preliminary data

20. Does the source agency provide preliminary information in any of the file you receive?

- Yes
- No
- Not applicable

21. If the answer to the above question is “yes”, are there any problems with regards to their provision of final data?

- Yes (specify problem(s)
- No
- Not applicable

Comment(s) – if any:

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Series breaks (changes to definitions/methodologies), data revision and provision of historical data.

22. Is the source agency reliable in advising the OECD about changes to definitions of time series?

- Always
- Frequently, but not always
- Seldom
- Never
- Don't know

Comment(s) – if any:

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23. If the answer to the above question is "always", "frequently", or "seldom", does the source agency also provide adequate information about the nature of the change in definition?

- Always
- Frequently, but not always
- Seldom
- Never
- Don't know

Comment(s) – if any:

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24. Does the source agency provide adequate historical data (i.e. in terms of length of series) when there has been a change in definition?

- Always adequate in terms of length of series
- Provide some historical data but seldom adequate in terms of length
- Seldom provide historical data .
- Never provide historical data
- Don't know

Comment(s) – if any:

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25. Does the organisation provide information relating to revised series?

- Always, very reliable
- OECD always has to identify revised series and request relevant information
- Organisation never revises series previously provided
- Don't know
- Not applicable

Comment(s) – if any:

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Statistical methodological information (metadata)

26. How is metadata obtained by the OECD for statistical series disseminated by the source agency?

If more than one, rank all instruments that are actually used in order of importance, beginning with “1” as most important

- In text files provided specifically to the OECD by the source agency
- From the organisation's paper publications
- From other international organisations
- From the organisation's website
- Other (specify)
- Don't know

27. How reliable is the source agency with respect to their response to metadata queries by OECD ?

- Reply immediately
- Reply after a long delay
- Never reply
- Don't know

Comment(s) – if any:

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Data quality

28. Do you have any specific problems regarding either the consistency (of the data over time) or accuracy (i.e. actually measuring what it is supposed/purports to measure) of statistical data received from the source agency?

- Yes (specify problem areas in “comments” below)
- No
- Don’t know

Comment(s) – if any:

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29. Overall, how does the timeliness (i.e. with respect to the reference period) of statistical data received from the source agency compare with agencies in other countries?

- Generally good overall
- Normally good with some exceptions)
- Not very good overall)specify problem areas:.....
- Very bad overall)
- Don’t know

Comment(s) – if any:

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