



OECD SHORT-TERM ECONOMIC STATISTICS WORKING PARTY
(STESWP)

Country comments:
Release of the *OECD Data and Metadata Reporting and Presentation Handbook*.
Where to from here?

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Submitted to the Working Party under item 5 of the draft agenda

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STESWP 2007 – COUNTRY COMMENTS ON OECD PAPER PRESENTATION HANDBOOK. WHERE TO FROM HERE?

This paper outlines a series of options for consideration by STESWP delegates covering future work on data and metadata reporting and presentation following the recent release of the OECD *Data and Metadata Reporting and Presentation Handbook*. The paper outlines a number of specific issues for written comment by delegates prior to the Working Party meeting in June 2007. These will also be discussed at the meeting

The five issues for written comment are outlined in Section D of the paper. These comprise:

- (i) Should the Handbook recommendations be used as a basis for comparison of current national and international practice in the reporting and presentation of short-term economic indicators (refer para. 16)?
- (ii) Do you endorse the approach outlined in paras. 18-19 of this paper identifying 11 main themes from the extensive Handbook recommendations?
- (iii) Do you endorse the top-down approach for reporting on the national application of these themes from a corporate perspective as well as the extent of their application across the many short-term economic indicator domains (refer paras. 20-21)?
- (iv) Do you have any comments on the draft issues identified for each theme, and priorities outlined in columns (3) and (4) of the table following para. 19 of this paper?
- (v) Finally, do you endorse the processes for the provision of the required summaries and national agencies and international organizations and their subsequent use outlined in paras. 22 and 23 of this paper?

AUSTRIA

Statistik Austria endorses the top-down approach and the well balanced selection of the 11 main themes. Nevertheless to avoid parallel work existing sources like the Eurostat STS-Issues should be taken into account. Also only high priority themes should be used for further comparisons.

BELGIUM – BANK

The NBB answers to the 5 questions are the following:

- i) the handbook recommendations can be used as a basis for comparison of current national and international practice in the reporting and presentation of short-term economic indicators;
- ii) the NBB endorses the approach identifying 11 main themes;
- iii) the NBB endorses the top-down approach for reporting on the national application of these themes from a corporate perspective as well as the extent of their application across the different short-term economic indicators domains;
- iv) the NBB has no particular comment on the different themes and priorities;
- v) the NBB endorses the processes for the provision of the required summaries by the national agencies.

CANADA

The Handbook should be used as a basis for comparison of current national practices in the reporting and presentation of short-term economic indicators. Priority could be given to 3 recommendations:

- Providing access to metadata, adoption of common metadata terminology and the use of common metadata items
- Transparent practices for data revisions
- Presentation of series breaks.

The last two points are important in the current international context where many NSO are rethinking and redesigning their statistical systems. These changes will most likely translate into better data but will also translate into revisions and breaks in time series. Addressing these points now would help implementing recommendations of the Task Force. While implementing changes, NSO would be in a good position to address the first point.

In terms of domains, the strategy could be to focus on macroeconomic indicators such as those produced by national accounts as well as few of the sources data used to compute the national accounts (manufacturing, trade and merchandise trade).

CHINA

I prefer Option 1. The Handbook would primarily serve as a reference document for possible adoption since different country has different conditions.

CZECH REPUBLIC

- (i) Czech Statistical Office is now in the stage of revision of so far existing metadata system and has preparing new system of metadata; the experience of other countries can help to the whole process.
- (ii) The idea of summarizing the recommendation into smaller number of topics seems relevant.
- (iii) The top-down approach identifying small number of the key issues can give general overview of situation in various countries and, in our opinion, it is sufficient for international comparison.
- (iv) Generally, we agree with priorities,
 - a. We propose to change priority of Handbook Section No. 7.2.3 - Recommended practices on the presentation of series breaks. This topic will be relevant due to implementation of NACE revision 2 in the coming years.
 - b. On the other hand, the priority of Handbook Section No. 7.3 – Recommended practices for the presentation of information on sampling and non-sampling - in our opinion can be marked as „L“
- (v) CZSO is able to send the report of the current stage of implementation the metadata system at the end of 2007 concerning mainly on the theme 6.3 and partially 3.5.

FINLAND

i) *Should the Handbook recommendations be used as a basis for comparison of current national and international practice...*

Finland is in favour of the option 2, more active approach. It would be very useful to collect information on practices in different countries for benchmarking purposes. We propose special attention to be directed to (1) publication of revisions and their reasons, (2) publication of information and documentation of differences of concepts and methods between statistics (for example national accounts, structural statistics and short term statistics), (3) how NSOs publish and use indicators of statistical quality, (4) if countries publish mainly seasonally adjusted figures in their press releases and (5) whether countries publish data of other countries for comparison in their press releases or publications.

Manuals are necessary, but it is important to preserve the flexibility to make national solutions in NSOs to react e.g. to changes in the environment.

Users expect timeliness, reliability, comparability of statistics (inside the country as well as between countries, i.e. concepts, definitions and classifications should be uniform). In addition users expect a lighter response burden (and on the other hand more and more detailed information). The second most common reason for using statistics is international comparison, which is why Statistics Finland will most probably increase the amount of international data in releases of national statistics.

ii) *Do you endorse the approach outlined in paras. 18-19 for this paper identifying 11 main themes from the extensive Handbook recommendations?*

Yes, the approach for identifying main themes is worth carrying out.

iii) *Do you endorse the top-down approach for reporting on the national application of these themes...*

Yes.

iv) *Do you have any comments on the draft issues identified for each theme,...*

3.5. M or H

7.1.3 add: time series of realised revisions

7.3 M-->H particularly how to release key figures describing quality.

Others OK.

v) *Finally, do you endorse the processes for the provision of the required summaries and national agencies...*

Yes.

GERMANY

No comments on this issue

HUNGARY

No comments on this issue

ITALY – BANK

- i) to make effective the potential stimulus of the Handbook towards a better presentation and understanding of statistical information, the Option 2 is highly preferable, also to spur some peer pressures on statistical and international agencies in increasing transparency of statistics;
- ii) the selection of eleven themes as scheduled in the table is very useful in reviewing different practices followed by statistical agencies; also the suggested priorities are in general appropriate, with a preferences for upgrading from M to H the codes of theme 7 (*Recommended practices on the presentation of series breaks*) and, in view of the increasing use of administrative data, theme 11 (*Recommended practices for the presentation and reporting of administrative data*), and downgrading from H to M the code for theme 4 (*Guidelines for reporting different types of statistical data*);
- iii) I would attach a double HH to themes 5 (*Reporting of different forms of data*) and 6 (*transparent practices for data revision*); as for the key issue identified for the first theme, I would add the details/coverage of information about the deterministic and stochastic component in the seasonal adjustment, for the second theme I would stress the issues of providing a properly long time series in revised data and that of backcasting. For the remaining themes, I think the key issues are well identified in the table;
- iv) Publication of results is a key requirement to strength positive peer pressures among agencies and improve the awareness of final users about a correct reading of the informative content of indicators.

ITALY – ISTAT

Comments about the issues submitted for consideration by STESWP participants:

(i). We consider that while the handbook offers by itself useful reference documentation, valuable for any producer of statistics involved in data reporting, it is worth pursuing a more active approach aimed at favouring the adoption of international standards in data dissemination and reporting by an increasing number of NSIs. In particular, it seems that the application of international presentation standards to the dissemination of short-term indicators is strictly related to the mandate of STESWG and worth to be pursued, considering in particular the high degree of interest of STES indicators for international users.

(ii). We endorse an approach based on identifying in the whole set of recommendations developed in the Handbook a limited number of important themes that are relevant in the realm of STES dissemination and reporting.

(iii) and (iv). Concerning the choice of an approach dealing with the application of presentation standards to the different domains included in the STES, we suggest that different alternatives could be discussed in the WP meeting. In turn, we agree that considering the whole set of indicators, domain by domain, would not be feasible, a top-down approach focused on the corporate perspective of each organisation could remain too abstract, without the possibility of grasping common elements about the way the most important indicators are presented. This possibility is implicit in the nature of the issues proposed in column 3 of the table following par. 19: questions tend to focus on the adoption of a “corporate strategy” (or policy) or of tools deriving from a corporate strategy (as guidelines, standard set of practices, etc.); in few cases there is an attempt at investigating the features of the strategy and the tools utilised. The issues proposed seem very general, gathering no information from NSI and other organisations that have not introduced a corporate policy or, at least, not a formal one (and Istat falls in this category). A tentative proposal could be to focus rather on the actual comparison between current prevailing

practices (may be targeting a very small set of key indicators) and the Handbook standards, considering the “corporate strategy” as one of the possible options.

Concerning the priorities proposed in the table, we would suggest “M” (instead of “H”) for guidelines concerning Section 4, and “M” (instead of “L”) for Section 7.4.5 (rebasing).

(v). We endorse launching an exercise aimed at collecting information about priority themes singled out by the STESWP (indeed, after a discussion of the nature of information required, as pointed out above).

KOREA

(i) The Option 2 that takes a more active approach and uses the recommendations as a basis for comparison of current national and international practices is supported. We think it needs more time to function as the mandate to all themes. We believe it’s a good way that the handbook is intended to phase in according to the order of priorities.

(ii) The approach outlined in para. 18-19 seems to be relevant. We can see the main themes to be dealt with easily among the extensive recommendations.

(iii) We generally agree the top-down approach. It would seem that the specific issues are treated in detail.

(iv) The review and discussion on the handbook is not fully done in Korea. When we have any comments on the draft issues for each theme, we will suggest them.

(v) This issue is still reviewing with the relevant divisions. We will inform you the decision when we settle.

LUXEMBOURG

The data and metadata reporting and presentation handbook should be updated on a regular basis by including new topics. The recommendations can be used to compare current national and international practice in the reporting and presentation of short-term economic indicators. The different statistical institutes and organizations should contribute by answering *one or several common questionnaires (or other form of templates) to be elaborated by OECD*. It will be important to *limit the burden* on the different statistical bodies to a strict minimum. Therefore, Luxembourg proposes that this comparison work should be limited in short-term (2007 and 2008) to the three handbook sections (4, 5.6 and 7.1.3) on page 7 of the document which have a ‘high priority’ flag. Section 6.3 seems to be of lesser importance, but section 7.2.3 on the presentation of series breaks should be included in the high priority topics. Concerning the delay proposed for the transmission of information by the statistical organizations, Luxembourg considers that December 2007 is quite adequate, nevertheless February 2008 would even be better.

MEXICO

No comments on this issue

NETHERLANDS

(i) Yes.

(ii) The suggested approach seems fine.

(iii) Yes.

- (iv) -
- (v) Yes.

NORWAY

General comment

Statistics Norway find this handbook both important and useful and will promote option 2 regarding a pro-active approach and use the recommendations as a basis for comparison of current national and international practice in the reporting and presentation of short-term economic indicators.

Specific comments

2.2.1 The policy and guidance for authors on dissemination/publishing in Statistics Norway is described in *Handbook on Publishing*¹. This handbook is only available in Norwegian and for internal use.

3.5 Statistics Norway will propose to give this Handbook section priority H for future STESWP work because consistency in terminology and definitions are crucial in the work of metadata. In our strategy on metadata Statistics Norway states *Harmonisation and standardisation of our documentation are key words*. Two important master systems in Statistics Norway contribute to harmonisation. One system is our variable documentation system (VARDOK) where all variables used in our statistics are documented according to the same system. The second important master system is a database for classifications (STABAS).

In Statistics Norway key quality and metadata concepts have been defined. The concepts are based on the definition in the SDMX metadata common vocabulary, and existing Norwegian concepts are related to these. The set of key concepts are limited, but includes quality (dimensions) in statistics, statistics, register, variable (statistical, classification and identifying variable), classification, code, statistical unit (observation, reporting and analysis unit), measurement unit, population and frame.

It has already been experienced that even if it might be easy to agree on some basic definitions such as those given by SDMX, the challenge is to apply these in practice, in a statistical table or on a micro level. One of the reasons for this is that concepts can be interpreted differently on these levels

6.3 The objective of Statistics Norway's work on metadata is to develop an integrated metadata system that contribute to effective statistics production and dissemination, in addition to improved quality of statistics. The strategy shall ensure that different metadata systems can be linked together in an integrated system, to make the metadata easily accessible for all users and updated in one place.

POLAND

We express our approval for the approach promoting the use of recommendations provided by the OECD Data and Metadata Reporting and Presentation Handbook as a basis for comparison of national and international practices in the reporting and presentation of short-term economic

¹ Håndbøker 2007/89

indicators. At the same time, we would like to stress that comparisons carried out by OECD should not increase the burden of national statistical institute in this scope. Taking it into account, for conducting mentioned above comparisons, OECD should make use of available information from the metadata base - SDDS (which includes applied methodology for specific STS variables) and from quality reports STS PEEI in Focus and STS Sources (available on CIRCA website).

We support the recommendations and suggested hierarchy of priorities for future work concerning the guidelines for the reporting of different types of data, different forms of time series data, metadata and recommended transparent practices in the frame of data revision.

We express our support for prepared table, comprising recommendations (column 2), the most important issues to be considered in the scope of these recommendations (column 3) and identified priority (column 4). Recommendations presented in the Handbook may be designed for possible use by countries, nevertheless they shouldn't be obligatory.

Concerning recommended practices included in section No. 3.5 and 6.3 of above handbook

One of the purposes of implemented system in CSO of Poland (named *Glossary of Statistical Terms*) is guarantee of unambiguosity of basic terms used in public statistics.

There was made the assumption, that two (or more) terms can have the same publication name (for example unemployment) but if their definitions are different their names should be various (for instance unemployment according to Labour Force Survey, registered unemployment). Every defined term is also described by the source of definition.

Since a few years this system has been accessible to statistical employees (of CSO and regional statistical offices). Since a few months, the content of the Glossary (currently limited to definition of a term and the name of responsible person) has been disseminated on the Internet in both, Polish and English version. The scope of disseminated information will be extended along with the development of the Glossary.

The plans concerning the development of the Glossary involve: allowing for existing international standards, extension of information scope, linkage of the Glossary with other elements of the Statistical Metadata System (very sensible is lack of complex SMS, especially one of it's components – the Documentation of Survey System) and also better linkage with other glossaries elaborated by Eurostat (including MCV of the SDMX initiative) and OECD.

Another important matter which the CSO of Poland indicates is dissemination of metadata in connection with disseminated statistical data. Currently, simple conversion from the value of data to description (and vice versa) concerns only the indicators announced by the President of CSO of Poland in the messages and notices (omitting SDDS). The state elements of paper publications (and their electronic versions) are methodical explanatory notes (remarks) including , among others, definitions of published values.

RUSSIAN FEDERATION

No specific comment on this issue

SLOVENIA

i) Yes

ii) We propose only these with high priority for the first step

- iii) Yes, but for the limited indicators in the first step
 - iv) No
 - v) Yes
- (Sector for Dissemination of Statistical Data and Methods)

SPAIN

No comments on this issue

SWEDEN

Yes we think that the Handbook recommendations should be used as a basis for comparisons. We also approve of the approach to identify 11 main areas which is a much more manageable set of recommendations. The proposed priority setting also seems adequate.

The key issues to be considered seems to be feasible to answer and the outlined timetable with the collection of information for high priority themes in December seems adequate. We suggest to begin with the high priority areas to see what information that can be collected and if this is a good way of working. It could be seen as a sort of pilot to evaluate the method.

UNITED STATES

- (i) The Census Bureau supports STESWP taking an active approach in using the Handbook's recommendations in comparing current existing practices in the reporting and presentation of short-term economic statistics.
- (ii) The approach seems reasonable
- (iii) We endorse the recommended top down-approach in corporately identifying key issues within each thematic area.
- (iv) We agree with the key issues identified in column 3. In column 4, we suggest assigning a high priority to the presentation of information on sampling and non-sampling errors. This information is essential in order to make sound inferences when comparing *data* across country. We believe the presentation of information on editing, imputation and estimation methodologies also is important. These are not currently reflected in the table.
- (v) We endorse the collection and eventual publication of summary information of national practices for the high priority themes outline in the table.