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Report of the Wiesbaden Group on Business Registers

Note by the Secretary-General

In accordance with Economic and Social Council decision 2021/224 and past practices, the Secretary-General has the honour to transmit the report of the Wiesbaden Group on Business Registers, in which the results of its twenty-seventh meeting, held virtually in September 2021, are summarized. The report is presented for information and the Commission is invited to take note of the report.

* [E/CN.3/2022/1](#).



Report of the Wiesbaden Group on Business Registers

I. Introduction

1. The Wiesbaden Group on Business Registers is a city group established by the United Nations Statistical Commission. In the spirit of the United Nations city groups, it relies mainly on the active engagement of the participating delegates, providing a forum for the exchange of views and experiences regarding the development, maintenance and use of statistical business registers. The Wiesbaden Group considers conceptual and methodological issues in relation to the use of statistical business registers and the development and implementation of good practices regarding their production, and its work supports a more integrated approach to structural economic statistics through discussion and development of the role of business registers in data collection and data integration as well as in the production and dissemination of statistics.

2. The Wiesbaden Group, which was established in 1986 as the International Round Table on Business Survey Frames, held its first meeting in Ottawa in 1986. Following its twentieth meeting, held in Wiesbaden, Germany, in 2007, it was renamed the Wiesbaden Group on Business Registers. The change of name was made to conform to the naming convention for United Nations city groups, and to reflect the changing role of statistical business registers, which, increasingly, provide the backbone for the production of economic statistics and are considered to be sources of statistical information in their own right.

3. The present report provides a brief summary of the themes discussed during the twenty-seventh meeting of the Wiesbaden Group on Business Registers. The meeting was organized by the National Institute of Statistics and Geography of Mexico (INEGI) and held online from 20 to 24 September 2021. It had originally been planned to be hosted in Mexico from 21 to 25 September 2020; however, the steering group of the Wiesbaden Group decided to postpone the meeting to 2021 and to hold it virtually owing to the health emergency caused by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

4. The twenty-seventh meeting of the Wiesbaden Group consisted of eight sessions, held from 20 to 23 September, and a special session for Latin America and the Caribbean countries, held on 24 September. The special session was jointly organized by National Institute of Statistics and Geography of Mexico and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) to address specific issues of the region, share best practices relating to statistical business registers and strengthen statistical capacity in the region. The meeting was attended by an average of 140 people per day from 57 countries and seven international organizations. Its virtual format facilitated the participation of many experts from a large number of countries. The papers and presentations are available on the relevant web page of the National Institute.¹

II. Report of the twenty-seventh meeting of the Wiesbaden Group on Business Registers

A. Session 1 on country progress reports

5. It is the practice of the Wiesbaden Group to open the meeting with a review of country progress reports, prepared by the meeting participants using a common

¹ See <https://www.inegi.org.mx/eventos/2021/wiesbaden/>.

template, summarizing recent developments relating to statistical business registers in countries.

6. To facilitate that endeavour, the National Institute of Statistics and Geography of Mexico developed an online data-capturing system that enables countries to fill out their country progress reports online and submit them to a database, where their responses can be stored for future use. In the past, the country progress reports had been made available on the meeting websites of the Wiesbaden Group, but the format had not been particularly user-friendly. A database of country progress reports would therefore greatly facilitate access to that information. It was therefore recommended that the Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat should build on the National Institute of Statistics and Geography of Mexico database to make such information available in a centralized manner.

7. The session was chaired by the host country, Mexico, and devoted to the country progress reports; in total, 52 reports were presented. Europe had the highest submission ratio, with 42.3 per cent; the Americas recorded a high response rate – 38.5 per cent – which was attributable to the efforts of the National Institute of Statistics and Geography of Mexico and ECLAC to strengthen the statistical business registers in the countries of the region.

8. The main results of the country progress reports were presented on the following topics: (a) number of employees in the statistical business register unit; (b) main uses of the statistical business register; (c) year of start and re-engineering of the statistical business register; (d) types and number of observation units; (e) availability of geospatial data in the statistical business register; (f) main progress and developments; (g) future plans; and (h) main challenges.

9. The session provided an important opportunity for experts in the field of statistical business registers from around the world to exchange up-to-date information on their ongoing and planned projects aimed at improving the construction, maintenance and use of business registers.

B. Session 2 on new challenges for statistical business registers

10. The second session, chaired by the Division, consisted of five presentations highlighting the crucial role that statistical business registers played in producing official statistics, including business demography and entrepreneurship statistics, and in contributing to the national accounts and measuring the digital economy. The role of statistical business registers has expanded to provide not only a population frame for surveys, but also a direct source of information to produce business statistics, facilitate data integration between multiple data sources and support the compilation of new statistics. Examples of how statistical business registers contribute to the development of new statistics were presented, such as their use in compiling statistics on registration of legal entities and as an integration tool for microdata linking to study the impact of digitization on employment and productivity. Countries shared the challenges faced with regard to specific aspects such as the methodological challenges of dealing with complex enterprises when establishing continuity rules for those complex units. It was considered that the Wiesbaden Group should continue to collect and share experiences on the issue and to develop a common international guidance on the treatment of complex enterprises. Other challenges were discussed during the session, in particular those linked to access to administrative data and the importance of engaging with administrative sources to improve access to and the quality of those sources.

C. Session 3 on innovations and new ways of interaction with users

11. The third session, chaired by Eurostat, was devoted to an exchange of experiences with regard to new ways of interacting with and serving users of statistical business registers. A number of papers were presented that covered different aspects of how to derive register-based statistics, gain new insights into relevant economic phenomena using microdata linking and create new tools to enable users to better understand and measure the quality of the administrative data linked to the business registers and used in many statistical activities. All the papers revealed how powerful statistical business registers were as the backbone to supporting innovative ways of serving users. The session highlighted how building capacities to develop methodologies, tools, standards and quality metrics could be used to better implement the many roles of statistical business registers and, in turn, generate spillovers that allow national statistical institutes to deliver new statistical outputs. The discussion served to show that there was interest in continuing to analyse the topics covered during the session and exchanging valuable experiences on the subject.

D. Session 4 on new products, new data sources and the use of new computer and analysis tools in the statistical business register

12. The fourth session, chaired by Statistics Netherlands, consisted of five presentations covering different and very challenging topics. All five presentations described a challenging development that had been caused by a rapidly changing society in which financial flows and goods and services production chains were becoming more complex as demand for economic indicators was increasing. The continuous emergence of new technologies, coupled with political or environmental developments, new service-oriented businesses, ever-increasing globalization and even the current COVID-19 pandemic were having a huge impact on economies worldwide and on the statistical description of economies.

13. The fact that innovative products and developments were being researched and formulated as a means of continuously improving the quality of statistical business registers and business statistics was considered to be of great added value. Moreover, it was regarded as the way forward to providing relevant information to society, science and policymakers, now and in the future. The session therefore highlighted how statistical business registers served as a good and solid basis for describing the economy in a changing world and provided the framework for discussing several analytical perspectives in the field of new products, data sources and tools that open the way for new collaborations in the future within the context of the Wiesbaden Group.

E. Session 5 on globalization: do statistical business registers have the appropriate statistical units at hand?

14. The fifth session, which was chaired by the Office for National Statistics of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, focused on the question of whether currently defined statistical units were correctly facilitating the collection of data from multinational companies. The business models of multinational enterprises had changed, whereas statistical units remained the same. The session was more conceptual than usual for the Wiesbaden Group, and only one paper was submitted. However, it yielded a good debate about the importance of correctly distilling and managing statistical units from the legal view of a business, a task that required profiling. The Group agreed that there was a need for further work on the subject, especially within the existing international forums that were considering globalization issues.

F. Session 6 on profiling and large cases units: practical aspects of reflecting multinationals correctly in the business registers

15. The sixth session was chaired by the Federal Statistical Office of Germany. It was considered that the term “Multinationals” was rather imprecise and that, in view of globalization, it contained both the “Enterprise group” and “Enterprises” units. Those unit types had become highly prominent in business registers worldwide in the past two decades, and yet it was not an easy undertaking to capture them for the business registers. There was a great need for harmonization of methods and procedures, for coordination and for practical experiences and knowledge-sharing. The session consisted of four presentations – two given by international organizations and two by country representatives – in which those necessities were thoroughly addressed and a good mix of viewpoints on the topic was provided. The presentations offered an insight into how different countries dealt with enterprise profiling and with providing a high-quality picture of enterprise group structures. The session therefore touched on methodology as well as on tools and data. Moreover, the strategy for coordinating different initiatives for dealing with globalization was discussed. Participants emphasized the prominent role of the statistical business register in that respect and the session concluded that the Wiesbaden Group should promote the topic in future meetings. In the meantime, bilateral contacts could be used as a means of sharing knowledge and experiences.

G. Session 7 on quality and statistical coverage

16. The seventh session was chaired by the Federal Statistical Office of Switzerland and consisted of five presentations. The session was devoted to various aspects of the quality and the statistical coverage of statistical business registers. It was considered that the quality of economic statistics depended directly on the quality of business registers. Moreover, the well-known quality dimensions defined the quality standard that the register must provide to its users.

17. Three of the presentations addressed the experiences of national statistical offices and Eurostat with regard to redesigning data processing and monitoring data quality. The remaining two presentations addressed international cooperation projects that demonstrated the importance of business registers in other domains, such as the digital economy and the statistical business register maturity model.

18. All those experiences served to prove, once again, how important the importance of the “topic of quality and statistical coverage”, especially in the era of a growing digital economy, where a huge amount of data flowed in an invisible way. It was the responsibility of statistical business registers to be able to respond to those new changes as quickly as possible and to provide users with qualitative information on the data of statistical business register units and their data sources. That was also one of the lessons learned from the COVID-19 crisis. In the current context, the role of statistical business registers as a central element in economic statistics had only increased, while quality indicators had become crucial for the maintenance and future development of statistical business registers. For that reason, statistical business registers must reconsider the question of the confidentiality of published information and be more transparent about the quality of their content. In conclusion, the issue of quality was perhaps a classic topic for the Wiesbaden Group but will remain essential to follow up on.

H. Session 8 on usefulness of geospatial information

19. The eighth session, chaired by the National Institute of Statistics and Geography of Mexico, provided an opportunity for countries to share their experiences of developing statistical products that use geospatial information contained in or linked to the statistical business register. According to the 52 country progress reports, it was

observed that, while around 55 per cent of responses indicated that their respective statistical business registers had geospatial data for the economic units, around 45 per cent were still without it. For that reason, it was important to encourage countries to include such information in their statistical business registers or obtain it through linking the statistical business register with other registers.

20. Two presentations were given in the session: in the first, Portugal indicated that it was possible to characterize and study not only the companies but also the social phenomenon in which they operated, including the geographical context; in the second, Mexico presented a statistical product based on another product it had launched in 2009 called the National Statistical Directory of Economic Units. The new product consisted of incorporating into the Directory a data layer to identify establishments that carried out an essential activity, as determined by the Government of Mexico.

21. In conclusion, geospatial data and other statistical business register data, as well as the evolution of geographical and information and communications technology tools, had opened a wide range of possibilities to offer useful products to users.

I. Special session for Latin American and Caribbean countries

22. The session was chaired by ECLAC and was devoted to discussing issues relating to the countries of the region, with the aim of encouraging a greater number of those countries to join the Wiesbaden Group and benefit from best practices relating to business registers, which were shared in the Group's meetings.

23. During the session, seven presentations were made, covering the following topics: (a) Statistics Netherlands presented the statistical business register maturity model developed by the Committee of Experts on Business and Trade Statistics; (b) the results of the country progress reports, presented by ECLAC with data from 18 countries in the region; (c) the national statistics offices of Chile and Peru discussed progress made on a cooperation project with Bolivia (the Plurinational State of) and Colombia to establish a statistical register system for the use of administrative data; (d) The National Institute of Statistics and Geography of Mexico and the National Administrative Department of Statistics of Colombia presented a methodological document on economic administrative registers which had been prepared to support Latin American and Caribbean countries in developing an economic administrative register system centred on the statistical business register; (e) the National Statistics and Census Institute of Costa Rica and the Statistical Institute of Jamaica spoke about the progress made in the implementation of their respective statistical business registers; and (f) the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics presented on the business demography indicators it was producing.

24. In conclusion, there was an enthusiastic response from the countries of the region to the special session, which is why it is important to continue with that type of practice in subsequent meetings of the Wiesbaden Group.

25. The National Institute of Statistics and Geography of Mexico, in its role as Chair of the Wiesbaden Group, was in contact with several national statistical offices with a view to finding a venue for the twenty-eighth meeting of the Wiesbaden Group.

III. Action to be taken by the Statistical Commission

26. **The Commission is invited to take note of the present report.**