



Access to Microdata

Rules, policies and procedures

Presentation to Workshop on Microdata

Luxembourg

November 2008



Background

- Greater focus on data security
- Need to formalise existing practices
- Not designed to limit access – actually the opposite



What the document includes

- Definition of types of microdata files available
 - Anonymised microdata files (AMFs) - ISSDA
 - Research Microdata Files (RMFs)
- Policy on access to RMFs
- RMF application procedure
- RMF Application Form
- RMF Assessment Criteria
- RMF Standard Agreement



What's an AMF

AMFs contain microdata that are provided for statistical/research purposes only in such a form that the information related to an identifiable entity/person cannot be directly (so, no direct identifiers) or indirectly (in many cases having undergone additional anonymisation procedures such as “top-coding” e.g. specific age re-coded to an age class) identified



What's an RMF

RMFs are unit record files that do not contain direct identifiers but where the risk of disclosure through indirect identification is considered to be significant.

RMFs are not statistical products, as our products relate to aggregated statistical analysis, but are research files that are made available to persons authorised to access such files under the Statistics Act, 1993 subject to strict criteria



Approved Researcher?

- Access to microdata granted within national legal framework – Statistics Act 1993
- Concept of an approved researcher does not exist
- So how do we decide on who gets access



The Statistics Act, 1993

- Section 20(c):
“..any other person authorised in writing by the DG to perform for a specified period particular statistical analysis which may necessitate access to data collected under this Act..”
- Section 34:
*“...The office may provide, for statistical purposes only, information obtained under this Act or the repealed enactments, in such form that it cannot be directly or indirectly related to an identifiable person or undertaking, to such person and **subject to such changes, conditions and restrictions as the Director General may determine....”***



What the new policy says

- Broadly speaking access will be considered where:
 - Agreement to abide by the conditions of the Statistics Act, 1993 is given in a written declaration;
 - Applicant or organisation/institute where working has a proven track record in research
 - Where a clear rationale for access acceptable to DG is provided
- All subject to adherence to policy etc.
- Commercial use is not an issue



Policy on access to RMFs

- The CSO **may** provide access
- Access can only be granted for statistical purposes
- First option will be to see if the provision of aggregates will suffice
- In general only one version of an RMF for a survey instance
- Responsibility for confidentiality rests with individual (s) appointed “Officer of Stats”
- CSO reserves right to put outputs into public domain



Policy on access to RMFs

- CSO reserve right to audit (unannounced)
- CSO will maintain a detailed register
- RMF will not contain any direct identifiers (CBR, PPSN etc.). CSO can generate a number for linkage purposes
- Researchers must not attempt to match RMF with other sources



Policy on access to RMFs

- On completion/termination of project
 - RMF returned to CSO or deleted/destroyed
 - Certification of deletion/destruction will be required
 - If RMF has been amended the amended file should be returned to CSO for storage
- RMF only be supplied when
 - Been appointed and Officer of Stats; and
 - Signed declaration of secrecy; and
 - Formally signed-up to the Standard Agreement



Policy on access to RMFs

- Failure to comply will lead to termination of the appointment as an “Officer of Statistics”
- May be implications for the individual and the organisation/institute for which they work



Overview of assessment criteria

- Legal
- Practical
- Ethical
- Technically sound
- Research experience
- Awareness of SDC issues
- Proposed usage/outputs
- Freely available to public
- Contribution to policy formulation
- Potential to reduce cost of research
- Ability to maintain integrity/confidentiality
- Availability of alternative data sources
- **Ultimate discretion rests with DG of CSO**



Overview of RMF Application Form

- | | |
|---|---|
| Individuals name | Outputs in public domain |
| Organisation/Institute | SDC outline |
| Aims/Objectives of research | Variables sought |
| Detailed description of project | For “Off-site”:
Detailed description of IT environment |
| Research on own behalf or on behalf of others | Activity of organisation |
| Target audience | |



Discretion of Director General

Nothing in the policy, protocol etc limits the discretion of the Director General in terms of granting access to microdata



Questions?