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ANONYMISATION AND RELEASE OF THE EU-SILC DATABASE: CONFIDENTIALITY ISSUES IN AN INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

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ABSTRACT

The European Instrument on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) is gathering ex post output harmonised micro data collected in 27 European Countries. It aims to provide comparable annual cross sectional data on income and living conditions and longitudinal data on income across Europe. The EU-SILC micro data is a unique information source for studying poverty in its relation to socio-economic variables. It is therefore a key tool for policy makers and will be indubitably of great interest for the research community in order to carry out detailed studies on poverty and living conditions. Before releasing to researchers, Eurostat (the European Statistical Office) has to anonymise micro data in such a way that individual statistical records which have been modified in order to minimise, in accordance to best practices, the risk of identification of the statistical units to which they relate.

The presentation will review the methodological problems related to the anonymisation of a European database, problems enhanced by the multiplicity of perceptions and realities of disclosure risk encountered in the different countries. Best practices are benchmarked against the practical issues. The presentation will detail, first, the Eurostat policy and practical arrangements taken with respect to the release of EU-SILC micro data base and, second, the methodological options taken to anonymise the database. The close inter-relation between these two aspects is highlighted in the presentation. The solution realises a trade off between the reduction of disclosure risk in each national component and the utility of released micro data by preserving information content and harmonisation of procedures used. The future perspectives with respect to European micro data release will also be discussed.

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