

Central Bank Statistics: moving beyond the aggregates

Session 4: Micro data: a push for transparency?

Christine Graeff (ECB) opened the session by emphasising the need to answer some of the important questions of our time. How to avoid economic instability, restore the notion that financial markets are open, competitive and serving the entire economy and avoid loss of confidence in certain market segments? What kind of information do policymakers need to design appropriate regulations?

Moving beyond the aggregates is a paradigm shift, bringing difficulties and trade-offs. This process can create concerns about confidentiality and protection of privacy, but also a demand for greater sharing as data are a public good. Micro data transparency can be seen as a factor that reinforces credibility, but there is also a risk of it being a source of instability. This risk should be avoided. The burden of collecting data in a timely manner should be weighed against the soundness and reliability of data, which are the very basis for their usefulness in policy making. The desire for transparency and demand to release what can be made available as soon as possible should not obfuscate the need for, and the benefits of, international standards.

Three speakers and two discussants tackled these issues. **Louis Marc Ducharme (IMF)** discussed to what extent granular data already exist behind the aggregated datasets¹. **Mariana Kotzeva (Eurostat)** provided an overview of current practices of the European Statistical System regarding access to micro data for research and statistical purposes and explored possibilities of further enhancements of these practices². **Loriana Pelizzon (Goethe University Frankfurt)** contributed from the perspective of academia, demonstrating the clear usefulness of micro data and also highlighting that much more micro data are available outside Europe³. She stressed that the specificities of the different markets prevent models and results obtained with non-European data from being directly interpretable for Europe.

Discussion summary

The first discussant, **Roxane Silberman (Centre d'Accès Sécurisé aux Données (CASD), Groupe des Écoles Nationales d'Économie et de Statistique (GENES) and CNRS Réseau Quetelet Paris)**, agreed that while micro data can bring greater transparency,

¹ [IMF paper and summary](#)

² [Eurostat paper and summary](#)

³ [Pelizzon papers and summaries](#)

collecting and sharing them raises questions around how to deal with confidentiality, and what are the respective roles of the different European, international and national authorities in this context. Based on her experience, she confirmed that there is no difference between the concerns raised by giving access to personal data in the social research domain and in the financial research domain. In many cases micro data do not raise confidentiality issues, but yet many remain unavailable or create access problems. Some solutions, like those presented by **Mariana Kotzeva** for Eurostat, already exist and implementing secure access is a driver for legal changes.

Important issues from the point of view of economic and social research are the costs of obtaining data, their formats, quality and common terminology, as well as harmonised criteria for approval of research projects and necessary data access. The need to link data, at both national and transnational level, will always require coordination by national research data centres.

She concluded that these issues have to be tackled more collectively to avoid duplication of access systems.

Claire Jones (Financial Times), the second discussant, welcomed the initiative of policymakers of looking into more granular data, as the financial crisis showed the limits of aggregate information on financial markets and institutions. In addition, she highlighted the importance of the Legal Entity Identifier and product identifiers in promoting a common language and making granular data more accessible and useful.

She asked the presenters from the IMF and Eurostat whether authorities are doing enough to ensure that information is easily available and easily understood by the media, academia and the public at large. She highlighted an important detail from the IMF paper that there may be a limit to standardisation when the internationally comparable aggregate does not reveal what is important from the particular country's perspective, and also asked about the Eurostat opinion on how legitimate the barriers in the current EU legal framework regarding the use of micro data really are.

She praised some good work done in recent years in various institutions and authorities to make statistics more available, including the growth of blogs which have provided the media with data in a format that can be fairly easily presented and analysed. Her final question was to what degree are these developments being tested with journalists and with the public at large.

Louis Marc Ducharme replied to **Ms Silberman** that the IMF does not have micro data, but even disaggregated data broken down by country can provide a lot of information, and these

data are free of charge and largely available. The IMF has recently published a substantial amount of disaggregated data, after asking permission from each central bank to do so. The good example set by these countries should ideally be an incentive for others.

He replied to **Claire Jones** that information provided by metadata is essential in explaining the context and the limits of statistics. It is the responsibility of the institution disseminating the information to ensure that users and the public at large can understand the figures.

Mariana Kotzeva replied to **Roxane Silberman** by saying that Eurostat is ready to cooperate with other institutions and the research community, and many practicalities need to be addressed, including identifiers, among other things. While access to granular data can be discussed, a public consensus is needed. In replying to **Claire Jones** she explained that the confidentiality issue as presented in the paper was current practice and there is room for more usage of granular data even within the current framework. She also agreed that, in order to prevent abuse of data, there is a need to work on data literacy and for more cooperation among the institutions.

For **Loriana Pelizzon**, access to data for research is a clear win-win situation, as the research community is ready to provide useful models for policymakers in exchange for free data. She asked institutions if they are ready to go in this direction.

Christine Graeff asked **Mariana Kotzeva** to comment on the interference of the political debate with statistics and the interaction between providers of official statistics and political issues. **Ms Kotzeva** emphasised that professional independence does not mean working in isolation; statisticians need to speak to all users at an early stage in order to understand their needs and what kind of information could be useful for policymaking. Official statisticians are responsible for presenting the data in such a way that they can be easily understood, while preventing possible manipulations.