

CMFB opinion on travel and tourism statistics

As set out in the Memorandum of Understanding on the cooperation between the Members of the ESS and the ESCB, signed on 22 April 2013, the CMFB shall facilitate close cooperation between the ESS and ESCB in areas of shared responsibility and/or common interest. One of those areas, which were identified for the CMFB work programme in 2015, is the domain of tourism and travel statistics. These statistics are important for the ESCB requirements (BoP) as well as the ESS (NA and other statistics).

Accordingly, the CMFB, at its plenary meeting of 29-30 January 2015, started and mandated a task force on travel, tourism and transport statistics (T3F) to address four aspects related to these statistics, namely:

- (i) to take stock of the (potential) use of administrative sources, including those not yet available for technical or legal reasons;
- (ii) to investigate the availability and use of mobile networks operators data;
- (iii) to analyse the use and further potential of card payments data;
- (iv) to identify key areas for improvements regarding bilateral asymmetries.

Members of the CMFB “welcomed the initiative to set up the T3F Task Force, due to the growing importance of tourism for EU countries general financial equilibrium”; the mandate also “underlined the need for better, cost efficient measurements of the phenomenon. Work should go in the direction of practical solutions and produce recommendations than encompass legal aspects as an enhancement of the legal framework”.

A final report, based on the work of the Task Force during the year 2015 and the results of a questionnaire addressed in August 2015 to all CMFB members, was presented to the CMFB Plenary meeting of 28-29 January 2016. Following the presentation of this report, recommendations were prepared and submitted to the CMFB Members via written procedures as provisioned for in the CMFB rules of procedure. Based on the procedure that took place 2-13 June 2016, the CMFB issues the following opinion.

1 - Cooperation among institutions in Member States should be fostered and enhanced as much as possible

The compilation of travel and tourism statistics is crucial for balance of payments statistics. It is mostly based on a multi-institutional set-up. The number of involved institutions and the modus of cooperation differ among Member States. Frequently, both the NCB and the NSI are involved in their respective capacities, which can vary across countries; in some cases government or promotion agencies are also involved. Despite such differences, all country experiences indicate that close cooperation between the agencies involved is an essential precondition to produce consistent and high quality statistics. The CMFB recognises the importance of this cooperation and promotes the removal of any obstacles preventing effective multi-institutional cooperation. In particular, where confidentiality rules and or legal restraints hinder an efficient production of travel and tourism statistics, the CMFB recommends Member States to take appropriate actions, if needed at the legislative level, in order to facilitate the minimal needed exchange of data between statistical compilers.

2 – Cooperation among Member States should be further stimulated

The quality and consistency of travel and tourism statistics could in potential greatly benefit from strengthening cooperation among Member States: the variety of national experiences allow for mutual learning and exchange of best practices; the joint monitoring and sharing of methodological developments enhance cross-national comparability of statistics, which is crucial; the bilateral exchange of information is necessary to reduce asymmetries, an important aspect of balance of payments statistical quality. The CMFB supports existing initiatives and recommends the development of new projects which allow for a better exchange of views, practices and micro-data among Member States, following a bottom-up approach. These endeavours can take different forms. In particular:

- The CMFB commends the work of the “Travel Workshop”, regularly attended by experts from NCBs and NSIs engaged in the compilation of tourism and travel statistics, and recommends that it continues its valuable work for which technical support is given by Eurostat and the ECB;
- The CMFB encourages compilers of travel statistics to develop, together with Eurostat and the ECB, harmonised analyses of tourism micro-data to the largest extent possible, in order to enhance understanding, quality and comparability of statistics in this area (e.g. share of business trips by destination country); the CMFB -and Eurostat and the ECB- could be facilitators in this domain;
- The CMFB encourages Member States to gather and share bilateral data on specific sub-items of the travel item in order to identify systematic asymmetries; when these asymmetries are detected, methodologies should be bilaterally compared, based in particular on the methodology developed in the Methodological Inventory exercise carried out by Eurostat in 2013 and solved to the extent possible.

3 – New sources of data: Mobile Network Operators

Mobile Network Operators (MNOs) hold important and still relatively unexploited data that could benefit to travel and tourism statistics. The CMFB encourages all initiatives aimed at improving the use of these data, both at the national and international level. These initiatives should aim at: (i) identifying a core set of variables and potential indicators that can be drawn from MNOs data; (ii) examining cost and legal considerations on the use of MNOs data, preferably within a more general framework also taking other uses than travel and tourism statistics into account; (iii) exploring a partnership approach between statistical compilers and MNOs firms, as both could benefit from collaboration. Pilot exercises at the national level are welcomed, especially as regards the choice of system data deliveries (centralised/decentralised) and source of data (active/passive), because they can provide useful input for possible draft legal obligations prepared at the European level.

4 – New sources of data: Payment Card Issuers

Payment Card Issuers (PCIs) hold important and only partly exploited data on travel and tourism statistics. The CMFB encourages initiatives aimed at improving the use of these data at the national level. More specifically, at the international level:

- The CMFB recommends carrying out a Merits and Costs Procedure, in collaboration with the Working Group on External Statistics (WG ES), aimed at verifying whether the current ECB Payments Statistics Regulation can and should be modified to take into account statistical needs related to the compilation of travel and tourism items which form an important part of Balance of payments statistics;
- More generally, the CMFB supports the possible development of national payment card transaction-level micro-data database, which lends itself to multiple uses, including via Big Data approaches.

(Signed)

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