

**Memorandum of Understanding
between the Central Statistics Office and
the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection**



PREAMBLE

Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (DEASP) Mandate and Mission

The DEASP's mission statement, as set out in the Department's Statement of Strategy¹, is to promote active participation in society through the provision of income supports, employment services and other services.

The DEASP is a producer of official statistics in the Irish Statistical System (ISS) and is formally recognised as a compiler of European Statistics as defined by Regulation (EC) No 223/2009.²

The DEASP is a major user of macroeconomic, social and demographic data for purposes of policy analysis, evaluation, research and modelling.

Central Statistics Office (CSO) Mandate and Mission

The CSO's mandate, as set out in the Statistics Act 1993, is
"the collection, compilation, extraction and dissemination for statistical purposes of information relating to economic, social and general activities and conditions in the State"

The CSO is also responsible for co-ordinating official statistics of other public authorities and for developing the statistical potential of administrative records. This co-ordination role with respect to the compilation of European Statistics is contained in Regulation (EC) No. 223/2009.

These activities are informed by the European Statistical Code of Practice (ESCOP)³ and the Irish Statistical System Code of Practice (ISSCOP)⁴.

¹ <http://www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/Statement-of-Strategy-2015-to-2017.aspx>

² <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2009:087:0164:0173:en:PDF>

³ <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/quality/european-statistics-code-of-practice>

⁴ <http://www.isscop.ie/>



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Adoption of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)

DEASP collects a wide range of data, principally in relation to the administration of a multiplicity of social insurance and social assistance schemes for children, people of working age, carers, people with disabilities and pensioners. The data is required by the DEASP to facilitate the processing and control of claims and payments, as well as to provide information on their programmes, policies, and operating environment, and to provide the basis for the publication of official statistics at both a national and European level by the DEASP.

Enhanced data cooperation between the CSO and DEASP ('the Offices'), with a view to exploiting the untapped statistical potential of data in various public administration systems to inform social policy, is acknowledged by both Offices to be desirable.

Environmental and other factors contributing to the requirement for an MoU:

- The Statistics Act, 1993⁵, in particular sections 10, 30 and 31, establishes the CSO's role in co-ordinating official statistics compiled by public bodies; its role in assessing the statistical potential of administrative records; its right of access to administrative records; and the requirement for all public bodies to consult with the Director-General of the CSO, and take on board any reasonable recommendations he may make, when creating or altering administrative data systems.
- Regulation (EC) No. 223/2009 and its amendments prescribe the coordination role CSO shall take with other national authorities (ONAs) in compiling European Statistics. In summary, CSO is responsible at a national level for coordinating the statistical programming and reporting—including quality monitoring, methodology, data transmission and communication—of all European statistics produced within Ireland, regardless of which department or agency produces them.
- The strategy articulated in the National Statistics Board (NSB) report *A World Class Statistical System for Ireland – Strategic Priorities for Official Statistics 2015 - 2020*⁶ highlights the importance for the development of Ireland's statistical system of a more systematic use of administrative records as a primary source of official statistics.
- The CSO's *Statement of Strategy 2015-2017*⁷ outlines the work programme of developing the Irish and European Statistical Systems and managing response burden.
- Under the provisions of the Statistics Act, 1993, the CSO may provide access to microdata files for statistical purposes only, under strict conditions to ensure that the integrity and confidentiality of data collected under the Act is maintained. The primary objective of the CSO in providing access to microdata is to support the research community and to ensure that appropriate use of the data collected by the CSO is maximised. This approach supports evidence-based policy-making, enables high-quality research, and also helps to avoid duplicate data collections.
- Likewise, the use of administrative data for statistical purposes is vital in order to generate enhanced statistical outputs in support of evidence-based policy making.
- The European Statistics Code of Practice⁸ requires that administrative sources of data be used wherever possible to avoid duplicating requests for information.

⁵ <http://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/census/documents/statsact93.pdf>

⁶ http://www.nsb.ie/media/nsbie/pdfdocs/NSB_Strategy_2015-2020.pdf

⁷ <http://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/aboutus/documents/SOS2015-2017.pdf>

This MoU will enable the CSO to realign its processes to ensure a more systematic use for statistical purposes of administrative data originating in DEASP. The agreement will contribute to enhanced statistical outputs by the CSO and to a reduction in the response burdens arising from CSO surveys.

Enhanced statistical outputs will at the same time contribute to better informed decision making with respect to policies and programs in the remit of the DEASP.

AGREEMENT

A. General

1. The Offices hereby agree to take all appropriate steps, within the confines of the Statistics Act, Regulation (EC) No. 223/2009 and any other relevant national and European legislation(*section B*)—
 - (a) to identify data to be provided by DEASP to CSO for statistical purposes and to facilitate the timely and secure provision of such data (*section C*);
 - (b) to monitor and facilitate the provision by CSO to appropriately accredited persons nominated by DEASP of (i) research microdata under the Research Microdata File (RMF) protocol and (ii) other custom non-confidential statistical analyses of CSO data (*section D*);
 - (c) to oversee the use of CSO research microdata protocols for DEASP data (*section E*), and CSO dissemination infrastructure for DEASP statistical publications (*section F*);
 - (d) to cooperate on methodological issues and to share technical expertise on matters of mutual interest (*section G*);
 - (e) to communicate, and wherever appropriate coordinate, CSO and DEASP work plans for statistical publications and other relevant matters (*section G*); and
 - (f) to ensure that data and publication needs in support of relevant research and analysis are reflected in the development priorities of the Irish Statistical System (*section G*).
2. The Offices further agree to establish a CSO-DEASP Liaison Group ('the Liaison Group') to oversee the implementation of these goals (*section H*) and to appoint Liaison Officers to co-ordinate the Liaison Group and related contact between the Offices (*section I*).
3. This Memorandum shall be regularly reviewed by the Liaison Group (*section J*), and both Offices shall publish it and internally communicate its contents (*section K*).

B. No contravention of statistical legislation

4. Nothing contained herein is intended or shall be construed to contravene any of the terms of the Statistics Act 1993, Regulation (EC) No 223/2009, nor of any other national or European legislation enacted in relation to the Central Statistics Office and the Irish Statistical System now or in the future, nor of the Social Welfare Consolidation Act, nor

⁴ http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_OFFPUB/KS-77-07-026/EN/KS-77-07-026-EN.PDF

of the Data Protection Act or any European data protection legislation (collectively ‘the relevant statistical legislation’).

5. In particular, nothing contained herein is intended or shall be construed, other than as provided for in the relevant statistical legislation—
 - (a) to allow or require the provision of information held by CSO relating to identifiable persons or undertakings to the DEASP or any other non-CSO person or body;
 - (b) to supersede or in any way interfere with the responsibility for and independence of the CSO and its Director-General in deciding the statistical methodology and professional statistical standards used by CSO, the content of statistical releases and publications issued by CSO, and the timing and methods of dissemination of statistics compiled by CSO.
6. Any and all references in this document to actions which the CSO “may”, “will”, or “shall” undertake shall therefore be read as meaning “without prejudice to the relevant statistical legislation, the CSO may [will, shall]” undertake the specified action. Equally, references to actions to be undertaken “where possible” or “where appropriate” shall be read as meaning that the action is to be undertaken “where possible [appropriate], consistent with the terms of the relevant statistical legislation”.

C. Provision of data for statistical purposes by the DEASP to the CSO

7. DEASP shall provide data to the CSO for statistical purposes as provided for in the relevant statistical legislation.
8. The two Offices shall agree and maintain a schedule of the data files to be provided by DEASP to CSO. Detailed information on data formats, metadata/data dictionaries, delivery frequency, and any other available documentation shall be provided in respect of the data files in the schedule.
9. Changes to this data schedule shall be submitted through and authorised by the Liaison Officers, having regard to the resource implications of the change.
10. DEASP shall inform the CSO as early as possible of any proposed changes in availability, scope or format of data which could materially impact the work of the CSO. Proposed changes will be discussed by the Liaison Group.
11. On the date of signature of this Memorandum, all existing data transfers from the DEASP to the CSO are considered approved by the Liaison Group and shall be included in the data schedule unless otherwise specified.
12. DEASP shall make all reasonable efforts to provide the data specified in the data schedule in a timely and secure fashion.
13. The data provided by DEASP to the CSO shall be done using secure protocols as agreed by the Liaison Group. The data, once transmitted, shall be managed according to the CSO’s administrative data management policy.

14. The CSO undertakes that all DEASP data relating to a person or undertaking shall be treated as strictly confidential and shall be used for statistical purposes only, in accordance with the relevant statistical legislation. The CSO shall ensure that all linking of DEASP data with other data sources, both CSO and non-CSO, will be carried out in accordance with the CSO Data Protocol⁹. In particular, treatment of data shall be subject to the CSO's Code of Practice on Statistical Confidentiality¹⁰.
15. The Offices shall maintain the appropriate infrastructure to ensure the secure storage of, and controlled access to, data.

D. Access by DEASP to CSO Research Microdata and custom analyses of CSO data

16. As part of its mandate, the CSO facilitates the specialist needs of the research and academic community for detailed and focused data. Research Microdata Files (RMFs) are one means through which the CSO grants access to anonymised microdata for statistical purposes. RMFs are made available to persons authorised to access such files under the Statistics Act, 1993 subject to strict criteria ("the RMF protocol").¹¹ Within the constraints of this protocol and subject to approval by the Director General, the CSO will facilitate access to RMFs by appropriately accredited DEASP nominated researchers.
17. Where DEASP nominated researchers have access to RMF data, CSO will provide any relevant and necessary metadata to allow the researchers to fully understand the data and its context.
18. The CSO shall maintain a schedule of the RMFs to which CSO grants DEASP nominated researchers access. This schedule will be shared and reviewed by the Liaison Group.
19. The CSO will, on request, undertake and provide custom statistical analyses to DEASP where such requests do not conflict with ESCoP. The Liaison Group may make recommendations on the prioritisation of such requests. The CSO may publish any and all such analyses in line with ESCoP.
20. The CSO shall maintain a schedule of the custom statistical analyses which it provides to DEASP. This schedule will be shared and reviewed by the Liaison Group.
21. On the date of signature of this Memorandum, all existing data arrangements between CSO and DEASP shall be deemed valid unless otherwise specified and included in schedules where appropriate.
22. CSO shall make all reasonable efforts to provide the data specified in the data schedules, and to inform DEASP in a timely manner of any planned changes in availability, scope or format of the data so provided to DEASP which could materially impact the work of DEASP.

⁹ <http://www.cso.ie/en/aboutus/csodataprotocol>

¹⁰ <http://www.cso.ie/en/aboutus/statisticalinquiries/statisticalconfidentiality/codeofpractice>

¹¹ <http://www.cso.ie/en/aboutus/dissemination/accesstomicrodatarulespoliciesandprocedures/>

E. Use by DEASP of CSO RMF protocols for researcher access to DEASP data

23. Within the framework of the relevant statistical legislation, the CSO will facilitate the DEASP in providing researcher access to DEASP data for statistical purposes using the CSO RMF protocols and infrastructure.
24. The CSO will take the DEASP position into account when deciding to grant researcher access to DEASP microdata held by CSO.
25. The Liaison Group will monitor and review the appropriate use of CSO RMF protocols in this regard.

F. Use by DEASP of CSO infrastructure for publication of data

26. The CSO shall facilitate the publication of DEASP statistics through the CSO Statbank and other appropriate channels.
27. The Liaison Group will monitor and review this use of CSO dissemination infrastructure.

G. Technical cooperation and coordination of effort

28. The Offices agree to cooperate where appropriate on technical and methodological issues. This may include, but is not limited to –
 - (a) assessment of the quality and adequacy for statistical purposes of data sources in areas of mutual interest;
 - (b) sharing of metadata, documentation, algorithms and other materials in relation to data and outputs of mutual interest;
 - (c) sharing of subject area expertise; and
 - (d) provision of general technical assistance.
29. The Offices shall, subject to the limitations of the relevant statistical legislation, communicate and coordinate –
 - (a) their work plans for relevant methodological and technical improvements; and
 - (b) their work plans for relevant statistical publications and other outputs.

H. The Liaison Group

30. The Liaison Group shall be the formal, high-level mechanism for consultation and communication between the two Offices.
31. The Liaison Group shall have oversight of all data matters and related issues of mutual interest. This shall include, but is not limited to:
 - (a) oversight of the schedule of data for statistical purposes to be provided by DEASP to CSO, and of any changes to that schedule (*paragraphs 8 and 9*). The data files in the delivery schedule and any amendments to that list are being

requested by the CSO under Section 30 of the Statistics Act 1993. This MoU serves as a notice request for the purposes of that section of the Act.;

- (b) oversight of research microdata access by DEASP nominated researchers, review of the data schedule for such access, and recommendation of additions or changes to these arrangements (*paragraphs 16 to 18*);
 - (c) oversight of custom statistical analyses provided by CSO to DEASP, review of the data schedule for such analyses, recommendation of additions or changes to the schedule (*paragraphs 19*);
 - (d) oversight of the CSO RMF protocol in respect of researcher access to DEASP microdata (*paragraphs 23 and 24*);
 - (e) oversight of DEASP's use of CSO infrastructure for the publication of DEASP statistical data (*paragraphs 26 and 27*);
 - (f) oversight and regular review of the security of data transfer and storage mechanisms, to ensure compliance with the Statistics Act and other relevant data protection legislation, and
 - (g) oversight of practical difficulties in the provision of data, identification of gaps in the data being provided, and recommendation of steps to redress the issues identified.
32. The Liaison Group shall work to promote enhanced co-ordination across the Irish Statistical System, and make and consider recommendations for its further development.
33. The Liaison Group shall share information on matters of mutual interest, including planned methodological changes and new or changed statistical outputs, and shall encourage cooperation, harmonisation and coordination of effort wherever possible.
34. The Liaison Group shall appoint, as required, expert groups to investigate issues arising; such working groups shall report to the Liaison Group. The Liaison Group shall also facilitate the operation of relevant groups on cross-cutting issues (e.g. the Government Finance Statistics Liaison Committee (GFSLC) and its subcommittees).
35. The Liaison Group shall meet on at least two occasions each year and shall be chaired alternately by DEASP and the CSO at Assistant Secretary/Director level.
36. The Liaison Group shall conduct regular reviews of this Memorandum of Understanding.

I. Liaison Officers

37. The CSO shall appoint a Liaison Officer as the main point of contact with DEASP; this role shall encompass a Data Custodian function, with responsibility for the management and use of DEASP data by the CSO. DEASP shall likewise appoint a Liaison Officer as the main point of contact with the CSO. The Liaison Officers may nominate deputies as appropriate.

J. Review

38. The MoU will be reviewed at least once every two years by the Liaison Group, but may be reviewed at any time at the request of either party. Any changes to the MoU shall be effected only with the mutual agreement of the Offices. This MoU will continue in force until it is terminated by either party by giving to the other not less than six months prior notice in writing.

K. Communication

39. The approval of this MoU and its content and procedures shall be communicated within the CSO and DEASP; such communication shall include publication on the respective websites.

Signed:



Pádraig Dalton
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Cork.

Signed:



John McKeon
Secretary General
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Date:

25/7/18

Date:

4/9/18.