Accreditation for transnational research access to official micro-data in Europe

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Accreditation

- Part of the process of ensuring safe access to data for research

- Three major components:
  - Eligibility criteria: who is a researcher
  - Application procedures: how to request access
  - Rules for decision-making
Accreditation and barriers to access

- Accreditation is currently a barrier to access across borders in Europe
  - Differences in rules, practices and procedures across countries
  - Greater difficulty of assessing eligibility of foreign applicants and monitoring the process

- Yet increasing demand for international access
Data without Boundaries (DwB)

- Enhancing access across borders in Europe
- In particular, understanding causes and nature of barriers related to accreditation
- Detecting similarities and differences across countries, identifying best practices
- Proposing potential solutions
This talk

- Presents key results of our overview of accreditation practices across Europe

- Outlines recent improvements, current tendencies and work in progress

- Proposes directions for further progress and dialogue with stakeholders
Accreditation for accessing official microdata in Europe: an overview
Data and methods

- Study of data produced by NSIs in European countries

- Sources: websites of NSIs and other data providers, extant publications, information obtained directly from NSI representatives

- Focus on national-level datasets

- Comparison with situation and progress in accessing European datasets at Eurostat
All countries allow researcher access, but with varying practical modalities and conditions

Fundamental conditions (eligibility criteria, contents of applications and user contracts) are common, but details remain heterogeneous

Widespread openness to granting transnational access, but with limitations relative to national researchers

Some obstacles to transnational access (limited online information, lack of English translations) admit simple solutions
European-level accreditation at Eurostat

- In progress

- Divergences regarding the possibility of a dual accreditation process – for research institutions and for individual researchers

- Divergences concerning the possibility to delegate part of the accreditation process to data archives at least for anonymised data (SUFs)
Ultimate goals and current restraints
The ideal access framework for researchers

- Data must be **discoverable** – the importance of information, and of translations

- Application process must be clear, transparent and **straightforward**

- Avoid duplication of efforts – have a **single point of contact**

- Avoid multiple accreditation for **one project** requiring access to different Research Data Centres
The ideal access framework for NSIs

- Ideally, access should keep down (or even decrease) costs and burden, while still meeting all legal requirements.

- Indeed priority of NSIs is not research access *per se*, but provision of information to governments and protection of confidentiality.

- Costs arise because accreditation and access for research require sound legal expertise and substantial resources.
How to satisfy these needs simultaneously?

Countries would need to:

- agree on shared eligibility criteria for researchers
- agree to adopt a standard application form
  - Potential for improvement, based on observed similarities
  - Possibly starting with small clusters of similar countries
  - Shortening the process in case of multiple accreditation
- delegate management of the procedure too
- delegate decision-making to a third party, possibly a central body
  - A more sensitive issue especially for highly-detailed data
  - Possible solutions may build on existing collaborations with Data Archives
Moving forwards:
potential solutions and work in progress
Steps towards improvements in the short run

- Improvements in web-based communication and availability of English-language information would represent a great improvement for researchers, with limited costs for NSIs.

- DwB to contribute with a central directory of information on accreditation, to be released online.
Some possibilities for the long run

- Establishing a centralized database of accredited users of data for research within Europe
  - Time-consuming: would it shorten the procedure?

- Possibly completed with a central database of information about research institutions, perhaps relying on information already collected by Eurostat
  - List of accredited institutions by Eurostat? Other research bodies?
Some possibilities for the long run (cont.)

- A “researcher passport”: recognized international document carried by vetted researchers to prove eligibility for access
  - Criteria? Decision? Would such a passport shorten the process for transnational accreditation?

- Possibly to be integrated/combined with the European Service Centre for Official Statistics (ESC-OS), proposed within DwB to handle metadata issues
  → Importance of a shared governance system
Conclusions
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- A more homogeneous European model for accreditation is a realistic possibility, though adoption requires time – bilateral agreements could be a start.

- Upcoming DwB consultations with stakeholders to understand needs and expectations of all parties involved.

- It is important to understand to what extent an ESC-OS and/or a researcher passport would bring improvements.

→ Your feedback is welcome!
Thanks for your attention

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