

# International Microdata Scoping Studies

## Introduction

In April 2005 the Research Resources Board of the Economic and Social Research Council commissioned a *Review of International Data Resources and Needs*. The *Review* forms part of a strategy to foster international collaboration in the social sciences. Among its many recommendations, the report arising from this review drew attention to the paucity of accessible social and economic microdata resources covering certain key countries – notably for China, India, Mexico, Brazil and South Africa.

To inform future actions to address this issue, the Board wishes to commission a number of scoping studies designed to establish the availability within these countries of social and economic microdata resources for research purposes. This note describes how these studies could be conducted and invites interested parties to tender for them.

## The scoping studies

The proposed scoping studies are designed to be conducted by individuals or research/consultancy teams that have some prior knowledge of the statistical systems in the five countries for which information is required. The focus of each study will be on the availability of statistical microdata (data pertaining to individuals or organisations for analysis at the level of the individual or organisation) which are not currently accessible to researchers from outside the countries concerned. Such data are usually held by national or regional statistical bodies and/or government departments or agencies. They may derive from censuses, surveys or administrative systems and are often held as electronic files or databases. Relevant accompanying documentation includes data descriptions detailing how the data were collected; (*e.g.* survey methods employed, census/survey/administrative data collection instruments, *etc.*). These so-called ‘metadata’ may or may not be in electronic format.

It is envisaged that four or five investigators (or investigating teams) will be appointed to conduct these studies. Each will spend some time in the country concerned, to meet with senior officials in the national statistical institutes and to make contact with social and economic researchers who have gained access to relevant national microdata sources.

## The data required

The aim of these scoping studies is to report upon the nature, scale, coverage and availability of microdata resources which can inform research on a wide range of social and economic issues for the countries concerned. Potential areas of interest include the following:

- demographic and related information (*e.g.* data on fertility and contraception; urban/rural migration; ageing and mortality; partnership formation; *etc.*) and whether or not such information is sex-disaggregated;
- housing conditions (*e.g.* data on building occupancy, amenities; new construction);
- social welfare (*e.g.* receipt of state aid; care for dependents; rehabilitation for drug users; *etc.*);
- economic (*e.g.* data on organisation ‘births/deaths’; trade statistics; productivity, research and development surveys);
- labour market (*e.g.* employment, unemployment, retraining, labour costs, *etc.*);

- education (*e.g.* primary, secondary, tertiary education; educational expenditure; student follow-up surveys);
- transport (*e.g.* commuting patterns; vehicle ownership; vehicle sales);
- criminal statistics (*e.g.* victim surveys, crime surveys, statistical records of arrests, convictions)
- public health (*e.g.* health surveys, administrative data from clinics, hospitals, etc.)

A variety of methods are usually employed to collect such information. Some information may come from censuses (of housing, employing organisations, *etc.*) and most of these countries conducted major national censuses in 2000/01. Some derives from regular and repeated surveys, for example, Labour Force Surveys, Household Expenditure Surveys. Some are the by-product of administrative systems set up to record transactions, incidents and the like.

The scoping studies should determine how and under what conditions data could be made available to UK researchers. To address this issue, each study should report:

- a brief description of each data source which could be made available (main variables, format in which data are held, *etc.*)
- the coverage and quality of the data concerned (*e.g.* census, sample survey, administrative data);
- the availability and quality of associated data descriptions and the language of such documentation;
- the nature of any conditions that are stipulated by data owners (restrictions on access, whether licensing agreements required);
- the costs of preparing data for acquisition (*e.g.* data extraction and preparation costs, translation of key documents to English).

## Timescale

The timescale for these studies is short. The Research Resources Board would like to make an informed decision regarding the acquisition of major new data resources from the countries concerned at its November 2006 meeting. To facilitate this, and recognising that further negotiation may be required with the statistical authorities in the countries concerned, the Board wishes to commission these scoping studies by the end of July 2006, reporting their findings by the **20<sup>th</sup> October 2006** (a draft report will be due on the 6<sup>th</sup> October 2006).

It is expected that each investigation will require at least two weeks spent in each of the countries concerned, preceded by up to four week's preparation time to establish contacts and to plan the visit, and two weeks to compile a detailed report. The estimated costs of undertaking each scoping study should include travel and subsistence costs. The maximum budget available for each study is £25,000 (including VAT). A consultancy contract will be issued for this work and will therefore not incur Full Economic Costing.

To tender for these studies, suitably qualified persons should write to Helen Haggart at the Economic and Social Research Council ([Helen.Haggart@esrc.ac.uk](mailto:Helen.Haggart@esrc.ac.uk)), stating which study or studies they are interested in conducting, their experience in the areas concerned and their qualifications to undertake the study(ies) concerned. Tenders should contain a statement of how bidders propose to undertake each of the studies (i.e. an indication of key contacts / organisations that would be approached). Proposals should also state the names of those who would conduct each study, the number of days that each person will spend on the study, daily rates (inclusive of VAT), travel and subsistence and any other associated costs. Tenders should be a maximum of 6 sides of A4 and be received no later than **June 30th 2006**.

The work of the consultants will be overseen by a small ESRC Advisory Group, who will also assess the tenders received. Consultants are expected to maintain regular contact with the Advisory Group, this will include an early briefing meeting in late July and further meetings to be agreed in due course.

Any queries should be addressed to Helen Haggart ([Helen.Haggart@esrc.ac.uk](mailto:Helen.Haggart@esrc.ac.uk)).