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Comparable indicators of competitiveness across Europe – state of the art and challenges

Topic 7 – Better statistics for a globalised world

Keywords: competitiveness, micro-data linking, accessing micro-data

Introduction

There is widespread agreement that improving competitiveness throughout Europe is at the heart of the structural resolution of past and future crises. However, agreement is likely to stop there. Although many studies measure the competitiveness of firms, regions or nations, there is no common single definition of competitiveness, and no consensus on how to measure it across countries and/or over time.

Many aggregate indicators suffer from measurement errors and do not necessarily deliver the same ranking across countries or over time. On the micro level of firms, which are increasingly seen as the basic units underlying competitiveness, the situation regarding the availability and accessibility of data is even worse. In the present contribution, we provide an inventory and an assessment of the data related to the measurement of competitiveness in the countries of the European Union addressing detailed information on data accessibility and computability for more than 150 indicators, distinguishing between macro-level and bottom-up (micro-level) indicators.

Based on the results of the inventory, we outline the main current challenges of providing comparable data on competitiveness across countries in the EU and we formulate some prospective responses aiming at improving data availability and accessibility.

Conclusions

Our contribution yields three key messages:

- (1) Aggregate and comparable indicators of competitiveness at the country, sector and regional level are generally available for relatively long time series in most EU28 countries and they are accessible via Eurostat, national statistical institutes, national central banks or other data providers.
- (2) Availability of micro-level data related to competitiveness is also rather good for many countries. This implies that, within countries, it is possible, in principle, to match different databases.
- (3) A major problem, however, consists in numerous legal, non-legal and technical barriers limiting the access to data and consequently the ability of researchers to construct bottom-up indicators that are not regularly provided by statistical agencies.

The ideal solution to overcome these current challenges would be to change the national and EU-level rules of data content, data availability, data matching and data access and to provide unlimited access to any micro-level data necessary to analyse competitiveness. As this is highly improbable to happen, our contribution suggests several workarounds, enabling improvements taking into account the current (heterogeneous) framework conditions. These workarounds range from improving methods and techniques of accessing and analyzing micro-level data without violating nondisclosure to initiating multiscope cross-country surveys addressing specific issues related to competitiveness.

