Cross-cutting and managerial issues

COVID-19 and official statistics

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Ongoing and upcoming activities

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Activities

Ongoing:

- The Executive Board of High-Level Group for Modernisation of Official Statistics and its Blue-Skies Thinking Network established a protected digital space where its members share their views and experiences regarding the response to the crisis in their organizations.
- Facilitating knowledge exchange in the expert community within existing activities (e.g. on usage of mobile data).

Upcoming:

During the 68th plenary session of the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) (22-24 June 2020), the chief statisticians of all CES member countries, will discuss:

- **Impact of COVID-19 crisis on official statistics** - jointly with the OECD Committee for Statistics and Statistical Policy (OECD CSSP):
  - Data stewardship – new roles of NSOs in the changing world (organized by UNECE)
  - Impact of Covid-19 crises on business continuity of official statistics (organized by OECD)
- **Using geospatial data and tools for measuring COVID-19 impact** - jointly with UN-GGIM: Europe

Related initiatives

Resources

- Strategic Communication Framework
- Making Data Meaningful Publications

Country practices

The examples below illustrate how NSOs deal with the challenges of continuing their operations during the COVID-19 crisis.

The main sources of information are: (1) a special survey carried out by the UNECE Task Force on Measuring Hazardous Events and Disasters (and follow-up communication with NSOs), (2) the UNSD COVID-19 response website, (3) NSOs’ websites and (4) information provided directly by NSO.

Examples on crisis communications during COVID-19 are available on the dedicated page under Strategic Communications Framework.

For updates and adding of information please leave a comment at the bottom of the page or contact Malgorzata Cwiek.
The ABS is committed to delivering timely and accurate information about the impacts of the coronavirus (COVID-19) on Australian society and the economy.

The ABS is producing a range of existing and new statistical products, providing relevant insights on households, employment and industry to inform government, business and community responses to the pandemic. A dedicated task force has been established to identify and secure new data sources to supplement the production of existing ABS products, address emerging policy questions and data needs in response to COVID-19, and deliver novel and innovative products in the future.

New statistical releases will provide information on:
- Business impacts such as cash flow and turnover
- Additional monthly analysis on hours worked, including reasons for working less hours, and quarterly hours worked analysis by industry
- Preliminary retail turnover data
- Interactive employment maps
- Preliminary import and export data
- COVID-related employment and health implications for households
- Additional analysis of short term overseas visitors and international students
- Interactive age and health conditions population maps
- Confidentialised microdata for Australian businesses will be made available for researchers through TableBuilder so they can produce tables, graphs and maps.

The ABS is protecting the health of its staff and respondents, while ensuring the ongoing operating capacity.

By mid-March, given the risks associated with travel and gatherings in confined spaces, ABS reduced the number of agencies and individuals attending lock-ups for market sensitive statistics. ABS also suspended surveys that required close face-to-face contact, including those within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, to protect vulnerable populations.

Some of the regular activities were paused to free up resources to ensure the key economic series weren’t at risk, or to make way for the collection of COVID-19 related data. Critical teams were identified, and surge capacity and shadow teams put in place to keep production processes going in the event that infection rates of ABS staff rose to critical levels.

INSEE has been complying with the confinement and has been able to ensure continuity of its mission through teleworking. This required realigning priorities and adapting certain operation to the new conditions. INSEE informs about the impact of the COVID-19 on its work through press releases and a dedicated web page.

Registers: INSEE assured the public about that it will continue to maintain the population register and the business register which are under its responsibility.

Surveys: INSEE carries household surveys exclusively by phone or online if possible (employment survey and living conditions survey). ICT survey will not be carried out in 2020. Replies already provided by companies online will be preserved but there will be no reminders and no legal consequences of non-response. Certain large companies whose responses are indispensable can be contacted.

Statistical production: INSEE aims to ensure the continuity of the production of national accounts. The provisional annual accounts for 2019 should be published as planned. The publication of trimestral accounts for first and second trimester 2020 may not follow the usual calendar, in particular the first estimate, which is scheduled 30 days after the end of each trimester.

INSEE will continue to publish according to the usual calendar (or almost) all the main economic indicators, including monthly industrial production index, trimestral employment figures and monthly price index. Economic developments and difficulties in data collection may however affect the quality of certain indicators. This will be systematically documented.

Every week, INSEE will publish daily number of deaths reported by the communes, based on the civil registration system.

INSEE is in contact with mobile operators to measure the distribution of the population on the territory. This work will lead to a publication as soon as possible.

Economic impacts: INSEE aims to publish an analysis of the economic situation every two weeks. INSEE will issue updated press releases as necessary if conditions of data collection deteriorate or if INSEE encounters difficulties in ensuring continuity of service.
Italy  
Statistical production  
Actions to ensure continuity of statistical production, a special internal task force  
Due to measures adopted by the government to contain the virus, Istat has implemented a series of actions to ensure the continuity and quality of statistical production even in this emergency situation. The institute has reorganized data collection by sustainable acquisition techniques, innovative methodologies and use of data sources; it also provided most appropriate solutions to support statistical production processes, in full protection of workers' Health. Official statistics are fundamental for measuring the evolution of economy and society; their production and dissemination at the service of institutions, policy makers, families and businesses, therefore, cannot be stopped, but need to be rethought to be ready to provide the country with all necessary answers, and above all to support and monitor the future country's recovery. Istat has long invested in dematerialisation and can therefore ensure full operation of its databases and accessible online services.

A special internal task force is dedicated to organize and manage the impact of pandemic on the statistical activities. It caused the stop of some survey and the postponing of others. Istat is working using "agile works" and all the workers are connected and are working as usual. Web meeting tools are very often used. A special part of the internal website is well-organized containing all the necessary information.

Australia  
Statistical production  
Impacts on the work programme  
The ABS is providing a range of additional, up-to-date information to enhance understanding of the social and economic impacts of COVID-19, including new information relating to the Australian Labour Market. In order that the ABS can continue to deliver official economic and social statistics during this period, it has made small changes to some elements of the ABS Forward Work Program.

Mexico  
Statistical production  
No interruption of production and publication of short-term economic indicators and maintaining information quality standards  
The main challenge is not to interrupt the production and publication of short-term economic indicators and maintain information quality standards. In case of the production of short-term economic statistics, we anticipate problems in surveying and in the imputation methods of missing data, as well as the temporary or definitive suspension of some businesses in certain industries.

The main challenges for the price indices are:
- Preserving the health integrity of the work team,
- Carrying out the day-to-day work of operation, facing existing restrictions, but seeking to obtain the result by alternative methods,
- Resolve the no response problem by alternative methods of data collection and processing,
- Ensure the publication of the National Consumer Price Index, defined as data of national interest.
- Ensure the quality and reliability of the data.

Mexico  
Risk management  
Evaluation of the operating conditions in economic units  
According to the Contingency Plan of the National Economic Surveys, INEGI will carry out an evaluation of the operating conditions that prevailed during the health crisis in the economic units, in such a way that the data available is ratified or rectified. This activity will be a determining input for the generation of statistical results for the contingency period, in such a way that the data is generated in accordance with the quality, accuracy, relevance and opportunity established by the Law.

It is essential to carry out an evaluation of the actions taken during the contingency, both statistical and non-statistical, in order to prepare a detailed report of the actions, highlighting the impacts, conclusions and alternatives for the area opportunity that may be found. This report will be the fundamental input for the design of a contingency plan of greater scope.

Germany  
Statistical production  
Biggest challenges at the moment  
Monitoring of company responses and the share of estimation: Due to the difficulties experienced by companies during the pandemic, non-responses are expected. As far as possible, this is compensated by utilizing estimates, accepting a higher error tolerance and reducing the publication depth. The present situation is particularly difficult for many companies, public authorities and private individuals obliged to report data for the production of official statistics. We are nevertheless asking for the submission of data via the familiar electronic transmission channels. If data are not sent, this data will help to pro-vide politicians and administrative authorities with the basic information they need to decide on measures for coping with the crisis.

Contributions by other public authorities: Important contributions by other public authorities might be missing, because they are also affected by the disease.

Germany  
Human resources management  
Biggest challenges at the moment  
A reduction of active staff is expected because of the pandemic. The existing staff is "reorganised" according to the statistical production of short-term economic statistics, home office working has been initiated and remote access to databases has been provided.

A special internal task force is dedicated to organize and manage the impact of pandemic on the statistical activities. It caused the stop of some survey and the postponing of others. Istat is working using "agile works" and all the workers are connected and are working as usual. Web meeting tools are very often used. A special part of the internal website is well-organized containing all the necessary information.

Mexico  
Human resources management  
Providing data to government for crisis management  
NSO sent most of its offices employees to work under a home office structure starting March 23th 2020, keeping just a small crew to operate. Field personal worked on the census until March 30th 2020. On April 6th 2020 practically everyone still in the office was sent home. The Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare indicated to NSO that the contracts of its temporary employees who carry out field activities should be maintained.

Turkey  
Human resources management  
Biggest challenges at the moment  
In line with the TurkStat National Data Release Calendar, in order to ensure timely publication of news bulletins and statistics, home office working has been initiated and remote access to databases has been provided.

Personal started to work in shifts both in the central office and regional offices by rotation and by remote accessing from home (telecommuting). Approximately 10 % of the staff goes to work in every unit, there is some staff on duty to take necessary precautions. Except this, each unit organizes their work schedule themselves in control of their superior. As a result, the number of personnel has been decreased in the offices (% 50 of staff telecommuting) to decrease the contigation of the pandemic. Meetings and other social interactions were stopped, instead of it, video-conferences were organized.

Turkey  
Statistical production  
Data compilation issues  
There are 26 regional offices of TurkStat (corresponding to NiTS in II level regions), which are in charge of the compilation, evaluation, quality control, analysis of the data and its transfer to the Center. Approximately 3/4 of the total staff are working in the regional offices, with the majority of them are interviewers who are primarily engaged in data collection. Therefore, due to the Covid-19 illness, some challenges are expected to be experienced during data collection processes in surveys and hence, some measures mentioned below have been taken by NSO to overcome these challenges.

In Regional Offices, face to face interviews with the households and workplaces for some surveys were stopped temporarily. Instead of it, interviews by e-mail, telephone, web survey and data collection by administrative register methods will be continued during the pandemic.

Some cards are bought each consisting of adequate minutes and internet data for interviewers in the regional offices so that they can call the respondents at home, including the first meeting of Labour Force Survey. This application is valid only for three months. Afterwards it is planned to adopt and reorganize the regional offices to our Computer Assisted Telephone Interview (CATI) system and software.

By optimising the software infrastructure, CATI operators (Working for LFS and CPI Rental Prices) are made to work at home as if they were at office. Thus, all the phone calls are still recorded and given quality scores. Our experts can listen all the calls at their homes by connecting our call center software.

An official application to "Informatics and Communication Authority" is made to get a special phone number (1XY) that is only given to governmental institutions working for common good. With this application, it is aimed to make respondents feel safe when they are called-up to conduct a survey.

NSO has been sending information letters to the respondents before the starting of the fieldwork of each survey according to the agreement between TurkStat and Turkish Post Office for years. These new practices are announced with our informative letters and Respondent Information Module on our website to inform respondents that they can be called by phone during COVID-19 in order to conduct surveys.

Besides letters, respondents are also given information via SMSs and emails.

In terms of business surveys , Computer Assisted Web Interiewing (CAWI) method was the main channel. Our staff in regional offices ensures respondents participation to surveys reminding them with phone calls and e-mails.

Household Budget Survey (HBS) is postponed 1 month due to quality problems that it is not nominal enough to conduct this survey by CATI.

Alternative data sources like outlets’ websites, e-invoices, e-archive invoice, card payments for some studies are used to fill data gaps in data collection during this Covid-19 period.
Consumer Price Index: In the context of the COVID-19 crisis, weight structure of CPI and classification which is used in CPI compilation will remain unchanged during the year. However, price compilation of the CPI is guided by the following principles:

- to continue the price collection from outlets by price collectors whenever possible.
- to replace missing price by price obtained from other sources.

In addition to this, prices will be collected by telephone, e-mail enquiries and outlet’s websites.

Short Term Business Statistics: In Short Term Business Statistics, VAT declaration information is used as the data source in the calculation of turnover indices, retail sales indices and industrial production index. Due to the Covid-19, VAT declaration is extended. VAT declaration information of all enterprises has not been received due to the extension of the declaration periods. For the enterprises without data, industrial production survey, e-invoice, e-archive invoice, card payment and foreign trade data were used in the calculation of the indices in addition to the VAT declaration information. There is no problem for the studies whose data source is questionnaire.

Household Budget Survey (HBS): Household information is compiled by interview, registration and observation methods in HBS. The households are visited prior to the survey month and the first meetings are held with the Computer Assisted Personal Interview (CAPI) method. Then, during the survey month, each household is visited 4 times for taking expenditure records. After the survey month, the survey is completed by making an income interview with the CAPI method. In this context, if the first interview can be made through a face to face interview it is possible to complete the survey period with CATI method. In March 2020, field application completed by with CAPI method. However, field application is cancelled for April 2020 since the first interviews could not be made through face to face interview.

Household Labour Force Survey: Before Covid-19, all surveys of the first wave and the majority of the 2nd and subsequent waves were being conducted with CAPI method and a small part of the 2nd and subsequent waves were being conducted with CATI method. Together with the measures taken in the context of the epidemic, all face to face interviews have been stopped. The capacity of the NSO CATI Center has been increased and the CAPI interviewers have started to implement the survey by telephone.

Household Labour Force Survey: Before Covid-19, in the first wave of the survey household visits were conducted once. However, due to Covid-19 household visits were stopped at the beginning of the field application period. After a while, the survey method was changed from CAPI to CATI. For the households of wave 2, 3 and 4 the survey has been trying to be done by phone although SILC is a very long and intense survey. For the first wave households’ surveys cannot be conducted and this will be evaluated by Eurostat in the following days.

Statistics on Income and Living Conditions Survey (SILC): SILC Survey’s field application period is 4 months starting at March and finishing at July. This year due to Covid-19 household visits were stopped at the beginning of the field application period. After a while, the survey method was changed from CAPI to CATI. For the households of wave 2, 3 and 4 the survey has been trying to be done by phone although SILC is a very long and intense survey. For the first wave households’ surveys cannot be conducted and this will be evaluated by Eurostat in the following days.

Death Statistics: Monthly transferring death data from the data source (the Central Civil Registration System (MERNIS) database of the Ministry of Interior, General Directorate of Civil Registration and Citizenship Affairs) does not allow daily/weekly death data production at that moment.

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Do you have questions or want to share your experience? Let us know in the comments below

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