Cross-cutting and managerial issues

COVID-19 and official statistics

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

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.
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| Australia    | Consumers and data suppliers management  | ABS COVID response webpage Australian Statistician’s Briefing to the Australian Business Economists | ABS has created three webpages dedicated to COVID-19 response:  
- a webpage dedicated to all ABS COVID-19 statistical products  
- a webpage with information for survey respondents  
- a webpage summarizing ABS COVID-19 response with links to both webpages above, statements of the Australian Statistician and media releases.  

On 30 April, the Australian Statistician gave a briefing to the Australian Business Economists on:  
- how ABS has responded to the changed world  
- how ABS arrived at the suite of outputs they had released over the previous month  
- how ABS had transformed the way they do things to embrace new, rapid response surveys to give governments and the community the most up-to-date statistics possible, and  
- how ABS data can help decision-makers navigate the uncertain economic terrain over the coming months. | 3      | 11 May 2020 |
| Australia    | Statistical production                     | ABS COVID-19 statistical products Australian Statistician’s Briefing to the Australian Business Economists | 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. | 3      | 11 May 2020 |
| Australia    | Statistical production                     | Protecting the health of staff and respondents, while ensuring the business continuity | 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. | 3      | 11 May 2020 |
| France       | Statistical production                     | Impact of COVID-19 on national statistics production (press releases of 16 March and 25 March) and a dedicated COVID-19 web page | INSEE has been complying with the confinement and has been able to ensure continuity of its mission through teleworking. This required redefining 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 90 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, and quarterly national accounts.  

INSEE will however not be able to release seasonal adjusted figures for the last quarter of 2019 due to outage dates constraints. The revised quarterly national accounts for 2019 will be published in the usual way.  

INSEE will continue to release the main economic indicators of Q1 2020, which will be published on 24 May, according to the usual calendar.  

INSEE will continue to publish monthly indicators according to the usual calendar (or almost)  
- industrial production index  
- employment figures  
- monthly price index  
- quarterly national accounts  
- main economic indicators of Q1 2020  

INSEE will not be able to provide seasonal adjusted figures for Q3 2020 due to outage dates constraints. The revised Q3 2020 national accounts will be published in the usual way.  

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. | 4      | 4 May 2020  |
| Netherlands  | Statistical production                     | A dedicated website Coronavirus crisis: CBS figures | Statistics Netherlands created a dedicated website with CBS figures on COVID-19 impacts on economy, society, public health, public mobility and supply chains, and related news articles. | 4      | 4 May 2020  |
| Netherlands  | Statistical production                     | Measuring article stockpiling with scanner data | On 24 March, Statistics Netherlands published an analysis on article stockpiling based on weekly transaction data. | 4      | 4 May 2020  |
| Netherlands  | Consumers and data suppliers management   | Message to users of CBS data and those providing data to CBS | On 26 March, Statistics Netherlands published a message to users of CBS data and those providing data to CBS that:  
- Explained in simple terms how the COVID-19 outbreak affects the operations of Statistics Netherlands  
- Assured about their continued efforts to maintain the production of statistics at the highest possible level  
- Underscored the importance of reliable data during a crisis for various stakeholders and the need to continue the data collection  
- Thanked in advance those who provide the data for their collaboration under the difficult circumstances. | 4      | 4 May 2020  |
| Netherlands  | Strategy and leadership                   | Interview with CBS Acting Director General Bert Kroese on reliable data in times of corona and beyond | On 22 April, Statistics Netherlands published an interview with CBS Acting Director General Bert Kroese, who further explained the impacts of the outbreak on the CBS work, importance of reliable, timely data and the need for continued collaboration between the Dutch national and municipal authorities, the academic world and the business community during the crisis and beyond. | 4      | 4 May 2020  |
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.
Istat has reorganized data collection by sustainable acquisition techniques, innovative methodologies and use of data sources; it also provided most appropriate solutions to statistical production processes, in full protection of workers' health. Official statistics are fundamental for measuring the 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 in order 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.

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 time, it has made some 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.

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 of action for the areas and 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. In fact, 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.

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 priorities.

Mexico Human resources management Providing data to government for crisis management
NSO sent most of its officers employees to work under a home office structure starting March 23rd 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 work 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 (% 90 of staff telecommuting) to decrease the contagion 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 NISST 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.

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 by SMSes and emails.
In terms of business surveys , Computer Assisted Web Interviewing (CAWI) method was the main channel. Our staff in regional offices ensures respondents participation to surveys reminding them with phone calls and emails.
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 gaps in data collection during this Covid-19 period.
Specific practices | Consumer Price Index:
In the context of the COVID-19 crisis, the weight structure of the 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: 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.

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.

Technologies the so called “e-VT” (standard business reporting programs for reporting business data and electronic interchange) and EDI (electronic data interchange) works.

Flexible working conditions may be applied in the future by evaluating the efficiency of the works.

Main lessons learned: The great importance of technological infrastructure in telecommuting has been understood as it enabled continuation of working process. It has been revealed that the works can be carried out easily by telecommuting and alternately working applications in cases where the personnel health should not be risked, but for this, the existing personnel structure and the technological equipment should be prepared. Flexible working conditions may be applied in the future by evaluating the efficiency of the works.

Main lessons learned: It has been seen how important the coordination with the relevant institutions is for the statistics produced by using administrative records and how important it is to carry out this process with all the stakeholders. Technologies the so called “e-VT” (standard business reporting programs for reporting business data and electronic interchange) is used in the NSO. The survey portal provides respondent units to fill in electronic questionnaires by themselves in a comfortable and a safe manner with the passwords assigned to them. By this system, no disruption in the data collection from enterprises is experienced during the Covid-19 period which highlights the importance of usage of the technological data collection methods. In terms of household surveys, we have used CAPI and CATI methods. CAPI was the main method for household surveys but after a six months pilot study we activated our CATI Center with 30 operators to collect data for some specific surveys. In the coming period, NSO is planning to redesign data collection methods for all its national social surveys in order to employ CATI mode. NSO has established a platform for this task.

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

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