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Business Register, Data collection services

Tema 3. Statistikproduktionen

Developing Business Data Collection

Abstract: During 2007 Statistics Finland launched a development programme on developing its enterprise data collections (2007-2011). The development programme's main object is to develop respondent relations with better service and knowledge of the impacts and possibilities of data collections. The development programme involves several projects or functions, and proposes new ones. Each and every project/function has its own objective to execute the development programme's main object. The objectives are 1) to improve and harmonise data collection from enterprises and service to enterprise data suppliers, especially large enterprises, 2) to replace statistics-specific sample frames with a single frame (Business Register), 3) to co-ordinate and optimize samples, 4) to find standard solutions serving enterprises and treatment of data in all stages of the enterprise data collection process and 5) to reduce the data suppliers' response burden.

Possible benefits from the development programme, and projects or functions will be high-quality basic data and statistics and more effective data collection and better service to data suppliers.

1. Introduction

Statistics Finland has three ongoing development programmes, whose purpose is to co-ordinate statistics and statistical development projects in particular, identify and assess development needs, and develop and disseminate expertise. The development programmes are: Globalisation of enterprises (2007-2010), Price and volume measurement (2007-2011) and Enterprise data collection development (2007-2011).

The tasks and aims of the Enterprise data collection programme are 1) to coordinate statistics and development projects, 2) to identify and evaluate development needs and 3) to share information and good practices by measurement and control of the response burden, development of sample co-ordination, and optimisation and development of standard solutions.

The overall objective of the development programme from Statistics Finland's perspective is to replace the statistics and data collection-specific sampling frames with one frame and ensure that there are standard solutions for all stages of the data collection process, and that they are in use, and to decrease the response burden.

To achieve these overall objectives, the Programme Group has started and will be involved in projects that promote and support their achievement. The main projects are:

- Development of quality assurance and automatic editing for VAT and employer payments data
- Development of the Building Cost Index

- Co-operation with large enterprises, processing of data on large enterprises and development of procedures to handle respondent relations with large enterprises
- Measurement of the response burden
- Improvement of the usability of electronic (web-based) data collection forms
- Promotion of direct data collection from the information systems of enterprises
- Development of the co-ordination of samples for statistics on enterprises
- Making the Business Register the core element for data on enterprises
- Development of the system for receiving administrative data.

2. Developing Business Data Collection

Services for respondents

Statistics Finland provides enterprises with an online service where they can log on and view which data collections they are or have been included in. To use the service, an enterprise needs its own user identifiers. The service provides information on data collections dating back to 2006, and new information is added to the service as and when a sample is drawn ([Enterprise data collection service](#)).

Another Internet service for enterprises is the Data Collections web pages. The service mainly provides a description of all the direct data collections from enterprises for the calendar year and features more than 30 respondents. Enterprises can use the site for a number of purposes: to find information on direct data collections undertaken by Statistics Finland, log in to access electronic forms, read instructions, print out hard copy forms and obtain information on the results of data collections and the statistics produced ([Data collections](#)).

The purpose of both these services is to provide information on Statistics Finland's surveys and make it easier to respond to data collections.

The use of administrative data in the production of statistics

Under the Statistics Act, the compilation of statistics must always in the first instance make use of data collected in another context. Direct data collection is only resorted to if the information is not otherwise available. Statistics Finland obtains most of the information it needs for producing statistics from existing administrative data.

The use of administrative data represents an attempt to keep the response burden of the data providers at a reasonable level. A ruling principle of a data collection is that it should be planned carefully and that only data that are absolutely necessary should be collected from respondents for the compilation of statistics. Lightening of the response burden can be accomplished by improving electronic data collection processes and by making the data that are collected widely usable.

The aims in the ‘Metadata-oriented Reception of Administrative Data’ project are rationalisation and streamlining of the reception of data flows, development of common tools for automated basic checking of data and their transfer to statistical production databases. The end product will be a harmonised system for receiving administrative data throughout Statistics Finland which will include automated basic technical data checking.

Measurement of the response burden

The response burden of all data collections from enterprises was measured once in a project which Statistics Finland had running in 2008 to 2009. This produced information about the real and perceived burdens of direct data collections. The real burden was measured by asking enterprises how much time they spent on familiarisation with the data collection, reading of instructions, retrieval and processing of the required data, and the length of time the actual answering took. They were also asked how many persons had participated in the preparatory work and in the answering. The perceived burden, in turn, was investigated by asking enterprises whether they found the answering easy or laborious, and by means of a series of diverse statements (11 in all). In addition, enterprises had the opportunity to give feedback and make suggestions for improvement.

The response burden is to be measured at regular intervals every three years or so. If the data collection process substantially changes, the measurement procedure will need to be repeated following the changes in the monthly data collections in the third round of surveys and in the annual data collection after the change in the second year. Furthermore, new data collections will be measured in the second collection round. Regular measuring will be a way to monitor trends in the response burden, both actual and perceived.

Usability testing for web surveys

The ‘Usability of Enterprise Data Collection Forms’ project (2009–2010) seeks to promote the usability of electronic forms by testing their viability and by designing improved versions of them. The aim is to establish a process model for testing electronic forms and to standardise the data collection forms as a whole. The overall goal is to gather higher quality data, minimise the response burden and get better response rates for surveys.

Promoting direct data collection from the information systems of enterprises

Statistics on accommodation establishments have been developing a system for automatic data capture direct from the respondents’ information systems. A similar data collection solution has also been used for agriculture and forestry. The objective is to discover in what data collection processes and to what sort of data collections the automatic data capture method should apply in the future. Basically, procedures should be introduced in collections which require a lot of time to respond. The most benefit might be derived from automated capture if it can be linked to firmware that is widely used by respondents.

The benefits of automated data capture are that the response burden is negligible and the data are obtained faster from the respondents. The

processing of the data and the costs arising from it fall, more time is left for the processing of the data and the quality of the eventual statistics improves.

Development of system for feedback statistics

The title of the project involved is 'Production of Feedback Statistics for Respondents in a Consistent Fashion, including Layout and Functions' (2010). At present statistical practices and methods vary. If necessary, it must be possible to customise the feedback facility for each individual respondent. Statistics Finland's new system is able provide feedback to the respondents consistently and in a manner which serves them better than before. The system is based on the PC-Axis and PX-Web software which are used in Statistics Finland's publishing system.

Co-ordination of samples in business statistics

The 'Co-ordination of Samples for Statistics on Enterprises' project (2009–2010) aims to develop a process model to evaluate the quality of samples of data collections for enterprise statistics and look for sample overlaps – which data collections feature the same companies and the same data collection timetables. The following benefits are estimated to be gained from the projects: standardisation of the data collection process will enhance the management of the data acquisition process and proactiveness, and improve the work process; improvement of the quality of statistics; a model aiming to reduce the response burden of small enterprises responding to several inquiries by distributing the response burden more evenly.

Making the Business Register the core element of data on enterprises

The aim of the 'Making the Business Register the Core Element of Data on Enterprises' project (2009-2014) is for the Business Register to become the core element of a coherent production database and enterprise statistics system, and to produce standardised business statistics from the enterprise data warehouse. In addition, harmonised procedures will be established for the reception and pre-processing of administrative data at Statistics Finland and they will be available to all who need them.

Co-operation with large companies

Statistics Finland strengthened its co-operation with large enterprises in 2009 by setting up a dedicated working group and in the spring of the year also a steering group for it. The working group has focused its efforts on the treatment of cross-boundary project assignments, examination of the impact of the shift from manufacturing to services in economic activities, processing of data on large enterprises, development of the profiling of multinational enterprises, and establishment of enterprise and international contact networks.

The working group develops procedures and tools for a consistency analysis of multinational enterprises (Grant Agreement 2010-2011) and participates in ESSnet work relating to the profiling of multinational enterprise groups. Profiling has now been done for ten or so multinational groups, and the largest enterprises (12 in all) have been analysed, and data have been compared between 2008 and 2009 statistics.

Co-operation with representatives of the business world and with other authorities

During the past few years, Finnish authorities have paid particular attention to the reporting obligations of enterprises and to ways of easing their administrative burden. In March 2009, the Government approved an action plan for 2009-2012 for reducing the administrative burden on businesses by 25 per cent from the 2006 level by the end of 2012. Statistics Finland has an active role in this Government action plan. Statistics Finland has developed from the SCM (Standard Cost Model) a lightened model inquiry version for measuring the costs and administrative burden imposed on enterprises by legislation. The inquiry has been used for measuring the administrative burdening of operating as an employer, environmental licensing procedures, food safety and quality, and priority areas of agricultural subsidies.

Statistics Finland and the business world have also a permanent liaison group which discusses the establishment of new statistics and revisions to existing ones. The group also discusses the business sector's data collection questions referred to in the Statistics Act and creates opportunities for co-operation in the development of the statistical production process.

In addition, there will be participation in projects to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of data collections by the public administration, and the development of electronic communication services, etc. will be monitored by State administration. A current example of this is the centralised 'Katso' identification system and authorisation management solution used by the Finnish Tax Administration which is to be extended to all areas of public administration. The introduction of the 'Katso' system will enable respondents to access all Statistics Finland's data collections with the same password.