

The System of Official Statistics in Sweden

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Summary

In accordance with the Swedish Constitution, government authorities in Sweden have an independent role vis-à-vis the Government. The task of a government authority is to translate political decisions reached by the Parliament and the Government into practical action.

Swedish Parliament has decided that Sweden shall have official statistics for general information, investigative activities and research and that government authority should be responsible for the official statistics. According to the decision by Parliament, the Government determines the subject areas and statistical areas for which official statistics are to be produced, and which authorities are to be given the responsibility. For the moment there are 22 different subject areas.

Statistics Sweden is a central government authority for official statistics and other government statistics. In society there always is, and has been, an increasing demand for more statistics, higher quality in statistics, statistics in new areas and specific statistics in order to reflect changes. Some users of official statistics have pointed out some criticism about influence on possibilities to make changes in official statistics and that Statistics Sweden didn't always listen to the user needs. In the middle of the 1990s a reform was implemented of Sweden's official statistics, and 25 government authorities were given responsibility for official statistics in defined sectoral areas. The responsibility for those areas were transferred from Statistics Sweden to the 24 other government authorities. Statistics Sweden continued to be responsible for multi sectoral statistics.

One of the main purposes of the 1994 statistical reform was to give the users more influence over the statistics. It was expected that the reform would result in the statistics having greater relevance to their users, that the statistical system would be more flexible and that the efficiency of statistics production would improve. In the late 90's an evaluation was performed, which showed that official statistics continued to function efficiently. However, coordination and the overall view of the statistical system had worsened. The evaluation report recommended that a Council should be established for Sweden's official statistics to improve coordination and the overall view of the statistical system. A Council for Official Statistics was duly established at Statistics Sweden in 2002.

The System for Official Statistics includes the statistics, statistical products, metadata, the production systems, final observation registers, publications, separate tables and databases. Databases can be interactive or include fixed tables that the user cannot change. The system also includes laws, ordinances, regulations, general recommendations, guidelines, tools (that are developed for the system such as methods, classifications, etc.), the statistical authorities, the Council for the Official Statistics, and Statistics Sweden as the coordinating authority.

Background

Swedish Parliament has decided that Sweden shall have official statistics for general information, investigative activities and research and that government authority should be responsible for the official statistics.

Statistics Sweden is a central government authority for official statistics and other government statistics and was established in 1858. Initially, its operations focused overwhelmingly on population statistics – Sweden began to keep population statistics in 1749 - but gradually other branches of statistics were added, such as agricultural statistics, statistics on local government finances, savings banks statistics and poor relief statistics. In the year 1962 a more thorough process of centralisation began in public statistics. Greater responsibility passed to Statistics Sweden and during the next coming 30 years almost all public and official statistics in Sweden were decided and produced by the National Statistical Office.

During this period there were increasing demands for more statistics, higher quality, statistics in new areas and specific statistics in order to reflect changes in the society. Some users of official statistics pointed out some criticism about influence on possibilities to make changes in official statistics and that Statistics Sweden didn't always listen to the user needs. Due to that, a Commission was appointed by the Government to inquire into how to create a more user-friendly system for official statistics. As a result of the inquiry there was a recommendation to reform the system of official statistics.

The structure of the statistical system

In the middle of the 1990s a reform was implemented of Sweden's official statistics. The reform implied a decentralised system for official statistics and 25 government authorities were given responsibility for official statistics in defined sectoral areas instead of a centralised system and one governmental authority responsible. Statistics Sweden continued to be the central government authority for official statistics and other government statistics and in this capacity also is responsible for coordinating and supporting the Swedish system for official statistics. It was still possible for Statistics Sweden to produce the statistics. The roll of Statistics Sweden to coordinate and monitor official statistics was strengthened.

One of the main purposes of the reform was to give the users more influence over the official statistics. The reform was expected to result in the statistics having greater relevance to their users, that the statistical system would be more flexible and that the efficiency of statistics production would improve.

In 1998 an evaluation of the reform was performed, which showed that official statistics continued to function efficiently. However, coordination and the overall view of the statistical system had worsened. The evaluation report recommended that a Council should be established for Sweden's official statistics to improve coordination and the overall view of the statistical system. In the very beginning some authorities were negative to the coordination roll of Statistics Sweden and wanted a detached organisation responsible for this. A Council for Official Statistics was established in 2002 with the purpose to improve coordination and overall view of the system for official statistics.

According to the decision by Parliament, the Government determines the subject areas and statistical areas for which official statistics are to be produced, and which authorities are to be given the responsibility.

For the moment there are 22 different subject areas;

- Agriculture, forestry and fishery
- Citizen influence
- Culture and leisure
- Business activities
- Education and research
- Energy
- Environment
- Financial markets
- Health and medical care
- Household finances
- Housing, construction and building
- Judicial system
- Labour market
- Living conditions
- National accounts
- Population
- Prices and consumption
- Public finances
- Social insurance
- Social services
- Trade in goods and services
- Transport and communications

Each subject area is divided into one or more statistical areas. In 2006 there were 107 statistical areas and 321 statistical products. There are changes in statistical areas due to user needs. A new statistical area established in 2006 in the subject area Agriculture is for example Animal health.

The statistical authorities decide on the content and scope of statistics within the statistics area(s) for which unless otherwise specified by the government. The statistical authorities also decide, in consultation with important users of the statistics and taking into account the demands made by the European Union, which objects and variables are to be studied, which statistical measurements and study domains are to be used, the periodicity of the surveys etc. Except for Statistics Sweden there is normally no special appropriation for statistics; funding for statistics is included in the authorities' appropriation framework for their main task.

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Laws, Ordinances and Instructions

The official statistics are regulated by law, ordinances and instructions. The Official Statistics Act (2001:99) states that the official statistics shall be available for public information, investigative activities and research. They shall be objective and made available to the public.

When official statistics are made available they shall be accompanied by the phrase "Official Statistics of Sweden" or a special symbol.

Collection of data from enterprises, municipalities and others by statistical authorities is regulated by, among other things, the Official Statistics Act. The statistical authorities, have informed, through various authorisations, about regulations that are directed towards enterprises and others on the implementation of the obligation to provide data. Data for the official statistics shall be collected in such a way as to make the response process as simple as possible for data providers.

The Ordinance (1988:137) with the Directive for Statistics Sweden states that Statistics Sweden shall be responsible for coordinating government statistics production, and shall work to improve coordination between the production of government statistics and the production of other statistics. It states that there shall be a Council for the Official Statistics at Statistics Sweden, and sets out the composition and tasks of the council.

In addition to laws and ordinances, there are regulations and general recommendations for the publishing of official statistics. There are also guidelines produced for the statistical authorities.

The role and responsibility of the Council for Official Statistics

The Council, which is an advisory body, shall deal with matters of principle concerning the availability, quality and usefulness of the official statistics, as well as issues on facilitating the response process for data providers. The Council shall work to improve cooperation between the statistical authorities, and to develop and manage a statistics network. It consists of one chair and six other representatives who are managers at the statistical authorities. The Council is supported by a secretariat and different workgroups. All authorities responsible for official statistics are invited to participate in the different workgroups. Due to the users of official statistics the system and the cooperation is judged to function rather well.

The duties of the Council are presented above and set out in Statistics Sweden's Directives. The authorities to be represented in the Council are appointed by Statistics Sweden after consultations with all the statistical authorities. Members shall serve on the Council for a period of not more than three years. Statistics Sweden's Director General is Chair of the Council, and the Council appoints its own Deputy-Chair.

The Council holds meetings twice a year. In February is the Council's annual report to the Government approved and in October the plans for the new report are decided on. Other items on the agenda are e.g. reports from workgroups of the Council, establishing of new workgroups and proposals to the Government for changes in the Statistics Ordinance Appendix regarding subject-matter areas and authorities. The decisions taken by the Council are normally recommendations to Statistics Sweden as the coordinator or to all the authorities.

During 2007, seven workgroups are actively working for the Council. The workgroups treat issues on giving access to data, methodology and quality, electronic publishing, statistics on sub-national levels, the costs of statistics and the costs of data-providers. The workgroups are made up of representatives for the authorities in the Council and representatives of other statistical authorities who expressed interest in this work. The workgroups are chaired by experts from Statistics Sweden. The workgroups prepare cases which are discussed and decided on in the Council.

The report from the Council for Official Statistics aims to produce an overall view of the system for official statistics and to describe the situation regarding availability, quality, and presentation of statistics broken down by sex etc.

To provide a picture of this, the statistical authorities annually complete questionnaires on the provision of data and on costs and staff who work with the official statistics. The authorities also submit a list of their active products. As a complement to this information, special measurements have been made on punctuality and production time, documentation, the use of the Official Statistics of Sweden (SOS) logotype and reporting by sex in the statistics.

The cooperation within and improvement of the system

Statistics Sweden, in its role as coordinator, has the mandate to issue regulations to statistical authorities regarding documentation, quality declarations and publication. The main coordination tool since the Council was established has been coordination by cooperation (soft coordination) and the development of a well-functioning infrastructure. Participation in the workgroups has been on a voluntarily basis and great interest in participating has been observed. Common guidelines for deciding what Official Statistics are and a definition of what a statistical product is, for sufficient quality, for preliminary statistics, for the websites at different authorities have been developed. There are specified routines for deciding on which statistics are to be official. There is a database of all Official Statistics and all changes in the statistical system are continuously registered in the database. It is therefore possible to follow a statistical product from cradle to grave.

The users have now one main single point of contact with the Official Statistics via Statistics Sweden's website, though there is a decentralised system. There are slightly more than 300 statistical products within the Official Statistics and they are described in a consistent manner on the website. There is a common publishing plan that is continuously updated and there are links to the different authorities' websites where Official Statistics are published.

To date, the cooperation has led to a common view of Official Statistics, an increase in competence, more systematic assessments related to user needs of what should be included in the Official Statistics as well as a much better overview of the content of the Official Statistics. The authorities responsible for official statistics have generally organised contact nets with their users. The availability of statistics for users who have an interest in statistics covering different areas has improved.

The work is still in an initial phase. Today we deal with aspects of statistics such as quality, documentation, response burden, use of administrative data and security of information. Other aspects will emerge in the future. The value of systematic cooperation has the potential to increase as there are mutual benefits which can be derived from the joint development of statistics and common statistical systems rather than the development of separate solutions for each authority.

List of Statistical authorities and number of products 2007

Official statistics 2007

Statistical authority	Number of statistical products for which the authority is responsible
Swedish Work Environment Authority	4
National Council for Crime Prevention	5
Swedish National Board of Student Aid	2
National Courts Administration	1
Swedish National Financial Management Authority	2
Swedish Financial Supervisory Authority	9
National Board of Fisheries	3
Swedish Social Insurance Agency	16
Swedish National Agency for Higher Education	5
Swedish Institute for Growth Policy Studies	7
Swedish Chemicals Inspectorate	6
National Institute of Economic Research	1
National Mediation Office	14
Swedish Environmental Protection Agency	9
Swedish National Debt Office	2
Swedish Forest Agency	12
National Board of Health and Welfare	27
National Agency for Education	16
Swedish Energy Agency	17
Swedish Institute for Transport and Communications Analysis	13
Swedish Board of Agriculture	22
Swedish National Council for Cultural Affairs	7
Statistics Sweden	119
Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences	1
Swedish Agency for Economic and regional growth	1
Total number of statistical products	321