

Singapore Department of Statistics

Our History

Official statistics in Singapore date back to 1871 when the first census of population was taken. Since then, censuses had been taken regularly at ten-year intervals. The Census Ordinance of 1880 constituted the first statistical legislation for Singapore.

A legal framework for the collection, preparation and publication of official statistics was put in place only in 1921 with the enactment of the Statistics Ordinance. The Statistics Ordinance provided for the establishment of a Statistical Bureau. The Bureau has developed and grown to become the Singapore Department of Statistics today.

The Singapore Department of Statistics is the central statistical authority responsible for official statistics on the Singapore economy and population. Before Singapore achieved self-government in 1959, the Department compiled almost all the statistical series. The focus was on external trade, shipping and cargo statistics and basic demographic data. The statistical activities expanded rapidly in the 1960s to cover manufacturing, commerce and service statistics. Since 1973, a decentralised statistical system has been adopted. Official statistics are collected and compiled by the Singapore Department of Statistics as well as Research and Statistics Units (RSUs) in various government ministries and statutory boards. The RSUs specialise in statistics on key areas under the purview of their parent organisations.

Singapore's Statistical System

Singapore has adopted a decentralised statistical system since 1973. The official statistics are collected and compiled by a large number of statistical agencies as well as government departments and statutory boards. The decentralised system can be perceived as a three-tiered structure, with the building blocks in each layer focusing on statistics for different facets of the economic and social life of Singapore (see Box 1 below).

Box 1: The Singapore Statistical System

Singapore Department of Statistics	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• National Statistical Authority, responsible for statistics on the Singapore economy and population;• Designated as National Statistical Co-ordinator under Statistics Act
Gazetted Research and Statistics Units	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Responsible for statistics on specific subject matters under the parent ministry's purview;• Empowered to issue requisition for data under Statistics Act
Non-Gazetted Research and Statistics Units	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Responsible for statistics on specific subject matters under the parent ministry's purview;• Collect data under administrative regulations or other Acts

Available from: <http://www.singstat.gov.sg/abtus/abtus.html#mis>
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The Singapore Department of Statistics has the widest scope of responsibility in the statistical system, being the national statistical authority for official statistics on the Singapore economy and population. In a few government ministries and statutory boards, Research and Statistics Units (RSUs) are established and gazetted to conduct surveys and compile statistics on specific sectors or subject matters. For most other ministries and statutory boards, informal statistical units undertake statistical compilation mainly as a by-product of the administrative and operational functions of the parent organisations. Details on the key responsibilities of the Singapore Department of Statistics and the RSUs are given in the sections below.

The decentralised statistical system has effectively met users' needs for comprehensive economic and social statistics in the last twenty-five years. There is closer contact and greater interaction between statistical personnel and data users in specific ministries and statutory boards, leading to more relevant statistics being collected and analysed. As administrative databases and records are increasingly being tapped for statistical purposes, an increasing range of statistics has been compiled on more timely and cost-effective basis. With the specialisation of statistical personnel in specific subject matters, the Singapore Department of Statistics and the RSUs are able to stay focused and provide statistics that are of good quality. There is a high standard of professionalism in the statistical system for official statistics.

That the decentralised system continues to function with enduring strength augurs well for Singapore. This is partly due to the co-ordinating role that the Singapore Department of Statistics undertakes in the statistical system, and partly due to legislative changes which promote the adoption of national statistical standards.