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## **The evolution of the statistical system of Norway**

### **1. Introduction**

The prime mover behind the establishment of Statistics Norway (Central Bureau of Statistics) in 1876 was the Chief of the Statistical Division of the Ministry of the Interior, Mr. A. N. Kjær. He became the first Director of Statistics Norway in the following year, and the guiding principles adopted by him for the development of Statistics Norway gave official statistics a framework that still exists to day, 130 years later.

These principles included, *inter alia*, those of a highly centralized organisation for statistical services, and the extension of the duties of the collecting agency into the fields of methods and analysis. Thus, for most periods the history of Statistics Norway also represents the history of official statistics in Norway.

For the first 25 years the emphasis was on centralization. This principle was formally accepted at an interdepartmental conference in 1881.

During the next 25 years period from around 1900, the trend was reversed. For several fields statistics based on administrative records were transferred from Statistics Norway back to the appropriate administrative body. Statistics based on direct collection of data, however, remained in Statistics Norway and new censuses and surveys added during this period. Of major importance for future work was the adoption of the Statistics Act in 1907, which was in force until 1989 when replaced by a new law.

From around 1925 onwards the trend was again reversed towards a centralized system. This was based on the recommendation a special administrative committee in 1923 and meant transferring back to Statistics Norway statistics that had been taken away during the previous period. In 1924 a decision was passed that established Statistics Norway as the final authority in all matters concerning statistics to be published in the series NOS (Norway's Official Statistics). This series had been established as early as 1861.

The years of reconstruction after 1945 and the following 25-year period represented an active period in the life of Statistics Norway. In the field of economic statistics the advent of the national accounts was in many ways the most decisive factor for further developments. The national accounting procedure provided a check on the completeness and consistency of available series that led to the establishment of standard concepts and definitions, classification standards and current registers that ensured the uniform classification of establishments in different series of economic statistics.

The establishment of a research department in 1950 indicates the increased focus on building an integrated and consistent statistical system, contributing to improved understanding of the mechanisms for social and economic development and supporting national planning.

In spite of the very satisfactory status of economic statistics as a whole at the beginning of this period, this new development required an almost complete revision of the series and the extensive use of the more advanced mechanical and electronic equipment that gradually became available during the period. The resulting gains in quality and comparability gave rise to more extensive use of official statistics for analytical purposes based on more refined methods.



Social statistics had been very much in the foreground in the early years of Statistics Norway. This field had, however, not experienced the same expansion as economic statistics during the period between the two wars. As a result more comprehensive statistics were required in this field after the last war in order to meet the increased demands for information on the various aspects of human conditions.

At the same time, considerable work was done on improving the quality of the data, in particular with respect to completeness and consistency. Like in the field of economic statistics, new and improved statistical standards played an important part in this development.

Of immense importance was the establishment of a permanent current population register and the introduction of permanent numerical identification codes for the individuals. Statistics Norway took an active part in this development and served as the central office for vital registration until 1991. This unique identification system has permitted the linkage of data for individuals from various sources and time periods, for statistical purposes.

Needless to say, the availability and increased use of modern electronic processing equipment in Statistics Norway was a prerequisite for these improved procedures. Another important development was the establishment by Statistics Norway of a permanent field organization for household and similar surveys in 1966. This opened up the possibilities for social surveys that previously had not been within the reach of Statistics Norway.

During the last 25 - 30 years the statistical system has been further developed and consolidated, not least through its integration with the European statistical system. Through the development of common identification numbers for business units from around 1990 and the development of an integrated address, dwelling and property register system linked to geographical references, a well-integrated basis for register-based statistics is accessible.

From the rather modest beginning 130 years ago, Statistics Norway has developed into a comparatively large and complex organization in order to satisfy present-day demands for official statistics of both government and the general users. The staff which in 1876 was a mere 15 all told, has increased to some 967, split on two locations, in Oslo and Kongsvinger. In addition about 187 part-time interviewers are employed.

## **2. Some main features of present day Statistics Norway**

### **The formal basis:**

Statistics Norway has its own Act - the Statistics Act of 16 June 1989.

Pursuant to the Act, Statistics Norway shall:

Identify and place in order of priority the needs for official statistics.

Coordinate comprehensive statistics, which are produced by administrative agencies.

Develop statistical methods and apply statistics to analysis and research.

Provide information for statistical use for research purposes and for public planning.

Bear the main responsibility for international statistical cooperation

The Statistics Act states that Statistics Norway is a professionally autonomous institution placed under the superior guidelines and financial framework set out by the Government and Storting (the Norwegian Parliament). This means that:

Statistics Norway is responsible for the design of the total statistics product within the guidelines and budgets as set out by superior bodies.

Statistics Norway determines which statistical methods shall be used in the production of statistics.

Statistics Norway bears the responsibility for the content of published statistics and for setting release dates.



### The obligation to provide information and the right to impose compulsory fines

The Statistics Act gives Statistics Norway the right to impose an obligation to provide information. This means that businesses in receipt of a questionnaire from Statistics Norway are obliged to return it. This provision applies to most business and industry surveys. If the information requested has not been provided within the deadline, Statistics Norway may impose compulsory fines. Most business and industry surveys carry an obligation to provide information and the right to impose compulsory fines for those who do not comply.

Participation is voluntary for the majority of surveys aimed at individuals. In such surveys the obligation to provide information is only applied to surveys of particular importance, such as the Labour Force Survey. Compulsory fines are not imposed on individuals.

### Access to administrative registers

The Statistics Act gives Statistics Norway unlimited access to a number of administrative registers, so that statistics can be produced on the basis of figures that already exist. Few countries have such high-quality administrative registers as Norway, a source of information that Statistics Norway is making more and more use of. At present Statistics Norway utilises more than 60 administrative registers in its production of statistics. The use of such registers means that Statistics Norway does not have to ask people for information that they have already given to a public body.

The central population register in the Directorate of Taxes, the Brønnøysund Register Centre's Central Coordinating Register for Legal Entities, Statistics Norway's Central Register of Establishments and Enterprises and the Norwegian Mapping Authority's Ground Property, Address and Building Register (GAB) are particularly important as, in addition to forming a basis for many statistics, they identify the most central units on which official statistics are based. In short, this includes national identity numbers for individuals, registration numbers for businesses and organisations and addresses for properties, buildings and houses.

### Data security

Statistics Norway has the duty to comply with the Personal Data Act and the rules set out by the Data Inspectorate with regard to the processing of personal data. Statistics Norway complies with the Data Inspectorate's security requirements for the processing of sensitive personal data and its routines for data protection have been developed in cooperation with the Data Inspectorate.

Statistics Norway has appointed a personal protection delegate whose responsibility it is to ensure compliance with the legislation. All employees of Statistics Norway have signed a confidentiality agreement. Confidentiality breaches are liable to punishment.

### The management of Statistics Norway

Statistics Norway is managed by an executive committee (Board) and a Director General. The Director General is responsible for the professional work and management of Statistics Norway, and reports to the Ministry of Finance. The Board decides on the strategic plan, the budget proposal and the annual work programme as proposed by the Director General.

The activities are organised in 8 departments, three statistical departments, a research department, and departments for administration, management support, dissemination and IT

### Main research areas



Statistics Norway has for many years had a considerable research activity. The main research areas are the following:

- Macro economic research, including empirical studies of the functioning and development of the Norwegian economy. The research is based on Statistics Norway's short-term statistics and national accounts data, and the development and use of econometric time series methods and models.
- Analyses of public finance and the main factors behind the development of public revenues and expenditure, such as tax income, transfers and demand for public services. Demographic conditions, participation in education and employment and the significance of various social security regulations are of great relevance to these analyses. The research also focuses on the behaviour of local government and their priorities between different service sectors and recipients.
- Micro economic research focuses on further development and the application of tax benefit models, analyses of consumer behaviour and the distributional effects of public intervention, and effects of changes in direct and indirect taxation. The functioning of the labour market and firm behaviour are covered through econometric analyses of Statistics Norway's micro data.
- Social and demographic research, where demographic development and changes in the population's economic and social living conditions are analysed. The research activities combine a micro-analytical approach focusing on demographic and socio-economic processes, with a macro level approach directed at describing changes in social and demographic structures.
- Research on energy and environmental issues, such as the environmental situation in Norway and the interaction between economic growth, energy consumption and the environment. The analyses also cover the development of national and international energy markets.
- Statistical methods, including sampling methods and non-response problems, measuring errors and methods for estimating uncertainty in statistics, linking of register-based statistics and sampling statistics, editing methods, methods for seasonal adjustment and for questionnaire design.

### **3. Some key numbers**

#### **Staff and budget (2006):**

- 967 employees, of which 578 in Oslo and 389 in Kongsvinger
- Some 187 interviewers (123 local and 64 central)
- More than 65 per cent have higher education
- Total revenues 566 mill. NOK
- Government Budget 372 mill.NOK
- Funding by users 173 mill. NOK

#### **Data collection:**

- Around 60 administrative registers
- 727 000 questionnaires (430 transmissions), Electronic transmissions: 33 per cent
- 220 000 questionnaires received in reply envelope
- Approx. 120 000 "other" questionnaires received
- Approx. 125 000 persons interviewed (per year)
- 120 000 business units receive one or more questionnaires

#### **Response burden (2006):**

- Businesses: 95 man-years
- Others: 81 man-years

#### **Output:**

- Approx. 310 different statistics
- 25 monthly statistics



- 45 quarterly
- 240 yearly

#### **Dissemination:**

The Internet is now the main channel for dissemination of statistics and the home pages of Statistics Norway have about 7 mill. "hits" every month. Release of statistics always takes place on the Internet. Last year, a total of 855 statistical releases were published.

The Internet release ensures that all users get access to the statistical releases simultaneously and implies a strict policy of non-differential treatment; ministries, the media and the public are all treated equally. To ensure that all users have equal access, all statistics made available on the web site may be used (read, copied, downloaded) free of charge. Statistics are released according to a release calendar that covers the next four months and is updated every week.

In spite of the almost explosive increase in the Internet publishing, the number of printed publications is still on a high level. After release, the statistics are published in reference publications (mainly tables and meta data) and through more analytical periodicals and research reports. Almost all printed publications are also available, free of charge, on our web site.

#### **4. Statistics Norway and other partners of the statistical system**

Even if the statistical system of Norway is highly centralized, there are some other governmental agencies producing statistics. The main producers are: National Insurance Administration, Norwegian Institute of Public Health, Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, Norwegian Labour Market Administration, Norwegian Pollution Control Authority.

Statistics Norway is responsible for coordinating statistics that are produced by governmental agencies according to the Statistics Act. Thus a Statistical Council was established in 2004 comprising 20 institutions that produces statistics or are owners of administrative registers that are important for the production of official statistics.

The Statistical Council is an advisory body, which shall contribute to the coordination of official statistics and to the establishment of requirements regarding the fundamental principles for official statistics. Furthermore it shall promote cooperation and be a forum for exchange of experiences and human resource development.

#### **5. Summing up**

Some main characteristics of Statistics Norway are:

- Strong professional independence
- A centralised statistical system - a major part official statistics produced by Statistics Norway
- A register based statistical system - but still a lot of statistics based on questionnaires and interviews
- Integrating accounting and indicator systems - national accounts, environmental accounts, energy accounts, social indicators etc.
- Important financial contributions directly from users - around 30 per cent of the total budget
- Important research activity - one of the largest social science institutes in Norway