

Selected country examples on Ensuring Continuity

The following country examples are indicative of the types of responses to COVID-19 that national statistical offices (NSOs) have employed. The examples are not intended to be an exhaustive list but only represent a small sample. The experiences were compiled from information collected by international organizations and from websites of the cited NSOs.

Australia

- The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) reduced the number of agencies and individuals attending lock-ups for market sensitive statistics.
- 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.
- ABS is revising its work program to reduce reporting required by businesses, while meeting critical information needs about business activity, changes in the economy and the impact of COVID-19. These surveys have been delayed:
 - Retail Trade Margins Index survey – delayed for the foreseeable future;
 - Bi-ennial Survey of Employee Earnings and Hours survey – from May 2020 to May 2021, and outputs delayed until January 2022;
 - Periodic Transport Industry and Activity Survey – from August 2020 to August 2021; and
 - Film, Television and Digital Games Survey – from August 2020 to August 2021.
- The ABS is exploring administrative and transactions data from the public and private sector to inform official social and economic statistics in response to COVID-19. Of particular interest is the significant potential for aggregated, de-identified transactions data from major banks to generate public value by informing official ABS estimates of business sales, household consumption and Gross Domestic Product (GDP), and assist in understanding the evolution of the Australian economy. The ABS is discussing the supply and use of the data with major banks and the Australian Banking Association (ABA). Data from major banks will be used for six months to inform official statistics in response to COVID-19, after which arrangements will be reviewed. Data received will not contain information about individuals, will only be accessed by ABS staff and will not be shared with anyone outside the ABS. The ABS is also assessing the feasibility of using energy consumption data, communication and internet usage data to inform official statistics.

Canada

- Statistics Canada is accelerating data collection in response to the urgent need for information to help the country respond to, and recover from, the social and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in Canada. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/45-28-0001/2020001/article/00021-eng.htm> -

Colombia

- The National Administrative Department of Statistics of Colombia (DANE) established an Internal Ad-hoc Emergency Committee to focus on continuity and reinforcement of monitoring of self-completion of web surveys, minimization of in-person collection operations and the adoption of additional health security protocols according to the guidelines established by the Ministry of Health and Social Protection.
(<https://covid-19-response.unstatshub.org/statistical-programmes/statistical-operations-in-colombia/>)

El Salvador

- In El Salvador, the government declared a month-long closure of key NSO activities which disrupted progress in ongoing field-based data collection and the planning cycle for the new national strategy for the development of statistics.

France

- The National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies of France (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. INSEE assured the public that it will continue to maintain the population register and the business register 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. 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. Economic developments and difficulties in data collection may however affect the quality of certain indicators. This will be systematically documented. INSEE aims to publish an analysis of the economic situation every two weeks.

Germany

- The Federal Statistical Office of Germany (Destatis) is monitoring 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 utilising 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. A reduction of active staff is expected because of the pandemic. The existing staff is "reorganised" according to the statistical priorities.

Italy

- The Italian National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT) has implemented a series of actions to ensure the continuity and quality of statistical production. The institute has reorganized data collection by sustainable acquisition techniques, innovative methodologies and use of data sources; it also provided most appropriate solutions to support statistical production processes, in full protection of workers' health.
- Official statistics are fundamental for measuring the evolution of 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 to be ready 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. A special internal task force is dedicated to organize and manage the impact of pandemic on the statistical activities. It caused the stop of some survey and the postponing of others. Istat is working using "agile works" and all the workers are connected and are working as usual. Web-meeting tools are very often used. A special part of the internal website is well-organized containing all the necessary information.

Mexico

- The National Institute of Statistics and Geography of Mexico (INEGI) reports that 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. The main challenges are:
 - Preserving the health integrity of the work team,
 - Carrying out the day-to-day work of operation, facing existing restrictions, but seeking to obtain the result by alternative methods.
 - Resolving the no response problem by alternative methods of data collection and processing.
 - Ensuring the publication of the National Consumer Price Index, defined as data of national interest.
 - Ensuring the quality and reliability of the data.

The NSO sent most of its office's employees to work at home starting March 23rd 2020, keeping just a small crew to operate. Field personnel worked on the census until March 30th 2020. On April 6th 2020 practically everyone still in the office was sent home. The contracts of its temporary employees who carry out field activities have been maintained.

New Zealand

- Collection of data by Stats New Zealand is an essential service. The data we collect is used to produce statistics such as gross domestic product (GDP), balance of payments, labour market (unemployment) and the consumers price index (CPI). To make sure we can still produce these insights, we need to keep carrying out surveys and other data collection activities.

Turkey

- In order to ensure timely publication of news bulletins and statistics, TurkStat has initiated home office working and remote access to databases has been provided. Personnel 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. Meetings and other social interactions were stopped, instead of it, video-conferences were organized. There are 26 regional offices of TurkStat (corresponding to NUTS 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. 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. Sim cards are bought each consisting of adequate minutes and internet data for interviewers in the regional offices so that they can call the respondents at home.

- 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 by reminding them with phone calls and emails. Alternative data sources like outlets' websites, e-invoice, e-archive invoice, card payments for some studies are used to fill data gaps in data collection during this Covid-19 period.
- For 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 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. 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. Survey Portal (self-completion of computer-assisted questionnaires via Web survey) and EDI (electronic data interchange) 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.

United States

- The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) - A special page devoted to COVID-19 Questions and Answers (<https://www.bls.gov/bls/bls-covid-19-questions-and-answers.htm>) has been added to the website, with information on all BLS programs, information for survey respondents, and other announcements. In addition, BLS news releases are accompanied by explanatory material on the effect of COVID-19 on data collection, response, data processing, and other issues.

UNESCAP

- The stat brief "Survey Under Lockdown: A Pandemic Lesson" prepared by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific. The brief provides an overview of maximum impact of the pandemic crisis on different data collection operations and possible responses by the national statistical offices. It also proposes a mixed-mode panel survey design to enable continuing data collection under lockdown and after pandemic situation with minimum impact on quality of survey. https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/Stats_Brief_Issue23_Apr2020_Surveys_Under_Lockdown.pdf