



Press release



Embargo: 23.03.2010, 9:15

0 Statistical basis and overviews

N° 0353-1001-30

www.fso150years.ch

150 years of the Federal Statistical Office (FSO)

Neuchâtel, 23.03.2010 (FSO) – **In this day and age no modern state should fail to provide statistics for decision makers and the general public alike. This necessity was recognised by the Federal Council in 1860, when it established the Statistical Office of the Federal Department of Home Affairs. Nowadays the wide range of themes covered by official statistics and the quantity of statistical data published is a response to the growing need of state and society for information. The FSO uses modern technology for its comprehensive data collection and publication projects, thereby making an important contribution to the development of e-government. The bilateral agreements on statistics enable improved comparability between states.**

Throughout this anniversary year, by means of various activities and events, the FSO will reflect on the past of official statistics and consider the challenges that the future will bring.

Following the establishment of the modern Federal state in 1848, the Federal Council, of which Stefano Franscini was member, felt the need for statistical information that was meaningful for the whole of the Confederation. Several other European countries already had tools for the acquisition of such information. The need for administrative and political centralisation, befitting a modern state, was becoming apparent. From 1 June 1860 this was also true for Switzerland. The "Statistical Office" began operations in Bern with three members of staff. One of its first tasks was to conduct the Population Census of 1860.

Milestones

Numerous important milestones had to be passed on the way to today's modern, internationally connected statistical service system "Swiss Statistics". In 1870, the first law governing federal statistics was passed, requiring the cantons to provide data on a regular basis. In 1891 the Statistical Office published the first edition of the Statistics Yearbook of Switzerland thus providing in one volume

a periodic, comprehensive statistical overview of Switzerland. Over the years, official statistics has incorporated the questions and concerns raised by government and society.

Important statistics on individual subjects were thus added, such as the national consumer price index, the Business or Housing Survey and the National Accounts. The things that matter to us today are reflected in the 22 main topic areas, for example in the statistics on the environment or on gender equality.

The Federal Statistical Act of 1992 strengthened the FSO as national centre of competence and coordination for statistics. The reference to the statistical mandate in Article 65 of the new federal constitution expresses recognition of the importance of statistical information. Its international comparability was one of the objectives of the bilateral agreements on statistics with the EU, integrating Switzerland into the European statistical system since January 2007.

Challenges facing statistics

Society's need for rapidly available statistics is growing, questions are becoming increasingly complex and international cooperation is steadily strengthening. Official statistics are faced with the ever-growing demands of increasing numbers of clients. Politics, government administration, the media, the economy, health, social and education systems are all asking for precise and quantitative information on the issues that concern them. The position of Switzerland in comparison with other countries and the way in which it is perceived internationally, is largely dependent upon statistical information. These statistics must be provided by Switzerland according to international standards.

However, the scope of official statistics is dictated by limited and even decreasing resources. As part of the government administration it is subject to cost cutting. In order to meet the increasing demands, official statistics has to use new technologies to the full, not least in order to reduce as much as possible the time burden that the provision of data imposes on individuals and businesses.

The statistics system in motion

As far as information is concerned, the FSO is able to respond to these numerous challenges with a diverse publication programme and from as early as 1996 has been offering a comprehensive range of simple and easily accessible statistical information on its statistics web portal.

Major, ongoing projects aim for simplified and integrated systems for surveys and information on persons and households, businesses and the education system. Easing the administrative burden on businesses as well as a more efficient use of data within the government administration (as for example with the planned business identification number, UID) are important steps towards the implementation of the Confederation's e-government strategy. Furthermore, the use of a nationwide, harmonised population register instead of a full population survey will form the basis and cornerstone of the newly designed population census in 2010 - thus bringing up to date one of the main tasks of the Statistical Office 150 years ago.

The move from Bern to Neuchâtel

On 1 June 1860 "The Statistical Office" of the Federal Department of Home Affairs had no premises of its own and was temporarily housed in the Parliament's library in Bern. This changed in 1998. A centre for Swiss statistics was established in October 1998 with the Federal Statistical Office's move from Bern to Neuchâtel. Instead of being dispersed over eleven different sites in Bern, the FSO is now united under one roof in Neuchâtel thus strengthening, in particular, communication among its 530 members of staff and the FSO business culture.

Planned activities and available information related to the FSO's 150th anniversary

Events

28 April to 2 May 2010

"Salon du Livre" in Geneva. In this anniversary year the FSO will be more present than in previous years.

22 to 28 August 2010

International Association for Research on Income and Wealth (IARIW), 31st General Conference, St. Gallen. Biennial international conference on the subjects of income, assets, national accounts, social questions and methodological aspects. The approximately 250-300 participants represent national statistics offices, international organisations and universities.

18 to 20 October 2010

- The biennial Swiss Days of Official Statistics will be held in 2010 in connection with the FSO anniversary in Neuchâtel and also at the same time as the UN's first World Statistics Day on 20.10.2010.
- Concurrently, a forum will be held on the statistical measurement of progress. The three issues raised in the Stiglitz report (economy, quality of life, environment) will be discussed again. An assessment will be made of what is being done by official statistics regarding these three issues, from the point of view of data availability as well as from the point of view of aggregate indicators.

Saturday 6 November 2010

Open Door Day at the FSO. The FSO will once again open its doors to the general public. Selected activities of the Office will be presented as well as interesting parts of the building.

Information available on the website

The FSO's anniversary website, www.fso150years.ch is full of information on the history and development of statistics in Switzerland, such as

- Digitalised versions of the Statistical Yearbook from 1891 to 1957
- "ChronoStat" - multimedia chronology of the Federal Statistical Office. An application with interactive timeline navigation presents facts, events and personalities that have marked Switzerland and in particular the FSO over the past 150 years (french and german)
- Historical data for downloading
- And much more besides.

SWISS FEDERAL STATISTICAL OFFICE
Press Office

Information:

Armin Grossenbacher, FSO, Dissemination and publications section, tel.: +41 32 71 36488

FSO Press Office, tel.: +41 32 71 36013; fax: +41 32 71 36346, email: info@bfs.admin.ch

Publication orders, tel.: +41 32 71 36060, Fax: +41 32 71 36061

Email: order@bfs.admin.ch

Further information and publications in electronic form are available on the FSO homepage:

<http://www.statistics.admin.ch>

You can subscribe to FSO press releases in electronic form (PDF format):

Subscriptions at: <http://www.news-stat.admin.ch>