

Country experience: Ireland (Chapter 19)

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19.30. The Central Statistics Office of Ireland (CSO) is the national office responsible for compiling and publishing official BOP and related statistics and for implementing the related quality assurance activities.

19.31. The surveys of manufacturing and non-financial services enterprises undertaken by CSO are designed to meet international conceptual and geographical requirements. Coverage is on a sample selection basis, those surveyed being selected on the basis of statistical register information concerning transactions with non-residents. Two types of grossing up take place in the compilation of the results. For the enterprises that report annually, an estimate is made for non-response. That estimate can vary from the last value carried forward to more complex trending/forecasting based on similar enterprises, in terms of size and type, and current market conditions. For non-coverage, a separate grossing up exercise takes place for both services and profits. Using other data sources available, such as the annual services inquiry and the census of industrial production, the enterprises and data are matched and compared and an imputation is made for non-coverage on the basis of a ratio derived by comparing the size of the overall data to the size of the unmatched data. That exercise also serves as a useful quality indicator for comparing data collected via different channels.

19.31. The survey information collected for all types of enterprises covers transactions with non-residents concerning purchases and sales of services; income flows; and transfers, as well as acquisitions and disposals of foreign assets or liabilities. In order to facilitate compilation of the wider national accounts statistics, the surveys also collect data on transactions of reporting enterprises with residents of Ireland. This allows for a wide range of edit and plausibility checks, e.g., profits earned relative to costs and sales and dividends paid relative to earnings.

19.32. The type of quarterly survey form issued to a company depends upon the type of company. The survey for manufacturing and non-financial services companies requests data on all resident and non-resident sales/purchases of services (including royalties, copyrights and licences, etc.), assets and liabilities (flows, stocks and reconciliation items) and related income transactions from companies incorporated in Ireland and Irish branches of foreign companies. Sectoral and geographic details are also required.

19.33. A qualified accountant is employed to provide advice on data queries from respondents and on the various plausibility and edit checks in place. The accountant also examines and compares the data reported on the BOP forms against the annual statutory accounts, where available. The accountant accompanies the responsible staff when they visit respondents. The major enterprises are visited at least once every two years, while smaller enterprises are visited less frequently. Enterprises are assessed on an on-going basis for their suitability for quarterly and annual reporting.

19.34. Received data are loaded into the CSO relational database where they undergo various automated consistency and plausibility checks. Further manual checking routines are carried out by statistical staff. Depending on the materiality of the identified queries, the CSO makes contact with the enterprise concerned to obtain corrections and clarifications. Once the data are verified and any further processing has been completed, the data from all surveys are assembled and the combined data subjected to further scrutiny and checking, at both the macro and micro levels. If problems are detected at that stage, the case is referred back to the data collection division, which can contact the company, if necessary, to resolve the issue. Apart from the general checking routines performed by BOP compilers, additional checking is done by a separate data consistency unit within the national accounts division. That unit carries out checks on the consistency of monthly, quarterly and annual data returned by individual large manufacturing and non-financial services companies to various CSO divisions, including the BOP division. Approximately 70 large companies or groups of companies are reviewed.

19.36. The work of the consistency unit has been extended to rationalize data collection for the 50 largest companies/groups referred to above. The large cases unit (LCU) was set up in 2010 to coordinate the surveys issued to those enterprises. An important step was to examine the various CSO data requests and to ensure that any particular item of data was only requested once from the respondent. A combined survey form for those enterprises was designed that would collect not only BOP data but also production, turnover, services, stocks and profits. The LCU is the central point of contact for those enterprises and works closely with both the enterprises and the various production divisions in the CSO to ensure the quality and consistency of data, while at the same time minimizing the burden on the respondent.

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