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STD/STESEG(2003)17



Organisation de Coopération et de Développement Economiques
Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

10-Jun-2003

English - Or. English

STATISTICS DIRECTORATE

**STD/STESEG(2003)17
For Official Use**

OECD Short-Term Economic Statistics Expert Group

STATISTICS AUSTRIA (ST.AT)

**SHORT-TERM ECONOMIC STATISTICS
REDUCTION OF COST AND REPORTING BURDEN**

Paris, 26 - 27 June 2003

*Prepared by Statistics Austria
www.statistik.at*

JT00145806

Document complet disponible sur OLIS dans son format d'origine
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STATISTICS AUSTRIA (ST.AT)

SHORT –TERM ECONOMIC STATISTICS

REDUCTION OF COST AND REPORTING BURDEN

Vienna, May 2003

INTRODUCTION

The presented paper gives a brief but comprehensive overview on national practices to reduce cost and response burden, both for Statistics Austria and respondents referring to short term economic statistics.

The reduction of response burden is given more and more attention in statistical work. Therefore this topic can also be found in the Austrian statistical legislation:

- General Framework : “[Bundesstatistikgesetz 2000](#)”¹ (BGBl. I Nr. 163/99)
- Concerning STS

Production sector (NACE-sections D to F): [Konjunkturstatistik im Produzierenden Bereich BGBl. II Nr. 210/2003](#)²

Service statistics (NACE-sections G to K): [Konjunkturstatistik im Dienstleistungsbereich BGBl. II Nr. 233/2003](#)³

A. SAMPLE DESIGN

→ Reduction of sample sizes and rotation of reporting units where possible

Production sector (NACE-sections D to F): Enterprises with at least 20 persons employed are selected. Taking into account that 90% of national production at NACE Rev.1 class should be represented, the size threshold may be lowered (with a minimum size of 10 persons employed). Enterprises with less than 10 persons employed are excluded for reducing the burden on smaller businesses as much as possible.

Service statistics (NACE-sections G to K)

Statistics on trade and repair (NACE G): Also in this sector Statistics Austria reduces the sample size as much as possible. About 8% of the population are in the sample. The sampling procedure applied is in accordance with a systematic stratified sampling in the course of which the sampling units were arranged within the strata. In the stratum with the largest units all enterprises are asked. For the rest of the units a yearly rotating sample is implemented to reduce the response burden for smaller and medium-sized enterprises.

For example currently there has been reduced the sample size of statistics on Retail Trade and Repair from 6 500 survey units to 4 600.

Other Services (NACE H,I,72,74): Using of administrative sources (see [related chapter](#))

¹ http://www.statistik.at/_institution/bundesgesetz.shtml

² <http://www.bgbl.at/htmlausgabe.aspx?ID=10978>

³ <http://www.bgbl.at/htmlausgabe.aspx?ID=11021>

B. USE OF ADMINISTRATIVE DATA

The use of administrative data as far as possible is a new and important strategy at Statistics Austria, which is also described by the new national statistical legislation (see chapter "[Introduction](#)").

- At present:
- Use of social security data for the monthly employment index in the service sector
- In the future:
 - Use of social security data as far as possible for the production and service sector (starting with the sample surveys: January 2003 onwards)
 - Use of other administrative data, e.g. monthly VAT reports. Since January 2003 in Austria the monthly VAT advance return to the tax authority is reintroduced, which is obligatory to enterprises. The usability of the new secondary sources will be analysed in the near future. For "Other Services" (NACE H,I,72,74) ST.AT plans to use monthly VAT for the quarterly turnover index starting the 3rd quarter 2003 as reference period (according to the national derogation request⁴)

Basic condition for the use of administrative data is the correlation of the units of the register of enterprises (UR - "Unternehmensregister") with the units of the secondary sources. The quality of the data depends of the quality of the linkage of the different registers. At the moment the Austrian register of enterprises has widely been correlated to the units of social security administration and also to fiscal units (different tax numbers).

⁴ COMMISSION REGULATION (EC) No 606/2001 of 23 March 2001 on implementing Council Regulation (EC) No 1165/98 concerning short-term statistics as regards derogations of Member States

C. NEW DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUES / NEW PROCESSING PROCEDURES

→ Electronic Questionnaire e-Quest

E-Quest has been developed by Statistics Austria in cooperation with a specialised company and was especially designed for complex surveys; control routines and database access are available already for respondents. More detailed information is provided at <http://www.statistik.at/equest/equest.shtml> or by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (<http://www.unece.org/stats/documents/2002/02/edr/15.e.pdf>).

→ Web Interface (“Webformular”)

For surveys with only few data to transmit a web interface has been found to be the optimal solution. In the year 2002 retail trade, repair and wholesale trade companies were invited to use the internet as monthly reporting possibility in STS (<http://www2.statistik.gv.at/kjhweb/kjh.jsp>). After about one year already 50% of the reporting units are responding this way. Another 25% of the retail units have chosen to use fax and only a quarter of the enterprises uses still paper forms in this sector. The production sector is also planning to introduce an online-questionnaire in 2004. Due to the complexity in that sector the implementation will be limited to smaller enterprises with less than 20 employees.

→ E-mail

In order to shorten times of dispatching e-mail communication is used at Statistics Austria, wherever possible (for example e-mail reminders).

→ Electronic Data Processing

Electronic tools for data processing and plausibility checks are already available at Statistics Austria. Nevertheless new harmonized and further improved data processing methods for incoming survey data are important development projects in the future.

→ Scanning of paper questionnaires

It is planned to scan all incoming non-electronic questionnaires as base condition for full electronic further processing. As the project will start in the future, experiences are not yet available.

D. IMPROVING RESPONDENT - COOPERATION

The need for fast and reliable statistics demands the co-operation and help of the business community. ST.AT is working hard to have a good relationship to the reporting units. Some of the measures used are listed below:

→ Free information for respondents

Respondents have free access to survey results via Internet.

(<http://www.statistik.at/netquest/index.shtml>) .

→ Co-operation with the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber

Since April 2001 the always good co-operation with the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber was reconfirmed by a cooperation-contract.

→ Monitoring of burden on enterprises (“Belastungsbarometer”)

In co-operation with the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber an own survey, based on telephone-interviews, has been launched for measuring the burden on business. Final results are not yet available.

→ Use of new reporting technologies

To reduce the response burden new reporting technologies are tested and used. See also point [C](#).

→ New respondents

Special attention is given to new respondents of STS – samples. Detailed background information in the beginning tries to communicate the sense of valuable statistical data also for the response unit itself. Statistics Austria is in good contact with the respondents. As a matter of course a help- desk is available via mail or telephone.