

Third Meeting
of the Voorburg-Group
on Statistics of Services
to be held from 4 to 6 October 1988
in Wiesbaden

Conception of a pilot sample survey in the sphere
of service enterprises

1. Objectives of the pilot sample survey

In the industrialized national economies, the share of the service sector in the gross national product and in employment has been strongly increasing in recent years. Within the service sector, the business services are developing most dynamically. The statistical recording of the economic situation has not been in phase with this development. Especially in the sphere of modern business services, the overall statistical picture of many countries is still incomplete.

Bearing this in mind, the Federal Statistical Office, upon request of the Federal Minister of Economics, is conducting a pilot sample survey concentrating on enterprises offering modern business services. The main purpose of this pilot survey is the methodological preparation of comprehensive statistics of services on the basis of individual legal foundations.

With regard to this objective, the pilot survey is to examine

- the distribution of the enterprises to be covered according to the branch of economic activity, the size and other structural characteristics,

- to what extent a statistical survey based on voluntary participation can cover these enterprises,
- how the survey procedure and instruments have to be organized,
- what quality of results can be expected.

In addition, the Federal Ministry of Economics and the Federal Statistical Office hope to obtain first benchmark data on the progressively growing sphere of business services.

2. Elements of the pilot sample survey

With a view to the above objectives concerning the contents, the methods and the procedures of the survey, the statistical units and the branches of survey have been selected, and the sampling frame, the sample design and the characteristics to be covered have been determined.

2.1 Statistical units and branches of survey

In the Federal Republic of Germany, enterprises are the most important statistical units of official economic statistics. They also form the basis for the pilot sample survey of services. The studies that have been carried out so far moreover revealed that the differences between enterprises and other statistical units (e.g. establishments, local units) are far less important for the service sector than for production industries. In order to confirm these findings, the pilot sample survey of services covers the relation between the enterprise and its establishments.

According to an agreement with the Federal Minister of Economics, the pilot survey is limited to the sphere of modern business services. On the basis of the draft classification of services which has been drawn up by the Federal Statistical Office, the following individual spheres are included:

- data processing
- tax consulting
- business and management consulting

- technical planning and consulting
- research and development
- advertising
- renting of moveables, incl. leasing

Units of the sampling frame can only be included in the pilot sample survey if the emphasis of their economic activity seems to be to produce for third parties services belonging to the above-mentioned spheres.

2.2 Sampling frame

Since the microdata from the 1987 Census of Non-Agricultural Local Units were not available in time, the establishment file kept by the Federal Institute for Employment has been chosen as the sampling frame for the pilot sample survey of services. In the case of a one-time survey, the material from the Census of Non-Agricultural Local Units would certainly have provided the best possible sampling frame. If, however, periodical statistics of services are to be conducted later on, the sampling frame will have to be kept up-to-date, and this cannot be warranted as yet.

2.3 Design of the sample survey

The pilot survey will be conducted in the form of a representative random sample. Since four federal Laender (North Rhine-Westphalia, Baden-Wuerttemberg, Bavaria, Berlin (West)) are participating in the survey, it was obvious right from the beginning that a stratified multi-stage sampling method should be applied. Stratification characteristics are the Land, the branch of economic activity and the number of employees.

The aim is to include a net total of at least 4,000 units in the sample. In order to achieve this aim, the method chosen offers the possibility in the case of differing response rates to cover individual strata once again in a follow-up procedure. By using this method it is possible to reach the pre-set net total of statistical units in the individual strata.

2.4 Characteristics to be covered

The first question covers the relation between the enterprise and its establishments. For the second question, the enterprise is required to assess its main economic activity and to allocate it to a field of business activity. Another survey characteristic is the year of foundation. This information can later on be used to establish the age structure of the enterprises belonging to this service sector. For this question it has moreover to be stated to what extent the foundation of this enterprise or establishment is due to a spin off of specific functions from an already existing enterprise of production industries. This phenomenon has recently been gaining in importance. Another question relates to the employment structure of the enterprise or establishment. Free-lance employees are also covered by this question. The cost factor which is recorded includes gross wages and salaries. The sum total of turnover has to be indicated in Deutsche Mark, while for the analysis by individual types of services the relevant percentages should be given. Moreover, there is a question on fixed capital formation which covers both purchased fixed assets and rented and leased fixed assets.

In accordance with its pilot character, the survey also includes questions about the survey questionnaire. They are to establish which questions have created the greatest difficulties, for which perhaps even more detailed explanations would be necessary and which should be more differentiated or more concise.

3. Time schedule and organization of the pilot sample survey

The time schedule for the pilot survey is being determined by the subsequent activities in connection with the preparation of an individual legal foundation for the comprehensive statistics of services. It is intended to complete the pilot survey early enough to be able to integrate the methodological findings of the pilot survey into the legal foundation and to pass this foundation still in this legislative period. Since these activities will have to be completed in 1989, the latest possible date that can be envisaged for the completion of the pilot survey is spring 1989.

The Federal Statistical Office started the preparations in October 1987. The four participating statistical offices of the Laender completed the fieldwork in August 1988. The processing and evaluation of the pilot survey will take about half a year.

As far as we can say today, it will be possible to successfully complete the pilot sample survey with regard to the objectives that have been aimed at and the survey will provide data which are important for the conception of comprehensive statistics of services and for the contents of the legal foundations. In addition, first benchmark data on the included service sectors will be available by the end of the year.