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Theme 2

**LIST OF ADMINISTRATIVE SOURCES TO OBTAIN STATISTICAL DATA
AND THE INTERNATIONAL COMPARABILITY**

Supporting paper submitted by the National Statistical Service of Greece

Introduction

1. It is a fact that always growing efforts are being made to use administrative sources, in order to generate statistical data, decreasing thus the businesses burden for supplying the statistical authority with corresponding data. Attempt is made below to look at important aspects of the subject, to conclude to a system where the administrative sources, records etc. will be the basis for generating statistical data, comparable at national and international levels, with a corresponding decrease of the businesses response burden.

Definition

2. Administrative data mean information systematically collected and processed on a nominal and not anonymised basis by the administrative authorities, such as: Income tax returns, records of social Securities Organisations, cadastre records, population registers maintained by local authorities, registers of manpower organisations etc.

Use, positive- negative aspects

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3. The above-mentioned administrative data serve administration purposes (Ministries, Social Security Organisations, Banks, Chambers of Industry and Commerce, Educational Institutions, Professional Associations etc), can, however, under certain prerequisites be used for statistical purposes. The resort to the administrative sources and records to generate statistical data is facilitated by

- The increasing unwillingness (persons, businesses) to participate in the surveys of the statistical authority (and particularly in surveys on voluntary basis).
- The technical possibilities that make easy the generation of the information from the administrative sources and records.
- The lower cost for the production of information
- The regular and analytical (in specialisation and geographic analysis) information they contain.

4. The factors impeding the use of administrative sources and records for statistical purposes include:

(a) the non-accessibility of the statistical authority to the administrative sources for confidentiality reasons or lack of relative legislation.

(b) lack of cooperation between administrators and statisticians.

(c) serious drawbacks of the administrative data and records, such as:

- Application of different concepts and definitions (as compared to those used by the statistical authority).
- Different coverage
- Lower quality of variables of limited interest for the administration authority, but of major importance for the statistical authority.
- Lack of comparability at national and international levels.

Prerequisites for using administrative sources and records to generate statistical data

5. The use, or the extension of use of administrative sources and records to generate statistical data, can be achieved nationally, after ensuring the following prerequisites:

First : Identification and recording of the administrative sources and records and of their content, and their careful evaluation to determine their suitability for statistical uses.

Second: Allowing the statistical authority by law- in case it does not exist – to have access to the administrative sources and records and generate from them data.

Third: Institutionalisation of the cooperation on a permanent basis of administrators and statisticians, that would aim mainly at harmonising the administrative data with the concepts and definitions of the statistical authority, the use of statistical classifications etc and generally at servicing the statistical authority to the most possible extent.

Harmonisation ex ante or ex post

6. In most cases the administrative authorities act independently and consequently the data collected and processed or the records, registers etc compiled in the course of their administrative functions, use concepts and definitions different from those applied by the statistical authority. This is so since the administrative record system, registers etc are not designed for statistical purposes. The concepts and definitions, the scope and coverage, the content etc. are formulated on the basis of concrete requirements in data that shall be used to take administrative measures or proceed to administrative actions affecting persons, business, establishments etc. Example: Different definition of the unemployed according to the Employment Offices, from that used in a labour force survey. As already mentioned, in order to use administrative data, records etc for statistical purposes as well, these should be harmonised with the statistical concepts and definitions. Theoretically this harmonisation should precede the compilation of administrative data, which, in turn, implies that:

- The «statistical» concepts and definitions serve the administrative authorities, so that they are acceptable
- The administrative authorities accept their application even if this means additional burden in material and human resources.

7. In cases the above can not be realised, the solution lies in the ex post harmonisation of data. This has some disadvantages, since to implement it, there is need of certain assumptions (with unfavorable impact on the quality of data) and in addition it leads to an increase of the workload of the statistical authority.

8. An equally important aspect is the quality of administrative data and records, whose check by the statistical authority is impossible or at least difficult. However, the administrative data, before being used for statistical purposes, should be checked by the statistical authority, a procedure that burdens the latter and has impact on the reliability of the data.

9. In our view, and on the basis of our experience from the use of the Register of Businesses subject to the value added tax (maintained by the taxation authority), the administrative sources records, registers etc are useful for generating statistical data, when this can be done with the least burden of the statistical authority. If the latter is obliged to resort to quality checks, corrections, additions and combination of data etc through time-consuming procedures, the usefulness of the administrative sources becomes doubtful. The National Statistical Service of Greece (NSSG) is obliged to carry out time-consuming surveys and use additional sources, in order to make to VAT Register fit for statistical uses (mainly as a frame for drawing samples of enterprises and establishments).

10. The decrease of the response burden of businesses is offered as a basic argument for using administrative sources, records, registers etc (though it is beyond any doubt that the businesses' response burden for supplying data to the statistical authority, fill questionnaires etc, is much less as compared to the burden for satisfying the requirements of other agencies: ministries, banks, research institutes etc).

11. In this connection the following remarks should be made:

- The response burden refers mainly to the big enterprises falling in the certainty strata of the

statistical surveys, which are surveyed continuously (in contrast with the other strata where the sample businesses can be rotated).

- The response burden can be significantly limited by unifying the questionnaires, by applying modern techniques in data capturing (electronic questionnaires, specific software for capturing easily data from the accounting books etc) however the changes of the accounting systems constitute a major problem.
- The response burden should account for the businesses' participation in the (high) cost for the production of the statistical information, use of which they make to promote their activities.

Practical approach

12. Initially, and on national level, the administrative sources and records from which, in theory, statistics falling in the work area of the statistical authority could be generated, should be identified and recorded. However, we can not speak of international comparability of data generated from administrative sources, before answering, at national level, the following questions:

- Are the content and the concepts/definitions applied, compatible with the statistical requirements?
- Do they possess the desirable degree of accuracy?
- Is the access to the administrative sources and records permitted and if yes under which conditions
- Does the use of administrative data lead finally to the decrease of the businesses' response burden?
- Is it advantageous from the cost aspect, the adjustment of the administrative data, to generate statistical data?

13. It should not be considered a priori that the administrative data are accurate, because they are used by the administration to exercise policies affecting persons, households, businesses etc.

14. Then, and on the basis of the above information there should be compiled the list of administrative sources and records and within them the list of variables that can be used for statistical purposes, **following (eventual) small scale interventions to make them fit for these purposes.**

15. The administration data of enterprises constitute a separate category and certainly the bookkeeping systems and the accountant practices play an essential role in ensuring international comparability. However, we consider more important the other types of sources, namely:

- The Central Government
- The local and regional governments
- The specific Agencies (Social Security Organisations, Manpower Organisations, Banks etc.).

16. The resort to the administrative records of businesses decreases their response burden for the statistical requirements, but does not write it off. On the contrary the generation of statistical data from the other administrations and their combination will save the enterprises from the workload to supply data (at least for certain variables).

17. The N.S.S.G. by means of a Law has ensured access to the state registers and records,

maintained in writing, electronically, magnetically or in similar means of the wider public sector, as well as to all tax and customs' records of the Ministry of Finance. According to the Law's provisions data collected by the N.S.S.G. from the a/m sources are considered confidential and are exclusively used for the generation of statistical data.

18. Answers to the basic questions regarding the use of administrative sources, records etc. to generate statistical data (see par. 6 of the report), can give relative specialised studies.

19. For countries, lacking or having limited experience, the problem can be handled on a longterm perspective, and in cooperation with countries having experience.

Conclusions

- The administrative sources can provide statistical data
 - In most cases, interventions are needed, to make the data from these sources fit for statistical uses. The interventions refer mainly to:
 - The concepts and definitions used
 - The compatibility with the statistical requirements
 - The comparability
 - It is useful, when designing the systems for administrative records etc, to take into account the statistical requirements, so that the ex post interventions be avoided. In this way, both the data quality and the lower production cost are ensured. This however is difficult taking into consideration the spirit of autonomous action prevailing in the civil services. To implement this assumption, there is need of strong political will and functional structure, with predominant post of a coordinating instrument.
 - In case the generation of statistical data from administrative sources costs much less than their direct collection from businesses and without burdening them, the question is raised whether is it more advantageous to use the administrative sources, even making some concessions as regards the data quality (accepting in other words a lower comparability and reliability).
 - The extent to which the use of administrative sources increases the workload of the statistical authority depends on the extent of interventions required to make the administrative data fit for statistical uses.
 - The elaboration of international standards, certainly facilitates the use of administrative sources for statistical purposes, and particularly those referring to:
 - the statistical protection techniques
 - the conceptual coordination
 - the coherence of concepts used
 - the provision of legal conditions for use.
20. The elaboration of international standards for bookkeeping systems, techniques and for safe

guarding the consistency in time seem to be premature.
