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**THE SYSTEM OF OFFICIAL STATISTICS IN SWEDEN
COORDINATION THROUGH COOPERATION**

Invited paper submitted by Statistics Sweden¹

SUMMARY

1. In 1994, the responsibility of statistics connected to different authorities' fields of activity was transferred from Statistics Sweden to the authority concerned. Statistics Sweden kept the responsibility of multi-sectoral statistics and its coordinating function. The main objective of the reform was to increase user influence. The authorities can produce official statistics within their own organisation or they can entrust the services of an expert, such as Statistics Sweden. Today, Statistics Sweden is responsible for about 40 percent of the number of products but for slightly more than 80 percent of the production of official statistics.
2. An evaluation of the statistical reform in 1999 concluded that in many cases an increased user influence resulted in better control of quality, higher relevance and better usefulness. However, the division of responsibility for statistics between many different statistical authorities had resulted in a less coordinated system. It was recommended that a Council for Sweden's Official Statistics be established in order to improve the coordination of official statistics.
3. The Council for Official Statistics was established in 2002. The Director General of Statistics Sweden is the chairman of the Council, and six other Director Generals for other authorities responsible for parts of official statistics are members. The Council has an advisory function and shall consider matters of principle regarding access to, and the quality and

¹ Paper prepared by Gunilla Lundholm.

usefulness of, official statistics, as well as issues on facilitating the response process for data providers. The Council will prepare an annual report on official statistics and will also prepare an annual publishing plan.

4. The approach Statistics Sweden has chosen in its coordinating function is to encourage “soft” coordination. This means encouraging discussions and trying to reach consensus before decisions rather than issuing regulations. For all decisions taken by the Council, there has been the possibility for an in-depth and exhaustive examination of the subject matter by the authorities. There is on-going dialogue within the statistical system on matters concerning official statistics. Working groups, an annual conference, seminars and courses, common study tours, etc. promote dialogue which is vital to the implementation of common regulations and guidelines and continuous statistical development.

5. So far, this approach to the coordination of Swedish official statistics has been successful. The cooperation between the authorities responsible for official statistics and the transparency and efficiency of the system has improved. However, there are still many problems to solve and many possibilities for improvement.

Background

6. Up until the mid-1990s, the system of official statistics in Sweden was centralised. A reform was implemented in 1994, transferring the responsibility for about 50% of official statistics, for which Statistics Sweden had previously been responsible, to other government authorities. This primarily concerned statistics connected to the different authorities’ fields of activity (e.g. agricultural statistics, school statistics and crime statistics). Statistics Sweden continued to be responsible for multi-sectoral statistics, such as economic statistics, labour market statistics and welfare statistics, and kept its function as coordinator. The main objective of the reform was increased user influence with the aim of obtaining more relevant statistics, a more flexible system of official statistics, and more effective production of statistics.

7. An important component of the reform was a clearer process to enable a decision on what is official statistics. Today, the government determines for which subject areas and statistical areas official statistics are to be produced and which government authorities are to be responsible for the statistics (see annex). These authorities (hereafter referred to as “statistical authorities”) decide on the content and scope of the statistics in their areas of responsibility. Means for statistics production are included in the authorities’ annual budgets. However, they do not necessarily produce the statistics themselves. The decisions on content and scope are made in consultation with important users of the statistics, and with organisations that represent data providers, taking into account the special decisions made by the government or requests from the EU.

8. The reform of the Swedish statistical system gave the statistical authorities the opportunity to freely choose who would take care of the production of their statistics. The authority can produce statistics within their own organisation or they can entrust the production to the services of an expert, such as Statistics Sweden. In the case of Statistics Sweden, the authority can do so without inviting tenders from other suppliers, as would be the case if the authority turned to a supplier outside the government sector. In the reform of official statistics, Statistics Sweden kept the responsibility for coordination.

9. Today there are barely 300 statistical products (surveys) within the system of official statistics. Statistics Sweden is fully responsible for 115 products but also produces 102 of the products for which other authorities are responsible. 67 surveys are produced by the authority responsible for those statistics, 10 surveys are produced by private suppliers and 2 products are produced by authorities not responsible for official statistics. In economic terms, Statistics Sweden accounts for slightly more than 80 percent of the production of official statistics, including coordination costs, some costs for research and development, scientific library, etc.

10. The total cost of official statistics in Sweden is estimated at about EUR 70 million for 2003. There are approximately 900 people in the different authorities working on the production of the official statistics.

11. An evaluation of the statistical reform was carried out in 1998 on the instruction of the government. The evaluation concluded that, in all important aspects, official statistics continued to function efficiently after the reform. In many cases an increased user influence resulted in better control of quality, a higher relevance and better usefulness. However, the division of responsibility for statistics between many different statistical authorities had resulted in a less coordinated system, and the overall view of the statistical system had worsened. It was recommended that a Council for Sweden's Official Statistics be established in order to improve coordination of the statistical system.

COORDINATION OF OFFICIAL STATISTICS IN SWEDEN

12. Statistics Sweden is responsible for coordinating the production of national statistics including developing statistical nomenclatures and classification standards. The objectives for the coordination are that official statistics shall be uniform regarding methods, definitions, metadata, objects, processes, access to data for users, publishing and websites, independent of responsible authority and producer. The coordination work is supported by laws, ordinances, regulations, and guidelines and by Statistics Sweden.

Regulations

13. According to the Official Statistics Ordinance, the statistical authority shall provide documentation and quality declarations for official statistics and shall, free-of-charge, make public these statistics and make them universally accessible in electronic form over a public network. Statistics Sweden may specify detailed regulations, following consultations with all the statistical authorities.

14. Statistics Sweden has issued detailed regulations and general guidelines for the publishing of official statistics. The concept "regulations" implies that they are binding. The main items in the regulations are:

- Statistical authorities shall produce up-to-date descriptions of the statistics. These descriptions shall contain a quality declaration and general information regarding the statistics. The template is provided by Statistics Sweden;
- The descriptions shall be officially released at the same time as the official statistics and be made available to the public together with the official statistics;
- Official statistics shall be documented to a sufficient extent to facilitate future use of the stored data. The template is provided by Statistics Sweden;

- To ensure equal treatment of users, official statistics shall be released as soon as they are produced and shall be available to all users at the same time.

The Council for Official Statistics

15. A Council for Official Statistics was established at Statistics Sweden in 2002. The role of the Council is, according to the Ordinance containing Directives for Statistics Sweden:

“.....Statistics Sweden shall have a Council for Official Statistics. The Council shall have an advisory function and shall consider matters of principle regarding access to, and the quality and usefulness of, official statistics, as well as issues on facilitating the response process for data providers.

The Council shall prepare an annual report on official statistics, prepare an annual publishing plan and maintain a register of the statistical authorities and the products. The Council shall encourage cooperation between statistical authorities and the development and management of a statistical network.”

The Directive also states that, “The Council shall consist of a chair and six other members. Statistics Sweden’s Director General shall be the chair of the Council. The Council shall appoint a deputy chair from among its members. The other members of the Council apart from the chair shall be appointed by Statistics Sweden, after consultation with all the statistical authorities, for a term of not more than three years.”

16. The matters dealt with so far by the Council are the Council’s rules of procedure, appointments of working groups for areas of most vital importance, the establishment of a network of contact persons at the statistical authorities and the decision on Statistics Sweden’s instructions and general guidelines on publishing official statistics. The Council has ordered two inquiries: one on the common use of microdata and one on technical cooperation in the production of statistics. The Council has also decided on routines for informing on and discussing proposals on changes in the responsibility for statistics and proposals on subject matter areas, and has conducted two follow-ups of official statistics. Annual reports on official statistics for 2002 and 2003 have been delivered to the government.

17. A secretariat for the Council was established at Statistics Sweden with staff resources corresponding to 2,5 full-time employees. The main tasks are to support the Council’s work including the follow-up, maintenance of the Extranet for statistical authorities, the Swedish Statistics Net (SSN) and the database of statistical products, the production of annual reports and publishing plans, organisation of the annual conference and study visits, and the initiation of seminars.

18. The agenda and documents for the Council's meetings are distributed to all statistical authorities. Views on the agenda and the documents are to be submitted to the secretariat two days in advance of the meeting. Other views and ideas within the Council's field of activity can be delivered to the secretariat for further preparation. Some of the ideas may be placed as items on the agenda of a Council meeting and some are dealt with in other ways.

The annual report

19. The annual report from the Council for Official Statistics² aims to give a report on the Council's actions during the year, to present an overview of the system of official statistics, and to describe the extent to which goals relating to documentation, availability, quality, and presentation of statistics broken down by gender and the response burden are met.

20. To provide this overview, all the statistical authorities complete a questionnaire for each statistical product concerning the workload of the respondents, use of the Official Statistics of Sweden (SOS) logo and details of costs and staff who work on the official statistics.

21. To complement the results of the questionnaire, details were also submitted concerning documentation, statistics disaggregated by sex, punctuality and production time of the data. These details are based on measurements by Statistics Sweden and the Council's secretariat.

Publishing plan

22. Under the provisions of the Ordinance containing Directives for Statistics Sweden, the Council for Official Statistics is to produce an annual publishing plan. The Council's secretariat is responsible for preparing this publishing plan, which is to cover all official statistics, and making it available to the public in electronic form over a public network. The plan is made available every year, in December, on the Swedish Statistics Net website and contains a list of all official statistics to be published during the following year with links to the statistics.

Working groups

23. Since the establishment of the Council, four working groups have been set up. The working groups are made up of representatives from the authorities in the Council and representatives from other statistical authorities that have expressed interest in the relevant area. The Council is free to establish as many working groups as they consider necessary. The limitations come from the workload for statistical authorities, as most of them have very small statistical departments.

² Official Statistics of Sweden – Annual Report 2003 from the Council for Official Statistics is published on Statistics Sweden's website and can be ordered in a printed version by e-mail birgitta.tillquist@scb.se. In the report you can, for example, find information on the Council's work and a full text version of laws and rules concerning official statistics in Sweden.

The working group for giving access to data

24. This is a permanent working group, which addresses matters related to giving access to data. According to the directive for the group, their tasks include producing a description of the ways in which the statistical authorities make data available to the users and which user groups can have access to data. A first report has already been approved by the Council. The tasks of the group also include discussing ways of reconciling user needs and the potential benefits of research, on the one hand, and the demand for secrecy and the maintenance of integrity on the other. The group shall also deal with ethical issues arising in connection with granting access to data. The working group should aim to produce common guidelines for granting access to data and for pricing.

The working group for methods and quality issues

25. This is another permanent working group and, according to its directive, it shall focus on methodology issues related to the production of official statistics. One of its main tasks is the exchange of information and human resources development. Looking at quality issues in official statistics is another important task. The working group has so far organised a workshop on the mapping of processes and a one-day session on methodological issues at the latest annual conference on official statistics of Sweden. The group has appointed an ad hoc working committee to develop a human resources survey for the Swedish statistical system.

The working group for electronic publishing

26. This working group shall address both the continued development and management of the Swedish Statistics Net and the further question of electronic publishing. According to its directive, the group shall take initiatives to increase the availability of official statistics via the authorities' websites, for example by producing guidelines for the statistical authorities' statistical pages. The working group is to produce its final report in 2004.

The working group for developing guidelines for decisions on the contents and scope of official statistics

27. The directive for this working group outlined its task as that of producing a description of the standards that should be required of official statistics, and what rules should govern their definition. The group should also propose guidelines for the way the statistical authorities should apply these rules. The work of the group was based on existing laws, regulations and recommendations within the subject matter area. The result of the group's work has been compiled in a memorandum containing guidelines for decisions on the content and scope of official statistics and the demands that should be made of the statistics. These guidelines are discretionary, and should be regarded as support for the work of the authorities.

Reports on statistical coordination

28. Statistics Sweden regularly issues reports on statistical coordination, for example the guidelines for decisions on the contents and scope of official statistics, recommendations for quality declarations, recommendations for classification of causes of death and more.

The Extranet for the system of official statistics in Sweden

29. The information and communication within the system of official statistics is carried out via an electronic network, accessible to Statistics Sweden and the other statistical authorities and the Government. It contains laws and regulations, a list of statistical products, contact information, memoranda from working groups, information on seminars, information on tools for the production of statistics and more.

The Conference on Official Statistics

30. There have so far been two annual Conferences on Official Statistics. The Council for Official Statistics commissions Statistics Sweden to arrange the conferences. The purpose of the conferences is to provide an opportunity for people who work on official statistics, users of statistics and producers of statistics to meet and exchange experiences. There have been international contributions at both conferences, with representatives from Statistics Canada, the Office for National Statistics in the UK and Statistics Norway.

Seminars

31. Seminars concerning statistical and IT methodology, open to statistical authorities and to other producers of statistics, are frequently arranged by Statistics Sweden. As a complement to these, the Council's secretariat arranges some seminars with special focus on improving the coordination.

Courses

32. Participants from statistical authorities are invited to courses arranged by Statistics Sweden, on the payment of a fee.

Study visits

33. One of the tasks of the secretariat is to arrange study visits to examine other statistical systems, with the aim of learning from the systems in other countries. Representatives from all statistical authorities are invited. One visit has been arranged so far, in which representatives from Statistics Sweden and other statistical authorities visited the Office for National Statistics (ONS) in London.

Bilateral cooperation and support

34. An important role for the Council's secretariat is dialogue with statisticians in statistical authorities. This involves advice on many different subject matters. For example, how to decide which statistics to include in official statistics? What to include in the documentation? What to think about when organising a user council? Where to find instructions for constructing diagrams?

Swedish Statistics Net

35. According to the Statistics Ordinance, official statistics shall be released and published in an electronic network. The Swedish Statistics Net (SSN)³ is such a portal, managed by Statistics Sweden, and gives access to all official statistics. There are links to the statistical authorities where the statistics are published and there is a publishing plan for official statistics. There are links to Descriptions of Statistics, including quality declarations published on the website of Statistics Sweden, and links to the special product pages for all official statistics also published on the website of Statistics Sweden.

36. All the products for which Statistics Sweden is responsible, and products from the 14 other authorities who have chosen to present their statistics in this way, are available in Sweden's Statistical Databases (SSD). Today, about 50% of the products in official statistics are available in SSD. In addition to SSD, there are databases at a number of authorities, including the National Council for Crime Prevention, the National Agency for Education, the National Agency for Higher Education, and the National Board of Health and Welfare, available at the Internet.

COOPERATION – AN EFFECTIVE TOOL FOR COORDINATION

37. There are no sanctions connected to the laws and ordinances and regulations on official statistics. Statistics Sweden cannot punish a statistical authority if it fails to comply with the rules of official statistics. In such a situation, an attempt is made first to solve the problems through dialogue between the coordinator, Statistics Sweden, and the statistical authority at hand. The second step is, in consultation with the Council, to inform the government via the annual report about deficiencies and problems in more general terms.

38. Decision-making on issues of coordination takes place at Council meetings. The Council is an advisory body to Statistics Sweden, but the aim is to encourage “soft” coordination. Statistics Sweden would like to achieve unanimity in all decisions, as it is considered that without consensus the implementation process would not be successful. All decisions by the Council are based on proposals from a working group, which means that there has been the possibility for an in-depth and exhaustive examination of the subject matter, or proposals prepared by the secretariat with support of all statistical authorities. Decisions on guidelines are generally prepared by a working group. The opportunity of proposing changes and new initiatives within the Council’s domain is available to all authorities and individuals within the agencies.

39. The annual conference, the seminars and courses and the study tours and the bilateral contacts promote dialogue, which is vital to the implementation of common rules and guidelines and a continuous development of official statistics. The Extranet and the Swedish Statistics Net is the technical infrastructure for cooperation and coordination.

40. In the present organisation of the system for official statistics in Sweden, there is the opportunity for dialogue at every stage of the decision-making process. The work in the system is transparent - to allow for continuous questioning, new thinking, new proposals and better decisions concerning the coordination by Statistics Sweden.

³ <http://www.svenskstatistik.net/eng/index.htm>

41. As a result of this dialogue, the attitude of the statistical authorities towards Statistics Sweden has changed. A few years back, the relations between Statistics Sweden and the other authorities responsible for official statistics were rather tense. Today, the authorities assert themselves with more confidence and competence than they did during the period immediately after the reform. They are able to be critical in a practical manner towards the actions of Statistics Sweden as a coordinator, while remaining respectful of the competence of Statistics Sweden. There is an increased awareness of what quality in statistics means and of the importance of better quality.

42. The Ministry of Finance has gained a better overview and understanding of the system of official statistics, in particular through the annual reports, and the organisations representing the enterprises and municipalities providing data have a counterpart to represent the whole system.

43. However, there are still many problems that need to be addressed and there are still many possibilities for improvements. One such example is that there is a growing demand from users to co-publish related statistics independently of the authority which is responsible for the statistics. In recent years, there has been a debate on the growing rate of sick leave, in which the basic data originated from more than 10 different sources in Sweden. That particular problem was (partly) solved by introducing a portal for statistics on sick leave and ill health on Statistics Sweden's website. However, it is important not to forget that that kind of problem exists even within a statistical authority.

44. This year there is a focus on making statistics electronically available to the users via a common portal – Swedish Statistics Net with links to the websites of the authorities. Guidelines will be developed for presenting statistics and metadata.

ANNEX

Statistical authorities and statistical products in the Swedish System of Official Statistics 1
March 2004

Subject matter areas	Statistical authority	Number of statistical products for which the author responsible
Agriculture, forestry and fishery	Swedish Board of Agriculture	21
	National Board of Fisheries	3
	National Board of Forestry	12
Citizen influence	Statistics Sweden	14
Culture and leisure	Swedish National Council for Cultural Affairs	6
Business activity	Swedish Institute for Growth Policy Studies	13
	Statistics Sweden	1
	Swedish Tourist Authority	
Education and research	Swedish National Board of Student Aid	2
	National Agency for Higher Education	5
	National Agency for Education	16
	Statistics Sweden	15
Energy	Swedish Energy Agency	14
Environment	National Chemicals Inspectorate	6
	Swedish Environmental Protection Agency	The products are not defined
	Statistics Sweden	24
Financial markets	Swedish Financial Supervisory Authority	9
Health and medical care	National Board of Health and Welfare	7
Household finances	Statistics Sweden	3
Housing, construction and building	Statistics Sweden	10
Judicial system	National Council for Crime Prevention	5
	National Courts Administration	1
Labour market	Swedish Work Environment Authority	4
	National Mediation Office	14
	Statistics Sweden	7
Living conditions	Statistics Sweden	2
National accounts	Statistics Sweden	6
Population	Statistics Sweden	3
Prices and consumption	Statistics Sweden	6
	National Institute of Economic Research	1
Public finances	Swedish National Financial Management Authority	2
	Swedish National Debt Office	2
	Statistics Sweden	8
Social insurance	National Social Insurance Board	18
Social services	National Board of Health and Welfare	12
Trade in goods and services	Statistics Sweden	4
Transport and communications	Swedish Institute for Transport and Communications Analysis	14
Total number of statistical products		296