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Business continuity of official statistics**Official statistics and the COVID-19 pandemic – the Albanian case****Prepared by Albania***Summary*

Thanks to the advances in technology in the areas of communication, data processing, and emerging new data sources, our ability to respond to natural disasters is at a key point. Data used in times of crisis can show a clearer picture of the situation, reflect its rapid changes and help effectively manage natural disasters.

The Albanian Statistical Institute (INSTAT) operates based on the five-year official statistics programme, which regulates the production of official statistics by the national statistical system. This programme includes all the official statistics that will be produced in a five-year period, which, whenever necessary, can be updated through the annual plan. In a time span of 4 months, Albania experienced two major crises: an earthquake on 26 November 2019 and the global Covid-19 pandemic. Both events made it even more obvious that there is a need for rapid statistical production to help policy makers manage situations based on evidence.

This document describes how INSTAT has reacted to adapt to the new reality and helped to deal with the Covid-19 pandemic. Concrete actions undertaken to produce official statistics as well as to measure the impact in different areas will be described.

Given the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic crisis, statistical institutes need to review their budget, legal framework, development strategies and human resources capacities to deal with natural disasters.



I. Introduction

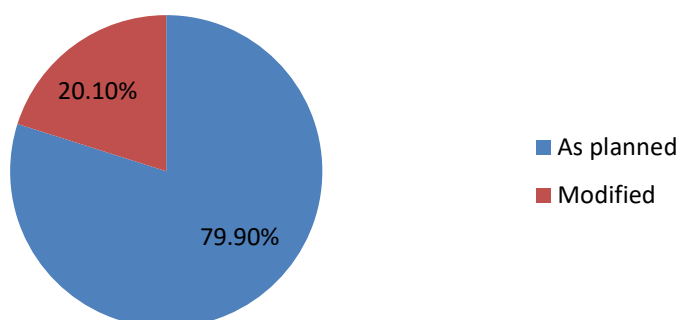
1. At a time when statistics have a huge impact on everyone's daily life, statistical production is essential. The crises caused by natural disasters stressed the importance of producing quick statistical indicators, not previously foreseen in annual plans, as well as experimental indicators to provide a clear picture of the social and economic situation in Albania. The Covid-19 pandemic caused a new global reality, to which statistical offices must adapt. The challenge of adaptation is two-fold: enabling the production of normal statistical indicators under constraints resulting from the pandemic and the production of new indicators, through which this new reality can be explained. In terms of the first challenge, INSTAT has adapted the existing processes to avoid stopping or postponing the production of key statistical indicators. In terms of the second challenge, new ad-hoc surveys, administrative data and experimental methods have been explored.

II. Official statistics production

2. In the 2020 annual plan of the programmed statistical activities, based on the GSBPM phases and sub-processes, 2068 tasks were planned for the period March-May 2020. Due to Covid-19, approximately 20 per cent of the tasks were modified in terms of timeliness and processes.

Figure 1

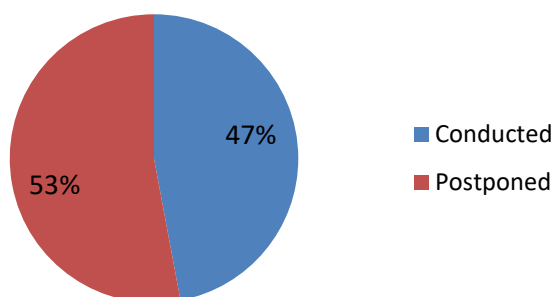
INSTAT planned tasks by status



3. INSTAT surveys are conducted using the face-to-face method. To enable the production of statistical indicators as well as in accordance with the provisions in force, INSTAT has used alternative or combined methods for data collection. The telephone interview was used for the Labour Force Survey, confidence surveys on business and enterprises of the Bank of Albania and price statistics. For short term statistics, a combination of administrative data sources with telephone interviewing has been used.

4. Alternative methods for data collection were not possible to be used for all INSTAT surveys. The main challenge of this exercise was the availability of the phone numbers of the target population. This is why it was decided to use telephone interviewing only on statistical surveys which have previously collected the phone numbers and were appropriate for this method of data collection in terms of questionnaire length and type of questions.

Figure 2
INSTAT planned surveys by status



5. During March-May 2020, out of 17 surveys planned in INSTAT annual plan, 8 were conducted using telephone interviews.

III. Ad-hoc indicators

6. To accomplish its mission on providing transparent, neutral and timely statistics that help the user to assess the progress of the transformation processes within the country, as well as to make evidence-based decisions and policies regarding the socio-economic impact of Covid-19, INSTAT undertook concrete actions on producing ad-hoc indicators. In terms of Covid-19 impact on households, INSTAT conducted an ad-hoc survey, while for enterprises, a new set of questions was incorporated into some existing surveys.

A. Survey on the socio-economic impact of Covid-19 on households

7. The survey on the socio-economic impact of Covid-19 on households was an ad-hoc survey that was conducted in April-May 2020, through telephone interviewing. The main objective of this survey was to understand the level and socio-economic impact that the Albanian households suffered as a result of the global pandemic. This survey gathered information about the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondent, employment status, consumption, incomes, school online attendance, financial capabilities of the household to pay for loans, household's perception for the future, etc.

B. Impact of Covid-19 on enterprises

8. Covid-19 poses a significant threat not only to human health but also to the economy. In order to measure the perception of Albanian enterprises on the impact of Covid-19 pandemic during May 2020, qualitative information was gathered on current and expected economic developments. A specific module of questions related to Covid-19 was attached to one of the traditional enterprise surveys, and the survey was conducted by telephone interviewing. The sample survey covers all enterprises in the private sector of the economy operating in the sectors of production, construction, trade and services. The questions aim to measure the impact on sales, supply of raw materials, human resources, liquidity, as well as the perception of the time required to return to normality.

C. Impact of Covid-19 through monthly agriculture surveys

9. In the context of the global pandemic crises, in addition to the statistical information that is collected periodically through monthly agriculture surveys, four questions were added to identify the impact that this pandemic had in the agriculture enterprises. The survey was conducted through telephone interviewing.

10. The economic activity of the interviewed enterprises covers slaughterhouses (cattle, wool, goats, pigs), slaughterhouses (poultry), milk factories (collection and processing only cow's milk), chicken for egg production (human consumption), farmers (production price of agricultural products).

11. The data collection process covered the period 1-30 April 2020 and the results refer to the impact that the Covid-19 pandemic for the period 1-31 March 2020.

IV. Conclusions

- Statistical offices shall act quickly during a natural disaster in order to quickly assess the impact of the crisis on the social and economic situation.
 - Proactive role in communication with users to identify key needed indicators.
 - Continuous development of the statistical production infrastructure, in line with the latest developments of technology.
 - Generic guidelines on the treatment of missing information or of breaks in time series.
 - Development of staff capacities in terms of agile statistical production processes.
 - Active role in partnerships with other institutions and international organisations, developing medium- and long-term strategies, on how to manage the crisis.
 - Planning reserve budget for not foreseen statistical activities needed.
 - Development of Key Performance Indicators for natural disaster periods.
 - Review of strategies for business continuity.
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