

Quality control of the statistical register in the Republic of Belarus

Svetlana Nichiporuk
National Statistical Committee
of the Republic of Belarus

1. Overview of functions and types of uses of the statistical register

It is known that any statistical survey is aimed at the obtaining of timely, consistent, reliable and comparable information to identify the development patterns of the phenomena and processes examined, at the regional, national and international levels.

The statistical register (SR) in the Republic of Belarus, as in other countries, is one of the most important and efficient statistical tools; a key source of information which provides the basis for statistical surveys, the quality of which depends on the quality of the statistical register.

The statistical register in the Republic of Belarus consists of two parts: an administrative part, which contains legal units, and a statistical part, which contains statistical units.

Among the main functions and applications of the SR the following can be distinguished:

- providing common enumeration of the respondents
- ensuring common principle of identification of the respondents
- organizing and conducting statistical surveys
- establishing consolidated statistical information
- establishing the list of respondents and summary data on the number of business entities in the country in various breakdowns and groupings.

To solve these tasks, the SR contains:

- Administrative data on the business entities reflecting the processes of their establishment, reorganization, changes in the constituent documents or liquidation, which are linked with the data used for the organization of the statistical surveys
- Data obtained from statistical surveys

The SR includes a common identification code of units according to nationwide classifications and provides sufficient characteristics to allow groupings of various survey populations according to different criteria. The SR thus also facilitates receiving both individual and aggregate data about business and their activities.

The wide range of use of the SR determines the need of quality control of the information of the register.

2. Actions taken to ensure the commonly accepted quality criteria of the statistical register

According to the quality policy of the National Statistical Committee, the quality of the SR is the extent to which it is in accordance with generally accepted quality criteria and meets information needs and expectations of users.

Below follows a brief description of actions taken to meet generally accepted quality criteria.

Relevance (demand) is a qualitative assessment of the degree to which the SR meets the needs of users. The fulfillment of this criterion shows the occurrence of relevant units of observation, together with the required characteristics (features) in the SR that allows to obtain statistical aggregates and samples for the statistical survey.

It should be noted that the units and their characteristics are being updated continuously on basis of information received from administrative sources and from experts in sectoral statistics, which is especially representative for the local units.

Accuracy (reliability) characterizes the correct reflection of reality in the register. To meet this criterion, information on legal units is periodically compared with information from registration and tax authorities, by cross-checking the statistical register with the Uniform State Register of Legal Entities and Individual Entrepreneurs and the State Register of Payers (other liable parties).

Timeliness and punctuality characterize the period of time when the register is updated to reflect actual state of events. Information on the legal units from registration authorities passes daily through the automated information system (AIS). In this way this information is updated fairly quickly (within 3 - 5 days).

It is very important to have timely information on whether a unit is active or not, but the registration authorities do not always have this information. This year an agreement with the tax authorities was signed in order to exchange information about organizations which do not report to the statistics authorities or do not pay taxes for more than 12 consecutive months.

Accessibility and clarity for the statistical register mean free access to documentation, allowing users to correctly interpret information in the register. For this purpose we prepared different documents which describe the methodological aspects, structure, composition, characteristics (attributes), and the procedure for updating, both administrative section of the statistical register, which contains legal units, and the statistical section, which contains statistical units. This documentation is available to all employees of the statistical office who are users of the SR.

Comparability has different aspects. Spatial comparability is comparability of observation units used in the register and classifications at the international level; comparability over time is the opportunity to review data in the register at the level of individual units or at the aggregate level for different periods of time.

The use of the national classification in the SR allows comparability of information, both in international and national levels. The national classification of Economic Activities is based on NACE rev.1.1. Currently, the existing version of the national classification of Economic Activities is being updated to be in compliance with NACE Rev.2.

Comparability over time is ensured by preserving cross-sections of the database for certain periods (including background information) of the administrative part of SR and the history of changes of characteristics and the observation units of the statistical part of the SR.

Consistency is composed of internal consistency and consistency with other registers.

Internal consistency is characterized by coordinated data processing in the register and presence of rules for the updates of the register. Consistency with other registers is achieved through the use of identification numbers (links). For exchange of information with other registers other codes are used, such as the National Classification of Legal Entities and Entrepreneurs (NCLEE) code – the registration number assigned by the registration authorities; and the UNP code (account number of the payer) – the registration number assigned by the tax authorities.

3. Update of the statistical register

The SR is updated on the basis of administrative sources and on the basis of information received from the experts in sectoral statistics. As mentioned before, the information from the registration authorities is received through the automated information system (AIS). The rules of interaction of government offices in this system are secured by normative legislative acts.

Cooperation with other holders of administrative data is currently being implemented through the framework of bilateral agreements, which are regularly updated according to the changes in the required data. However, administrative data are not always correct. When errors in information from administrative sources are detected the statistical office sends a request to the owner of administrative data to correct the data.

4. Cooperation with experts in sectoral statistics

Cooperation with the experts in sectoral statistics is implemented in two different ways:

- updating the individual characteristics in SR
- updating the local units

Some of the characteristics of the units of the SR, for example the main economic activity or attribute of budgetary organization, are updated on the basis of data from statistical surveys. Sectoral statistics is also the main source of information on local units.

Experts in sectoral statistics tend to demand high-quality information from the SR, while they are not always equally interested in providing the necessary information to help ensuring the quality of the SR. However, this situation has been improving due to establishment of certain rules for the update of the SR.

5. Data control

Data of the SR are checked before and after downloading it to the system. The main types of quality checks include:

- visual check of source data (depending on the amount of information)
- comparison of data from the data source and SR (changes control)
- comparison of similar data from different sources (consistencies check)
- completeness and duplication check
- check of National Classification of Businesses and Organizations code (for the control number)
- check of the characteristics values, to match the reference classifications used in the SR
- check of the interrelations between different values of characteristics and other controls

6. Possible ways to improve quality of the SR and directions of its future development

Certainly, the transition to new software and technology tools for formation and maintenance of the administrative part of the SR, which are under development now, is expected to increase the level of automatization of analytical and methodological processes in the updating and maintenance of the register.

In order to improve SR updating process, the following actions are planned:

A Government Informational Support Program has been developed to establish a single information space. One of its components is the development of the National Computerized Information System (NCIS) of the Republic of Belarus, which is designed to integrate state information resources and automate work of the government services that provide personalized services to other government agencies and other users. One of the main goals of the NCIS is to increase efficiency and quality of work of the public authorities, and as a result of this, the quality of the services they provide.

At the moment, the number of information sources that are integrated in the NCIS and services supplied on their basis are limited. However, further integration of information resources of government agencies whose administrative data are used for updating the SR in the NCIS will help to improve the quality of these administrative data and the mechanism of updates of the statistical register with state administrative data.

Moreover, because the current work on recoding of the main types of activities according to the new classification based on NACE Rev.2, it is planned to conduct recoding itself and its quality control of the SR in a few years' time.