

Statistics Norway and the Social Sciences

Objective

Statistics Norway (SSB) shall prepare and distribute statistical information on the Norwegian society. The official statistics shall co-operate with research and analysis in order to monitor and analyse economic and social conditions as well as resource and environmental conditions. It shall thereby provide the public, the industry and trade sectors, and the authorities, with information on the society's structure, developments and mode of operation.

Statistics and complementary analysis from Statistics Norway is a common property which should be used by as many people as possible. Statistics and analysis shall therefore be easily available to all, that is, to individuals, authorities, political and other organisations, educational institutions, the media, establishments, etc.

The Institution

Statistics Norway is a professionally autonomous institution. This means that Statistics Norway has full responsibility for the professional contents of the statistics and analysis. Statistics Norway is completely independent in deciding what official statistics shall be published and when and how this should be done. This independence from the authorities and interest groups is crucial as confidence and authority are essential prerequisites for official statistics and also for Statistics Norway to fulfil her role in the Norwegian and international society.

The Situation

During the last decade, Statistics Norway has had a real cut in her basic allocations from the national budget. The number of employment positions allowed by the national budget have gone down from over 700 to just under 600. In principle, the area of statistics covered by government funding should include a core of statistics and research subjects, defined from what is considered to be most relevant for the Norwegian society. That goal is difficult to fulfil with decreasing funding.

In certain cases, the establishment of new areas of statistics or the reinforcement and improvement of existing areas of statistics are not covered by current government funds. This will require binding long-term co-operation agreements with the ministries that have a special need for

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improvements in statistics and research for monitoring and for policy-making in their areas of responsibility.

These ministries must cover costs incurred during the development and operating phase of this increased production of statistics.

Pricing policy

The pricing policy of SSB as regards distribution and commissioned assignments shall be consistent with the ruling principle that statistics and analysis should be commodities that are easily available to various users.

For commissioned assignments, which may consist of the development of new statistics, preparation of statistics or research and analysis, the guidelines require that the client covers SSB's real costs, meaning full cost absorption.

In certain cases, users may require more detailed or processed figures outside the scope of statistics produced by government funding. The extra work required to provide such information shall be priced at its marginal cost when the statistics is distributed.

Data collection

At Statistics Norway is done by:

- sending questionnaires to "all" persons and establishments
- sending questionnaires to or interviewing a selection of persons or establishments
- setting up at SSB, registers of persons and establishments
- gathering information on persons and establishments collected by other public bodies.

Organisation of data

The objective of the organisation of data is that all users shall have simple and good access to official statistics of Norway. One way of answering the challenges from the major users would be to distribute data via databases where the user can make his own choice of pre-defined connections. The databases shall be user-friendly and shall contain metadata (descriptions and definitions of data etc.) while safeguarding the protection of privacy. In certain

areas, such databases are under development.

Data protection

In the production and distribution of statistics, confidentiality and the protection of privacy are strongly emphasised. Safeguarding the anonymity of the client is a vital prerequisite for the activities of Statistics Norway. Individual data on persons or establishments/enterprises should be treated confidentially and should only be used for statistical purposes and in accordance with the regulations laid down by the Norwegian Data Inspectorate.

Research and statistics

Statistics Norway carries out research on her own data. Research activities shall cover research for social planning in the areas where Statistics Norway has a particularly central statistical responsibility. As such, we compete with others who use statistics in their analysis activities. However, the research is important and necessary for further development and improvement of the production of statistics in the various areas.

Distribution to researchers

Social researchers are major users of our publications and databases. In many cases, researchers provide feedback that contributes towards quality control and improvements of the statistics. However, research-projects often requires other statistics than what we present in standardised form. In such cases, researchers may order separate data selections to suit their purpose. Sometimes, a researcher may like to combine his own data with our data. In such cases SSB combines the data and produces statistics or anonymised data files for the researcher.

However, research often requires other types of data than normally produced in statistics. In particular, this concerns event history data where one follows the same individual over time and in different social situations such as education, employment, social security benefits, etc. As government funds allocated for the production of statistics are decreasing, it is difficult to get funding for event history databases within this form of finance. We therefore have to try to find other sources of finance. Among others, the research sector itself.

The NSD Agreement

In 1993 Statistics Norway and the Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD) entered into an agreement, with the purpose of providing researchers and students with the easiest possible access to as much of SSB's data as possible without violating the rules laid down by Statistics Norway and without reducing the degree of protection of sensitive data.

The agreement covers two types of data. Firstly, statistical data tables ready to be published from SSB's statistical databases or specially prepared upon NSD's request.

Secondly, anonymised individual data from SSB's sample surveys or other data from persons or establishments.

For these services the agreed price is lower than the marginal cost that is usual for SSB's services. I must confess that due to inadequate capacity, SSB cannot always fulfil the agreement as quickly as desired.

The agreement says that SSB is committed to keep NSD informed about the surveys and statistics that are produced and to inform students and researchers about NSD's services. NSD shall in return inform them about the services that SSB can offer and ensure that SSB is cited as the source of data published in NSD's own publications or presented in reports, periodicals etc, by researchers .

The agreement has worked positively for both NSD and SSB. NSD has a reliable and reasonable access to important data for social research. SSB has been relieved of part of its services for students and researchers and SSB's data and the possibilities lying in these data have become familiar for students and researchers.

However, in SSB's view, the arrangement has two disadvantages. Firstly, when students are trained to use NSD, the result is that many of them do not approach SSB when they enter occupational life. They still want to use NSD. Consequently, NSD's subsidised service which is arranged for students and researchers, is demanded by groups for which it was not intended. This creates uncertainty about the division of roles between NSD and SSB.

Secondly, many of NSD's users are not always giving reference to SSB as the source of their data. Often, reference is only made to NSD. Subsequently, there is less appreciation for how important a well-established statistical agency is for research and education as well as for the society. The official statistics are taken for granted. At a time when there is a battle for public resources, the lack of understanding may have the consequence that statistics loses priority. Here, I refer to basic official funding of Statistics Norway as I mentioned before.

However, altogether, the conclusion is that the agreement works positively for both partners.

A non-authorized version of the agreement is enclosed this paper.

Data preparation at SSB for researchers

As I mentioned many users need specially prepared tables for their purpose and these tables are not always available from NSD's service. These users therefore have to contact SSB for special tables prepared. Very often the researchers would like several data sources to be combined in order to produce tables. In such cases, the researcher has to deal

with several divisions and in order to prevent this, SSB shall establish a fixed contact point for such services. This contact point shall be set up at our division for Population and Housing Census 2000 as it has been decided that the Norwegian population census shall be carried out by combining various registers. Subsequently, this division has to build up the competency required for combining registers and this may also be of use to research. We suppose that in many cases NSD will be the institution that demand such data on behalf of many researchers and students.

Perspectives

SSB has a three-pronged strategy for the provision of services for social research.

The first is (of course) “more and better statistics” especially in fields of statistics that can fill out the uncovered areas we have today, both within national accounting and within statistics on demography and social welfare.

Secondly, to continue to direct our efforts towards co-operation with NSD in the distribution of statistics to students and researchers.

We hope that this co-operation can be further developed in connection with the third prong of the strategy which is to increase the efficiency of our readiness to combine registers for research purposes. In this context, we also have to look into the development of databases for event history on persons. These databases should be built on many statistical sources and more annual volumes of these sources. Here, however, SSB, social research and social planning probably have to come together to find an appropriate form of finance for what could become the «new gold mine» of Norwegian social research.

Non-authorized version

AGREEMENT
between
Statistics Norway (SSB)
and the
Norwegian Social Science Data Services
(NSD)
on
THE DISTRIBUTION OF DATA
FROM STATISTICS NORWAY

1. Purpose

a) The purpose of this agreement is to give researchers and students the easiest possible access to the largest possible amount of SSB’s data without violating the current regulations and without relaxing the protection of individual data.

The term researchers refers specifically to researchers affiliated with a university/ college/ regional college in Norway or abroad and the institutional sector in Norway. The social science institutional sector is to follow the current definitions established by the Norwegian Research Council. Enclosure 1 comprises all those on NORAS’ list at the turn of the year 1991. Researchers from similar institutions in other sectors shall have the same rights. If there is doubt about whether an institution belongs to the institutional sector, the matter shall be resolved by the Norwegian Research Council. All persons enrolled at a university/ college in Norway or abroad are considered as students.

b) The distribution of statistics to other public and private services is outside the scope of this agreement. However, NSD may distribute data on condition that NSD pays an additional fee to SSB (enclosure 3). Individual data shall not be distributed to persons or institutions outside the primary target group without SSB’s special consent.

c) In addition, SSB and NSD may prepare separate co-operation agreements for the delivery of integrated program and data packages intended for various user groups.

2. Scope

This agreement covers the delivery of the following types of data:

Group I. Statistical tables ready to be published.

Group II. Individual data, rendered anonymous, from SSB's sample surveys or other individual data (persons, establishments) also made anonymous.

3. Delivery procedures

Group I data:

If data can be delivered from SSB's statistical databases, they are produced as standardised tables as soon as the underlying figures are registered in the database, and at an agreed price. Enclosure 2 gives a summary of prices and the types of data to be regularly delivered in this way.

NSD may choose not to have data delivered regularly, but may place an order in each instance. This is specified in enclosure 2. Alternatively, NSD may be granted on-line access to retrieve data themselves from SSB's databases.

In the case where NSD orders a set of data that does not exist in the databases but requires special processing, an estimate of the additional work required to deliver the data shall be calculated. NSD shall confirm the order before the assignment is carried out.

Group II data

NSD shall apply to SSB for the transfer of data from individual surveys. SSB shall evaluate the application and give approval, subject to SSB's concession from the Data Inspectorate. Alternatively, SSB may propose changes in the selected data and prepare an estimate for the additional work required to deliver the data. Researchers shall submit an application to NSD for access to the anonymous data. The application shall specify the project, etc. where the data shall be used. NSD shall process the application and approve or reject it. Before access is given, the user must sign a special pledge of confidentiality.

NSD shall keep a record of accepted applications. Furthermore, this record shall contain project information and a list of any publications that may be based on the material. NSD shall send an update of these records to SSB every six months.

For anonymous individual data that is not transferred to NSD, or tables with confidential information, NSD must apply for transfer in each instance and SSB shall determine the conditions that apply for the set of data in question.

4. SSB's rights and obligations

Restrictions on distribution and use of any particular set of data and possible claims of return, shall be determined by SSB at any time.

SSB shall keep NSD informed on all sets of data from sample surveys. As soon as the questions are finally agreed upon for each sample survey, SSB shall immediately

dispatch a questionnaire and give a probable delivery date for the data. More detailed documentation on the data shall be delivered on NSD's request, as far as SSB finds this possible in practice.

SSB shall provide regular updates on contents and changes in SSB's databases.

SSB may demand that reports and documentation on SSB's data, that are prepared and distributed by NSD, be submitted to SSB for approval.

SSB may request copies of delivered data and complementary documentation, against reimbursement.

SSB shall contribute to inform prospective user groups about NSD's services.

SSB is committed to deliver correct data that is released for delivery as well as documentation required to use and interpret the data. If any errors are detected during the transfer of data, SSB shall immediately arrange for correct data to be transferred.

SSB may make data originally prepared for NSD, available also to other users without notice to NSD.

SSB reserves the right to verify that the data is used in accordance with the conditions and requirements stipulated in this agreement.

5. NSD's rights and obligations

NSD has the right to distribute data to the user groups specified under point 1a.

NSD may use data from SSB in their own analysis and assignments for users specified under point 1a.

For distribution of tables to other users [administration, private users etc. (1b)] NSD shall pay a separate fee to SSB for the data used, in accordance with enclosure 3.

When integrated as a part of teaching packages/ test data connected to NSD-STAT, NSD may also distribute data from SSB to users other than those specified under point 1a. For distribution to non-primary users, reimbursement for the data shall be made in accordance with enclosure 3, or possibly in accordance with a separate agreement.

For all use of SSB's data, SSB shall be clearly cited as the source, both as a general reference and in association with individual tables where the data is used. This condition applies both for NSD's own use and usage of data distributed through NSD.

NSD shall establish protection for the data and prepare instructions for processing and data storage. Data

protection procedures and instructions shall be approved by SSB.

NSD shall report to SSB any errors and deficiencies that are detected in the data or documentation.

NSD shall contribute to distribute information to prospective user groups about SSB's services.

NSD shall give SSB free access to all teaching packages that are prepared with data from SSB.

NSD may have on-line access to SSB-DATA by paying the same subscription fee paid as schools/ libraries.

Every six months, NSD shall send a report on usage in accordance with enclosure 4, which will serve as a basis for settling the fee for distribution to non-primary group users.

6. Contact persons

Each of the partners shall designate a contact person. Changes are to be continuously reported.

7. Validity

This agreement is valid from the date of signature and can be terminated with three months notice. Enclosures 2 and 3 may be adjusted annually.

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