

Description of the French national statistical system

A single legal and institutional framework provides for the consistency of the system

The basic text of French official statistics is the Act n°51-711 of June 7th 1951 on Legal Obligation, Coordination and confidentiality in the Field of statistics. This text has been modified and updated since that date. The Act sets the great principles which allow for guaranteeing the quality of the production of official statistics. It delegates the interpretation and control of them to the National council for statistical information, an consultative body between producers and users the secretariat of which is provided by Insee.

A wide distribution in the whole state administration

The statisticians of the public sector are present in almost all the ministries and in numerous public bodies or even in the institutions of private law in charge of missions of public service. Among these bodies, Insee and the other Ministerial Statistical Offices (MSO) make up the "hard core" of official statistics. Their competences operate in extremely various domains, from sport to foreign trade.

To carry out these missions, official statistics (Insee and ministries) employ 9.000 persons, of which approximately two thirds at Insee. Because of the existence of ministerial statistical offices, the official statistical system is said to be "functionally decentralized". The presence of statistical settlements in regions, in particular at Insee, testifies also of an actual geographical decentralization.

Insee

Insee, which is a General directorate of the Ministry of economy, finance and industry is a *government agency*.

The missions entrusted to Insee bestow to it a particular character within the Ministry of economy, finance and industry. Whereas the other directorates of this ministry have responsibilities of action or of supervision and are instruments of design or of execution of government policy, Insee has a role of information and study, as well concerning the economic agents of private sector as of the authorities; it is thus an essentially *technical* body.

The range of the missions of Insee goes beyond the framework of operational activities internal to the Institute - its own production - and also applies to the system of economic and social information implemented or financed by the Administration, whose supervision and coordination it manages.

The Ministerial Statistical Offices (MSO)

Whatever the scope of their missions, all Ministerial Statistical Offices assure at least four responsibilities:

- They are responsible for implementing the Act of 1951 on Legal Obligation, Coordination and Confidentiality in the Field of statistics. They represent their ministry within the Cnis (National council for statistical information). They take part in the working out of concepts, methodological choices and statistical coordination. Since an Act of 1986, they enjoy a broad access to administrative sources for statistical-processing purposes.
- They apply the European Union rules and have regular relations with Eurostat ;
- They liaise their ministry with Insee for all statistical issues within the domain of relevance of their ministry (surveys, publishing of results, exchange of information) and for the management of statisticians officers stemming from Insee. The latter constitute an important part of the managers and a quarter of total numbers;
- They disseminate and comment the information they possess. This constant practice established as a rule, guarantees a wide access of the citizens and experts (professionals, analysis bodies, journalists, researchers, teachers and students) to the economic and social information. This allows also a strict enforcement of statistical confidentiality in the statistical publications and dissemination.

On the other hand, there is among the statistical services a great variety in the tasks carried out; this variety does not stem solely from the domains of relevance, but also results from the own history of these services. Eight activities - collection, taking part in the management, capacity of studies, IT, the role in assessment, taking part in forecasting, aid in decision making and orientation of research - make them strongly different. These activities may be, according to the services, inexistent as well as considerable and strongly connected to their daily operation.

The same variety exists also in the size and organization. The "MSO Agriculture", the most important, counts more than 600 persons. Four other great MSO have decentralized statistical services and have a high number of employees (from 300 to 400 persons roughly): it is the "MSO Education-research", the "MSO Equipment-transport", the "MSO Health-solidarity", the "MSO Labour-employment-professional training". The "MSO industry" has no regional settlement but counts roughly 250 persons.

The « MSO Justice », the "MSO Environment" and the "MSO Customs" are mid-sized (from 80 to 100 persons roughly). Ten other statistical services (Small and medium enterprises-trade-craftsmanship-services, Communication, Culture, Defence, Energy, Civil service, Local authorities, Fishing, Youth an sport, Tourism) have smaller staffs (from 8 to 30 persons).

Task sharing within the official statistical system

The distribution of the work between the different units of the official statistical system holds for a large part to history. The following classification is very simplified and gives an account of only a part of the reality of task sharing between Insee and the MSOs.

Business statistics

In the domain of business statistics, Insee manages the registers and provides for the coordination of surveys (concepts, questionnaires, methods ...) It defines the economic activity of businesses and coordinates the launching of surveys. Insee follows producer prices in all the sectors.

The MSOs follow the actors and the markets of their sector of relevance. They carry out annual business surveys (EAE or European structural surveys) which collect the result accounts of the enterprises (20 employees or more in industry). These surveys are organized around a common core (questionnaire and processing) and make up in France Eurostat structural surveys. The MSO carry out the production surveys (branch surveys) which feed the European base on the markets (Prodcom) and the specialized surveys in their sectors. Insee carries out itself the statistical survey on commerce and services (except transport) because the relevant MSO do not carry out any collection. For the customs, the department of statistics and economic studies provides the data of foreign trade which complete the data on markets.

These sources coexist with specialized and various tools, for instance on farmers and farms, on transport vehicles and their use, on financial structures, energy consumption... These tools are generally driven by the relevant MSO.

The business surveys are often carried out by mail, which has been in favour of their development in the MSOs. These surveys begin to be processed via Internet.

Demographic and social statistics

Insee carries out the censuses and household surveys, for instance the "employment" survey, a French version of the European Labour Force Survey. It carries out the collection of information on consumer prices and calculates also the corresponding price index. Household surveys are most often carried out by Insee, which has a permanent interviewer network. Lastly, the Institute processes fiscal and social files.

The MSOs are rather in charge of the follow-up of the persons answerable to their ministry and of the public and private establishments concerned. The distribution of tasks is done by domain of intervention. Dares (labour and employment) follows the wages, working conditions, the unemployed and aided employments. Drees (health and social protection) produces statistics on hospital and medico-social establishments, on health personnel, on sanitary state of the population. The "MSO Justice" collects the information on the activity of the courts, on offenders, on prisoners and on the prisons. The "MSO Civil service" follows the characteristics and the evolution of public employment.

Technical coordination

Besides its activities of production, the Institute coordinates the statistical operations through three means : it manages the **registers** (national registers for the identification of individuals and for enterprise and local unit register). It defines the **classifications** (classification of activities and products, official geographical code, classification of professions and socio-professional categories). It determines the **conceptual and accounting frameworks** (national accounts, satellite accounts).

Staff

The agents of Insee and of statistical services who belong to bodies of statistician civil servants¹ are managed by INSEE, which manages their training and their career. The French official statistician officers are recruited in higher education, through competitive exams and at a high level (mathematics, economy, general culture). They follow then a training, also shared by the statisticians-economists of private sector in one of the schools of INSEE, ENSAE² or ENSAI³. INSEE organizes the mobility of these officers with the aim to ensure the transmission of the competences over all the official statistical system. The **unified management of the careers** which is a result is an important coordination tool. The mobility of the officers in the whole sphere of official statistics is a way to reach the dissemination and the consistency of the methods used.

¹ Administrators, 'chargés de mission' and 'attachés' of INSEE

² National School of Statistics and Economic Administration

³ National School of Statistics and Information Analysis