

FIFTH INTERNATIONAL WORKSHOP ON BUSINESS DATA COLLECTION METHODOLOGY

19–21 SEPTEMBER 2018 – STATISTICS PORTUGAL, LISBON

DATA COLLECTION AND INFORMATION FLOW MANAGEMENT IN STATISTICAL SURVEYS CONDUCTED WITH THE USE OF REPORTING PORTAL.

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Background paper

Proper circulation of information is necessary on every stage of statistical survey, but especially during data collection. This phase includes not only information flow within the statistical organization, but first and foremost exchanging information between statisticians and data providers.

In the Polish statistical system, overwhelming majority of data from and about business are now obligatorily collected via Internet. So-called “electronic questionnaire” is a basic information carrier used by companies participating in surveys for the purpose of submitting data to the official statics service (only a small percentage of them submit data on paper; surveys with the participation of households are conducted usually in the form of sample survey in which interviewers gather data directly from respondents).

First steps towards building the online reporting system were taken in the first decade of the 2000s. Partly in response to expectations of entrepreneurs interested in contacts with public administration with the use of Internet, Polish statisticians launched a redevelopment of organization of surveys, with a view to building a system capable of replacing data collection on paper questionnaires. Due to large amounts of data collected on a regular basis from numerous respondents, Statistics Poland decided to build the system designed exclusively for statistical purposes and independent from another public administration systems of this kind. In 2007 an Internet platform referred to as the “Reporting Portal of Statistics Poland” was set up, initially only as an option for respondents (companies) interested in delivering the data in such a form.

Enormously popular among respondents from its very beginning, Reporting Portal became an obligatory tool for submitting the data (at least for the vast majority of respondents) as a result of changes in legislation that came into force two years later (in 2009). Since then, only the smallest companies (with a number of employees up to 5) have been allowed to deliver data on paper questionnaires (provided that they inform in advance the statistical office about their preference). Reporting Portal (together with its website address: <https://raport.stat.gov.pl/>) is usually indicated as a place of data provision in descriptions of business surveys, contained in

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the annual programme of statistical surveys of official statistics¹. As regards legal basis for collecting data online, relevant regulations are also contained in the Law of 29 June 1995 on Official Statistics, the most essential legal act for the Polish statistical system. According to the Article 28a of the Law, the President of Statistics Poland shall run a tele-information system comprising an electronic platform for statistical data collection (i.e. the Reporting Portal), which shall enable, among other things, submitting the data by respondents as well as maintaining communication between the official statistics services and respondents².

The Polish system of online reporting is based on individual respondents' accounts: the number of accounts has been rising steadily since the start of the Portal, reaching as many as 871,000 accounts at the beginning of July 2018. Access to the user's account on the Portal is possible directly from the website of Statistics Poland but, for safety reasons, authentication data (login and password) are unique for every user and generated automatically by the statistical office. Every respondent (in most cases: a company obliged to participate in statistical surveys) designates one employee as a "person in charge of reporting" (in Polish: *osoba zarządzająca sprawozdawczością*) responsible for the whole of statistical reporting from this particular company and authorized to use the Reporting Portal. "Person in charge of reporting" is allowed to access every functions and resources of the Portal relating to his/her company. Nevertheless, he/she can delegate some of his/her powers to other people entitled only to a strictly limited number of activities connected with reporting (e.g. filling-in only specific parts of a questionnaire). Statistical questionnaires are available for users within a limited period of time. In case the respondent doesn't meet the deadline for submitting the data³, questionnaire is made available to him once again for some time. In order for respondent to fulfill the statistical obligation, it is necessary to fill-in the questionnaire and accept it (acceptation is possible only on condition that automatic logical and mathematical control of data doesn't report any error). In 2017, about 3,050,000 statistical questionnaires were collected by the Reporting Portal⁴.

Data, collected by the Portal, are then processed in regional statistical offices⁵, according to their specialization in particular areas of statistics. Statistical office is responsible for the entire process of collection and data-processing of statistical data from all over the country,

¹ In Poland, annual programme of statistical surveys of official statistics comes into force in the form of regulation of the Council of Ministers. Statistics Poland (in Polish: Główny Urząd Statystyczny), established in 1918, is the central statistical office of the Republic of Poland, subordinated to the Prime Minister.

² Full text of the Law on Official Statistics is available on the website of Statistics Poland (<http://bip.stat.gov.pl/en/law/law-on-official-statistics/>).

³ Deadlines for data provision are specified (for every questionnaire) in the annual programme of surveys.

⁴ A total of 174 different kinds of questionnaires, used as a source of information in around 90 statistical surveys.

⁵ Apart from Statistics Poland, there are 16 statistical offices, located in capitals of voivodeships (regions); directors of statistical offices are subordinated to the President of Statistics Poland. Organizational structure of the Polish statistical services reflects administrative division of the country.

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regardless of respondents' locations. For example, collection and processing of nationwide data concerning social economy, healthcare, culture etc. are organized and conducted by the statistical office in Cracow, collection and processing of data in the field of labour market statistics – by the statistical offices in Bydgoszcz and in Gdańsk, collection and processing of fuel and energy statistics – by the statistical office in Rzeszów etc. Tasks performed during the data collection phase include, first of all, preparation of nationwide list of respondents obliged to participate in the survey and contacts with respondents. Data-processing is performed with the use of IT system dedicated to the particular survey and include: advanced control of collected data (preliminary control takes place, as it was mentioned above, in the process of filling-in the questionnaire), sometimes comparing data with results of another survey and preparation of tables presenting output data for the purpose of statistical publications. Those activities are performed in close cooperation with experts from the headquarters of Statistics Poland, specialized in methodological issues.

Most of the activities involved in statistical production (at least during the data collection and data-processing phase) are performed strictly in accordance with plans and schedules prepared in the Programming and Coordination of Statistical Surveys Department located in the headquarters of Statistics Poland. Typical data collection schedule and data-processing schedule sets the deadline for every activity as well as indicates organizational unit and employee responsible for this activity. It's practically impossible to imagine effective completion of those numerous tasks performed by numerous people without proper information flow among stakeholders involved in statistical production. In particular respondents (companies participating in surveys) need to be informed in detail (and, if possible, well in advance of the survey) about their statistical obligations. In consequence, organization of information flow is one of the most important elements of the planning and preparation phase.

Two-way communication between respondents and statisticians includes:

- typical announcements sent automatically by the Reporting Portal and delivered directly to respondent (letter informing about statistical obligations, information about the forthcoming deadline for submitting the data, admonition letter for those who missed the deadline),
- information intended only for particular respondent (concerning the current and next statistical obligations), available for this respondent after logging-in to the user's account on the Portal,
- information intended for all respondents, available on the website of Reporting Portal (guidelines concerning using the Portal, graphic designs of questionnaires along with instructions about their filling-in and deadlines for submitting the data, other messages etc.),
- instructions given to respondents by some "electronic questionnaires" in the process of filling-in the questionnaire (and list of errors, in case of any error detected by an automatic control of input data),
- help desk for respondents: in case of any problem connected with filling-in the questionnaire, respondent can contact the authorized employees of statistical offices and ask for explanation,

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- another help desk organized for users of the Reporting Portal having technical problems (lost authentication data, difficulties connected with logging-in to the account etc.).

In addition, exchange of information with respondents comprises also direct contacts (phone calls, e-mails) between staff of statistical offices and respondents in the event of errors found in already collected data as well as typical correspondence with companies obliged to participate in surveys (complaints, requests for additional explanations etc.).

All of those above-mentioned activities require perfect organization and planning, and involve a number of people permanently engaged in contacts with respondents. Particular aspects of information flow (with a focus on using the Reporting Portal as a channel of communication with respondents) will be discussed in more detail during my presentation.



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