



**Economic and Social
Council**

Distr.
GENERAL

ECE/CES/2009/28
30 April 2009

Original: ENGLISH

ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

STATISTICAL COMMISSION

CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS

Fifty-seventh plenary session
Geneva, 8-10 June 2009
Item 3 of the provisional agenda

**SEMINAR ON BALANCING PRINCIPLES OF PROFESSIONAL AUTONOMY AND
ACCOUNTABILITY WITH THE MANDATE TO PRODUCE POLICY RELEVANT DATA**

**SESSION III: ACCOUNTABILITY 'BEYOND THE BUDGET': MEASURING AND
ADDRESSING PUBLIC EXPECTATIONS**

EFFICIENT CUSTOMER DIALOGUE AT STATISTICS SWEDEN

Note by Statistics Sweden

Summary

The Conference of European Statisticians selected in June 2008 (ECE/CES/74) the topic “Balancing principles of professional autonomy and accountability with the mandate to produce policy relevant data” for a seminar to be held at its 2009 plenary session. The Bureau, acting on behalf of the Conference, approved the outline for the seminar at its February 2009 meeting (ECE/CES/2009/2) and requested Sweden to prepare a note to provide basis for the discussion.

Statistics Sweden is funded by appropriations and commissioned work (about 50 per cent each). The high share of commissioned work is quite unique for a National Statistical Institute. The paper describes how the customer dialogue is organised for statistics financed from both sources. It involves the use of boards, councils and other groups, as well as regular customer surveys. The paper describes also the recent reorganisation of Statistics Sweden in order to have a more efficient customer dialogue.

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The vision statement is our guideline for the long-term development of the organisation. It should define what we are working towards and what we want to achieve. Statistics Sweden's vision is as follows:

Statistics Sweden is of world class standard in refining data to statistical information, adapted to the customers' needs.

2. Statistics Sweden's definition of customers is "those we are here for". Our customers are the general public, customers through appropriations (government and ministries) and paying customers of commissioned work. The paying customers can be divided in statistical authorities, the central government in general, and other customers. The latter group comprises municipalities/regions, private sector and foreign customers.

II. REORGANISATION OF STATISTICS SWEDEN

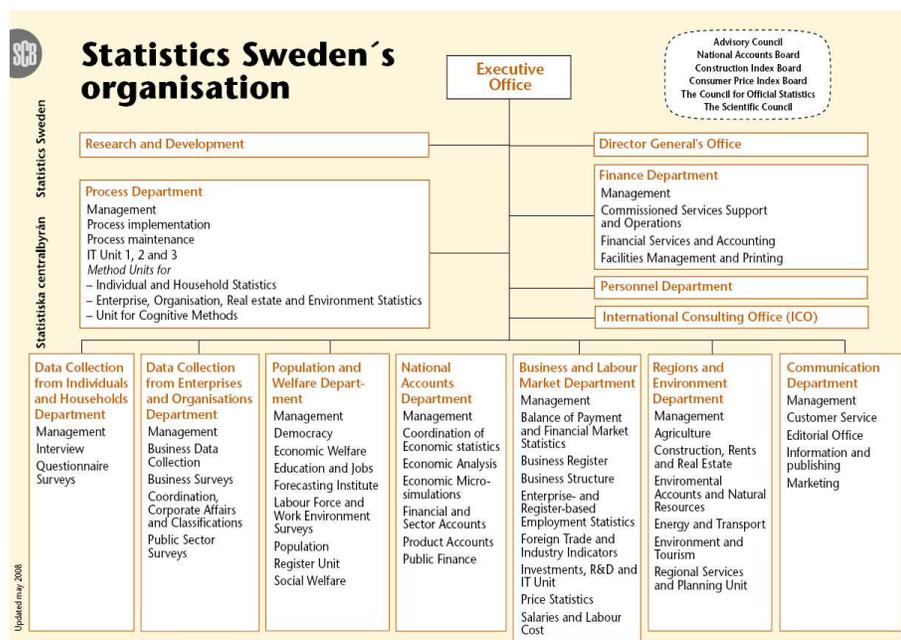
3. Statistics Sweden has for a long time been a very decentralised organisation: survey managers for individual surveys are to a large extent expected to make decisions within a given budget on which priorities to make, which methods and which tools to use for the production of statistics. The rationale for this has been that they know best the level of quality that should be achieved, based on knowledge of the user needs, as well as the specific situation where the methods and tools should work. Of course, a number of guidelines and recommendations has been available to support the survey managers in their decisions. They also have access to expertise in statistical methodology and information technology, but there are very few strict rules for operation. This has led to a large degree of variation in the process. It was considered that the positive aspects of this approach outweighed the negative ones. However, the world is constantly changing and new demands on quality of statistics, reduction of costs, reduction of response burden, a different staff structure and a growing need for quality assurance across the organisation made changes necessary.

4. An internal review in 2003 led to a successive reorganisation with some new units being created for specific purposes, where data collection was gradually centralised. However, standardisation did not come into effect nearly as quickly and as well as had been envisioned. Therefore a major development project was put in place in the fall of 2006, the so-called Lotta project, to achieve standardisation across the production process and to tackle the accompanying managerial and competence issues. Another purpose of this development project was to standardize and render more effective the customer dialogue. The objective of this project was:

"Effective methods and common tools should be developed for all stages in the production process and should be used by all statistical products. The responsibility for methods and tools is centralised, as is the responsibility for their support and use. The responsibility includes also the need for continuous improvement of methods and tools to increase quality and reduce costs for Statistics Sweden, and for our customers and data providers. The development work is initiated and prioritized from the viewpoint of the production processes' combined needs and, thus, is based on the customers' needs and wishes."

5. One result of this reorganisation is that Statistics Sweden now has a Marketing Unit at the Communications Department which is responsible for coordination of commission activities, Statistics Sweden's central marketing and the development of a joint marketing plan. The marketing unit has been built up gradually in 2008.
6. In addition to the Communications department, Statistics Sweden has four subject matter departments, two data collection departments, one department for research and development, one process department and departments for support in the areas of finance and personnel.

Figure 1
The organisation chart of Statistics Sweden



III. SYSTEM FOR THE OFFICIAL STATISTICS

7. There is a distinction in Sweden between official statistics and other public statistics. Official statistics are statistics that are produced according to the statistical act and ordinance and published as required by official regulations.
8. The Official Statistics Act states that official statistics are statistics for public information, planning and research purposes in specified areas produced by appointed public authorities in accordance with the provisions issued by the Government. Official statistics shall be objective and made available, free of charge, to the public. Further, they are to be produced and published in a manner that protects the privacy of individuals. All authorities responsible for official statistics should each year provide an updated description for every product for which they are responsible.
9. In the middle of the 1990s, a statistical reform was carried out and responsibility for the official statistics was decentralised. In 1994, the responsibility for about half of the official

statistics was transferred from Statistics Sweden to 24 other government agencies. Statistics Sweden continued to be responsible for multi-sectoral statistics, while other agencies were made responsible for other parts of statistics. The main purpose was to give the users more influence over the statistics.

10. The government report in 1999 which evaluated the statistical reform of 1994 showed that the transfer of statistics from Statistics Sweden to other agencies had by and large gone smoothly, but coordination and the overall view of the statistical system needed to be strengthened. The evaluation report recommended that a council be established for Sweden's official statistics to improve coordination and the overall view of the statistical system. A Council for Official Statistics was duly established at Statistics Sweden in 2002.

IV. THE COUNCIL FOR OFFICIAL STATISTICS

11. The Council has an advisory function and considers matters of principle regarding availability, quality and usefulness of official statistics, as well as issues on facilitating the response process for data providers. Every year, the Council prepares an annual report on official statistics, compiles an annual publishing plan, and maintains a register of the statistical authorities and their products. The Council encourages cooperation between the statistical authorities, and develops and manages a statistical network.

12. A number of work groups have been actively working for the Council in the past few years. The work groups have handled issues concerning giving access to data, methodology and quality, electronic publishing, the situation for data providers, regional official statistics and the calculation of the costs of official statistics. The work groups are made up of representatives of the agencies in the Council and representatives of other statistical agencies that expressed interest in this work.

V. THE ORGANIZATION OF THE CUSTOMER DIALOGUE

13. The dialogue with the customers starts with the management of Statistics Sweden.

A. Council of Trustees

14. From January 1, 2007, the government decided to amend Statistics Sweden's directive. The amendment involved replacing Statistics Sweden's Governing Council with a publicly controlled council, a Council of Trustees, whose purpose is to advise the Director General in issues related to the effective running of operations in accordance with operational objectives. The Council consists of representatives from the business community, trade unions, the parliament and Sweden's municipalities and county councils.

B. Annual work plan for activities financed by appropriation

15. With respect to appropriations, Statistics Sweden produces an annual work plan where all appropriation products are described. In the work plan, all bigger changes that are planned during the coming year are described. The work plan is presented to the department of finance at

the beginning of the year. This work means a dialogue with continuous feedback to the mandator.

C. Programme councils

16. Statistics Sweden has nine programme councils. These aim to create a network of organised user contacts to obtain constant information on new and changed statistical needs and to gain support for changes in statistics with major users. In addition, programme councils function as a network for information, whereby Statistics Sweden can spread ideas and gain feedback. Programme councils have external chairs and consist of an additional 6 to 12 user representatives. The chair is a representative from one of the major users and is a person with a good knowledge of the sector relevant to the particular statistics. The representatives are appointed for a period of three years.

17. In 2007-2009, there were programme councils for:

- (a) Labour market statistics;
- (b) Population statistics, education and demographics;
- (c) Democracy statistics;
- (d) Economic statistics;
- (e) Research and Development (R&D) statistics;
- (f) Regional statistics;
- (g) Social and economic welfare statistics;
- (h) Statistics on the physical environmental accounts;
- (i) Statistics on land, housing and construction.

18. Each programme council holds 2–4 meetings per year and, in some cases, two councils have joint meetings. They play an active role concerning issues of prioritisation and direction. The councils have also been an important channel for conveying particular viewpoints and following up on Statistics Sweden's activities. Furthermore, the programme councils have put together statements on statistical issues and have participated as representatives for statistics in external activities.

19. Every other year all user representatives in the programme councils respond to a customer satisfaction survey. These results are presented to the managerial board and are also presented in the annual report.

20. There are a number of other boards and councils where user needs are discussed. These include the Consumer Price Index board, the Construction Index board and the National

Accounts board, where methodological developments within the respective area are discussed. The boards meet two to three times a year and consist of representatives of important users.

D. Communication with customers via the website

21. The website is the most important channel in order to communicate statistical data to general public and to professional users. All statistical reports are published on the website in a standardized format. All printed statistical reports are published on the website in pdf-format. The most often requested statistical products of Statistics Sweden are presented on the website in the form of tables and diagrams. All press releases are published on the website.

E. Meetings with users

22. Statistics Sweden has regular contacts and special meetings with other statistical authorities for monitoring of operations. Units at Statistics Sweden carry out regular follow-up meetings with their clients where the department and unit heads are actively participating. The Director General (DG) has meetings with the statistical authorities and other large and strategic customers in order to learn about their requests. Regular meetings are held with the Board of Swedish Industry and Commerce for Better Regulation (NNR) and the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SKL). The purpose of these meetings is to discuss the response burden in relation to the need for statistical information. Consultations are always held with the NNR and SKL before any changes are made to a survey. Statistics Sweden also organizes customer days involving the DG and responsible managers in order to meet different customers.

F. Marketing Unit at the Communications Department

23. The Marketing Unit at the Communications Department is responsible for coordination of commission activities, Statistics Sweden's central marketing and the development of a joint marketing plan. The Marketing Unit has been built up gradually in 2008.

24. Contacts with customers can be established by initiative of the customer or of Statistics Sweden. Often the customers choose to contact Statistics Sweden to order statistical data. The majority of Statistics Sweden's statistics are free of charge and much of these are already available on the website. But sometimes the ordinary statistical reporting does not satisfy the customers special information needs. Therefore Statistics Sweden offers customized solutions throughout the entire statistical process.

25. For the cases where Statistics Sweden initiates the contact, a customer strategy is chosen. The strategy depends on the type of customer and the type of order. For a potentially large production request, it is recommended to meet with the customers personally to make sure that all their needs are met and questions are answered. For a smaller order it may suffice to communicate by phone, mail or e-mail.

26. Statistics Sweden has appointed customer segment managers at the Communications Department for the largest key customers. There are customer segment managers responsible for the state, the EU, the regions (municipal, county, etc.) and universities. The new approach means that a client team is formed around a number of major clients and that the work towards

customers is coordinated in customer plans. However, the departments are still responsible for the daily contacts involving ordering, production and delivery.

27. The customer segment managers put together a team of people who have a close relationship with a particular customer. In this way, inquiries and requests from the customer are spread in a larger group and knowledge of the customer is disseminated within Statistics Sweden. Customer teams are responsible for producing a customer plan, including information about the customer, and a strategy of how Statistics Sweden should act concerning the customer. All customer plans are collected in the market plan. The daily customer dialogue is important. Within certain subject matters, regular customer seminars are held, such as the annual seminar of citizen studies for municipalities, and several other seminars where regional statistics are presented and needs are discussed.

28. The output of the work done by the Marketing Unit is a market plan which contains all the plans for various marketing activities to be performed. The document also describes activities for prioritized customers and customer segments as well as other activities, for example seminars that are planned.

G. Customer service

29. Statistics Sweden has a central customer service which responds to questions from customers, researchers and the public. Customer service also receives study visits and performs smaller work on commission, such as compilations of international statistics. The customer service function is under development and the departments and units still have daily contacts with customers and respondents. In order to provide better service it has been decided that customer service will eventually take over all incoming requests. The daily contacts with respondents will still be managed by the departments.

VI. MEASURING CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

30. According to the appropriation directions, Statistics Sweden shall report on customer satisfaction in appropriations-financed activities. Comprehensive customer studies are valuable to get a general picture of what the customers consider important.

31. Statistics Sweden has a programme for conducting various types of studies to monitor the views of users on the quality and use of statistics, as well as on the service offered by Statistics Sweden. These studies aim primarily to serve as a basis for improvements in individual products and services. However the findings also give an indication of the general quality of Statistics Sweden's services.

32. Since 1996, continuous follow-up on orders of over SEK 10 000 has been conducted, providing quick client feedback about the product or service that was delivered. Our commissioned work has received consistently high marks.

33. A wider and more comprehensive customer satisfaction index is produced every other year. This study is directed towards the most important users and customers of Statistics Sweden.

The customer satisfaction index is showing not only the customers' assessment of Statistics Sweden's services but also which quality components they prioritize.

* * * * *