

Tools and Methods for National Coordination in the National Statistical System

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Abstract

The updated Regulation 223/2009 strengthens the coordination role of National Statistical Institutes. EU Member States are now implementing the regulation and are in the process of considering a) how to define coordination, b) who are the other national statistical authorities (ONAs) and c) what are the tools, methods and ways to do coordination at a national level.

To understand different ways of cooperation, examples are given as Statistics Finland has long experience in coordination and has developed various tools and methods to support this task.

Keywords: coordination, ONA, NSI, list of products.

1. Introduction

1.1. History of coordination in Finland

The Statistical office of Finland was created in October 1865 and the office started its work in December. Already in those days, there was discussion on how centralised or decentralised the National Statistical System should be. In Finland, the chosen solution was based on decentralisation as it was recognised that the main knowledge and expertise on different subject areas are in the government bodies responsible for that subject matter. The Statistical Office was responsible for harmonisation and standardisation, as well as dissemination of statistics. Already in 1885, there was a decree that government bodies should disseminate their annual report in Official Statistics of Finland (OSF) series. The roots of coordination of statistical work and branding of OSF can be traced to these days.

In 1929, the Act on the Statistical Office was renewed and the Statistical Office was mandated to supervise the statistical work and dissemination of other producers of official statistics, to give opinions on necessary changes and to promote the development of official statistics in Finland. The next renewals of the act of the statistical office were done in 1954 and 1971. It is possible to find out from history books that the coordination task given to the statistical office was hard to fulfil despite the good objectives. It was obvious that other government bodies producing statistics were very independent in their statistical work and in decision making concerning statistics. To solve the coordination problem, it was proposed in 1970 to create a three year statistical development programme and to monitor the implementation of this program. This task was given to the Statistical Office in a renewed act in 1971. Also the coordination role was more or less clarified. The Statistical Office should confirm concepts, classifications and identification systems, take care of statistical professional training, promote the usage of statistical methods and statistical data, and coordinate and conduct international statistical cooperation.

In the 1970's, the coordinator network was built to guarantee that ministries and government bodies are uniformly coordinated. Also to exchange information on statistical matters, a new journal was created for coordination purposes. The high level meetings were also used as a tool to discuss the usage and development needs of statistics on director general and Chief Secretary (of ministries) level.

In early 1990, Finland became an EU member, EU-statistical laws were adopted, and a new data management strategy was adopted by government. These actions strengthened the role of statistics in society and the new ways to do coordination in Finland. A task force was created in 1996 to develop a coordination mechanism and it gave 15 proposals to clarify responsibilities in coordination, to prepare the statistical development programme, to clarify the role of Official Statistics, to improve communication and training of coordinators, and to improve the quality in OFS. Many of these proposals were taken into action and they are described in Chapter 2.

1.2. Present situation

The updated EU regulation on European statistics (No 223/2009) strengthens the role of coordination. Recital 11 defines that “*Furthermore, the coordinating role already attributed to the NSIs should be clarified as regards its scope, in order to achieve more efficient coordination of statistical activities at national level, including quality management, while duly taking into account the statistical tasks performed by the European System of Central Banks (ESCB)...*”.

In article 5, paragraph 1 was replaced. In the new text, NSIs are responsible for coordinating all activities at national level for the development, production and dissemination of European statistics. Here, it is important to note that this coordinating role covers only ESS statistics defined by the multiannual statistical programme and it does not cover statistics produced only for national purposes as part of the Official Statistics of Finland (OSF).

“The new coordinating responsibility of the NSI shall cover all other national authorities responsible for the development, production and dissemination of European statistics ...” .

This sentence is important as it defines the borders of coordination of ESS statistics. The updated regulation gives NSIs new possibilities and duties for coordination but, at the same time, requires clarification at national level on who are coordinated, what is coordinated and which tools and methods are used in coordination.

By defining what ESS statistics are, it is possible to conclude who the other national authorities (ONAs) are. In Finland, most of ESS statistics are produced in NSI but some are produced by ONAs.

In Chapter 2, it is explained how these questions are put into practice in Finland. In Chapter 3, the development of coordination and requirement for an updated national statistical act is discussed.

2. Tools and Methods of coordination

2.1. Concepts and scope of coordination

Before the tools and methods of coordination are described, it is necessary to define what is meant by coordination and what is the scope of coordination in the National Statistical System. To define the concept of coordination is not always an easy task as it has many interpretations and ways to do it. Coordination can be understood as *e.g.* harmonisation, standardisation, synchronisation, integration of activities and responsibilities. Coordination can be understood to be governance of statistical work in the National Statistical System and thus use strong methods such as strict instructions given by the coordinator, guidance and approval of statistical process, certification of statistical operations and methods and statistical auditing by NSI. Coordination can also be soft and use methods such as discussions, common agreements and a common statistical programme. In many cases, coordination can be mixed with cooperation as the borderline between soft coordination and cooperation is very vague. These different viewpoints are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Different ways to coordinate



In Finland we use both soft coordination and cooperation but discussion on strong coordination has also started.

To define the scope of coordination, one should first have a clear understanding of who the ONAs in the National Statistical System that are producing ESS statistics are and what are the functions that should be coordinated. Eurostat presented the criteria for ONAs at an ESSC meeting in May 2014. In the document, it says that “Member States should consider as ONAs

all institutions (or their clearly identifiable organisational parts) which fulfil all the following criteria. They a) exercise public authority based on national law (regardless of their legal form); b) have production of statistics included among their tasks in the respective basic act (e.g. constitutive legal act, statute, mandate, mission statement etc); c) have clearly been given the responsibility at the national level for the production of a specific and identifiable part of European statistics (with a clear link to sectoral legislation, the European statistical programme, annual work programme or a list of ESS' statistical products). The ESSC endorsed the criteria but it was agreed for the sake of more flexibility that the second criterion (b) will not need to be applied.

Definition of ESS-statistics is another important aspect, and Eurostat is now preparing a catalogue of statistical products for 2017 (will be discussed at the ESSC meeting 5/2016). The discussion on the catalogue and the need to do it started in the ESSC meeting 5/2015 and continued in Resource Director Group, PG, TF on 223/2009 and also in ESSC 11/2015. The list (or catalogue) of statistical products covers European statistics that are in the multiannual European Statistical Programme (ESP) and which are implemented through Annual Work Programmes (AWP). Product means “documented sets of data that are available to end users on one or more supports or formats and correspond to a user need”. Eurostat’s opinion is that on the basis of the list, NSIs should be able to define what is produced and by whom.

Definition of functions that should be coordinated is best described in 223/2009 where it is stated “all activities at national level for the development, production and dissemination of European statistics”.

2.2. Coordination in Finland

The National Statistical System of Finland (NSS) is neither a fully decentralised nor a fully centralised system but something in between. This is of course due to the history and decisions made at different times during past decades. The NSS of Finland is a network of ONAs and OSF producers in the field of statistics.

In Finland, we think that coordination should be based on collaboration and cooperation. The objective of coordination is to guarantee that the NSS is working uniformly, data produced and published is of high quality and relevant and easy to use for our customers. Also, the production should be as cost-efficient as possible and all the produced data required by users. Statistical development activities are based on joint operational objectives and principles which are laid down in the statistical programme “Development of National Statistical Service -Main lines of policy 2013-2016”¹.

2.3. ONAs and other producers in Finland

In government hierarchy, we are steered by the Ministry of Finance. The main stakeholders are other producers of official statistics, data suppliers and register authorities, international statistical service (e.g. Eurostat, OECD, UNECE) and users of statistics. We also have some cooperation with research institutes and universities. And for some services we may use outsourcing, which means that we buy those services from the market (mostly from the private sector but also from the public sector). Our coordination role covers mainly register authorities and other producers of official statistics but also affects and follows what is happening with users and customers of statistical data.

In Finland, almost all producers of statistics in NSS produce Official Statistics of Finland (OSF). Quite many are also producing ESS statistics and thus can be called ONAs. In Table 1, it is shown who are producing ESS and OSF statistics and how many statistics are produced.

The Bank of Finland produces statistics that are part of the European Central Bank System but they no longer produce ESS statistics. It is worthwhile to note from the table that there is one producer who produces ESS statistics but no OSF statistics. That is the Finnish Immigration service and discussion is ongoing to include their production in the list of OSF.

¹ http://tilastokeskus.fi/org/tilastotoimi/tilastotoimenkehittaminen_en.html

Table 1. Producers of official statistics and number of statistics

	name of organisation	OSF producer	ESS-producer	amount of statistics
Statistical authority	Statistics Finland	yes	yes	148
	National Board of Customs	yes	yes	6
	National Institute for Health and Welfare	yes	yes	43
	Natural Resources Institute Finland	yes	yes	43
Government agencies producing statistics	Finnish Meteorological Institute	yes	no	1
	Finnish Transport Agency	yes	yes	7
	Finnish Transport Safety Agency	yes	yes	4
	Finnish Environment Institute	yes	yes	5
	Finnish Institute for Occupational Health	no	no	4
	National land Survey of Finland	yes	no	1
	Finnish Immigration service	no	yes	5
	Ministry of Employment and the Economy	yes	yes	1
other producers of statistics by law	The Social Insurance Institution of Finland	yes	no	30
	Finnish Centre of Pensions	yes	no	7

2.4. Methods of coordination

As described earlier, Statistics Finland has a long tradition in coordination and thus the ways to do coordination have evolved over time. At the moment, it can be described to be a combination of different aspects such as communication, planning and monitoring, quality improvement, coordination of national activities and coordination of international matters.

In this paper, methods refer to formal structures and tools are ways to do the work. Methods include different working groups and meetings, which are explained in this Chapter. Tools are described in next chapter.

Our system of Official Statistics is coordinated by the Advisory Board of OSF, which comprises all the ESS and OSF producers. The main task of this board is the development of statistical activities to fulfil the needs of customers and users, coordination of the national statistical system, and improvement of cooperation in line with ESS objectives. The board also

shares knowledge and expertise, promotes the visibility of OFS, compiles the statistical development programme and follows its implementation.

Statistics Finland coordinates EU cooperation in the field of statistics in Finland. The cooperation group for EU matters is appointed by the Ministry of Finance but it works under Statistics Finland's direction. The group includes representatives from all ministries and statistical authorities. The group discusses EU legislation on statistics, especially when there is new legislation proposals from the Commission.

Cooperation with the Bank of Finland focuses on Finland's international statistical obligations and commitments in the areas of financial statistics and some other economic statistics. The objective is to ensure the quality of statistics and cost-efficiency, and to avoid overlapping work. The cooperation is based on information exchange and preparation of uniform viewpoints (when possible). Cooperation is mostly done at senior management level meetings and joint working groups. But we also have a formal agreement with the bank and its details are updated annually.

Statistics Finland also regularly organises high-level meetings with ministries, statistical authorities, register owners and the Bank of Finland. The purpose of these meetings is to evaluate the relevance of statistics, launch joint projects and surveys, make long term cooperation agreements, reduce the response burden, and hear how we can better serve our main stakeholders.

We have coordinating groups in many different areas such as WG on Social and Health Statistics, WG on Agriculture, WG on Foreign Trade Statistics, WG on Education and WG on crime and criminal statistics. We also have a) cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in relation to international cooperation and consulting in the field of statistics, b) contacts with the Prime Minister's Office and the Ministry of Finance concerning national coordination of EU matters, and c) contacts with the Office of the Ombudsman for Data Protection and the Ministry of Justice on questions relating to the Statistics Act, the Personal Data Act, and the Act on the Openness of Government Activities.

Finally, we have a network of coordinators in Statistics Finland nominated for each ministry and main stakeholder. The coordinator is the main contact point towards stakeholder. She/he informs about the stakeholders activities to Statistics Finland and vice versa. He/she also organises high-level meetings, monitors the compliance of agreement and needs for updating the agreement.

2.5. Tools of coordination

The tools of coordination are various ways to improve the harmonisation and standardisation of statistical production, dissemination, communication and knowledge. The main tool is the policy document “*Development of National statistical Service 2013-2016*” (renewal in progress), which defines the main development goals for a four year period. The roots of this document dates back to the 1970’s. The document is drafted by NSI but approved by the Advisory Board for Official statistics, meaning that all producers of official statistics will be committed to these development guidelines and will follow these policy lines.

Another important tool are agreements that are done with other producers of official statistics, with administrative register owners and with the Bank of Finland. These agreements give details of forms of cooperation with each stakeholder. (E.g. with register owners we specify what are the registers and data and timetable for delivery that should be sent to NSI).

We have an OSF label for official statistics which is given by the Advisory Board of official statistics. Here it is useful to mention that not all statistics produced by government bodies are official statistics. Instead, only those statistics, which are presented to the Advisory Board and where the producer guarantees the continuation of that statistic and commitment to common OSF quality criteria which are compatible with the quality criteria of the European Statistical System (ESS) get the OSF label. Compliance with the quality criteria is monitored by the Advisory Board when it gives permission to use the OSF label.

We also have OSF recommendations (on data protection, statistical releases, use of languages, quality) approved by the Advisory Board. For external users, we have a specific OSF portal, which gives detailed information on the OSF label, OSF producers, OSF recommendations and directs the users to all official statistics. For internal purposes, (for NSI, ONAs and OSF

producers) we have a OSF extranet, where we give latest news on international meetings (e.g. ESSC, OECD, UNECE), national meetings (e.g. Advisory Board of OSF), documents (ESSC and OSF documentation), reports etc.

At the moment, we have a joint project (NSI and two ONAs) on development and implementation of EU quality reporting. In the project, we are developing a database to produce easily both EU quality reports and OSF quality reports for each official statistics in the NSS.

As a very important tool, we can also mention seminars and training sessions for other producers of statistics. We invite ONAs to participate in our statistical seminars and we also organise tailor-made workshops. For 2016, we have plans to organise three to four seminars on statistical work and quality.

Finally, to understand and monitor the output and input of our National Statistical System, we collect annually information of statistics produced and published, data collection methods (survey /administrative register), development projects and expenses and man-year used to produce statistics. This information is collected from ONAs and from other producers of OSF statistics and combined with NSIs own information to demonstrate the volume and output as well as costs of statistical work in Finland. Other monitoring activities are also conducted when needed e.g. compliance with COP and monitoring of other quality work of ONAs.

3. Development of coordination

As described in Chapter 1.1, Finland has a long tradition of coordination and as described in Chapter 2 we use different methods and tools to carry out our coordination role. However, we have recognised some tasks to improve our coordination. The first step, which is almost done, is the harmonisation and standardisation of agreements. We no longer make separate agreements by different departments for the same stakeholder. Instead, we gather all information in one agreement, which is signed by the Director General (previously signed by the Director of Statistics). The format is also standardised so that we clearly state the same rules and cooperative tasks to follow for all stakeholders.

Another step comes from amendments of EU regulation 223/2009. We are now in a phase of discussing if there is a need to amend the national statistical act as the EU regulation itself is binding but it covers only ESS statistics. We have raised the question of whether we should apply the same principles as those coming from 223/2009 in national statistical production (OSF). Changes arising from the EU regulation that we would like to implement in Finnish legislation concern coordination and the requirement to negotiate with NSI about administrative registers. This step is also almost done and the renewal of the national act on statistics is in its final stages before going to legislative procedure.

The third task is to implement COP Peer Review recommendations into actions. Finland received 23 recommendations and four of them touch on coordination: a) producers of official statistics should consider to put OSF label into all OSF data collection, b) producers of official statistics should consider to create a OSF annual statistical work programme and performance reports, c) NSI should conduct risk assessment of administrative data and d) NSI should intensify training of ONAs on quality items. Statistics Finland now uses the OSF label in its own direct data collections. At the moment, we are gathering the viewpoints of ONAs for taking the OSF label into use in their data collections. Discussions on needs to develop the annual statistical work programme has started but no conclusions have been made. The main message here is that ONAs do not want to have extra reporting if there are no clear advantages of this new work. Points c and d are already taken care of.

Finally, there is the question of guidelines given by the head of NSI to ONAs. As explained earlier, we have OSF recommendations agreed by all producers of official statistics but so far we haven't had guidelines given from NSI to ONAs. We have raised this discussion at the meeting of the Advisory Board for Official Statistics and it seems that some guidelines are welcomed by ONAs. But the discussion should go further and we need to clarify in which areas we want to give these guidelines (quality, methods, classifications, output, statistical areas etc.).

To conclude, we can say that we use various ways and tools that help us in our coordinating role. But of course the job is never finished and the importance of coordination is well raised

in new 223/2009. It is important to develop existing methods and get new ideas and best practices from other countries.

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