

Central Statistics Office, Ireland

A brief description of Ireland's national statistical system for the European Statistics Code of Practice peer review

Prior to 1949 statistics in Ireland were collated within a Division of the Ministry for Industry and Commerce under the Statistics Act, 1926.

The Central Statistics Office (CSO) was established in 1949 as the national statistical agency of Ireland. In parliament the Taoiseach (Prime Minister) stated that the CSO would be "attached to my Department to underline its independence and to give the office real freedom...". The national statistical system is highly centralised. The CSO produces the vast majority of Ireland's official statistics relating to the economic and social life in the State. Statistics such as those relating to education, health, housing and energy are compiled by other Government Departments or Agencies. Recently the responsibility for the compilation of crime statistics has been moved to the CSO.

The CSO has three offices, one in Cork and two in Dublin. The Cork office deals with surveys of enterprises and households and it is here that the main administrative function of the CSO is located. Statistical divisions dealing with national accounts, balance of payments, trade and environment are located at Rathmines in Dublin. Census processing is carried out in the Swords office, which is about 15 kilometres from Dublin City.

There are around 500 staff in the Cork office and 170 in Dublin, in addition about 150 household interviewers are dispersed throughout the country. Every five years there is an additional requirement (in Dublin) for about 175 temporary staff to process the Census of Population. Overall approximately 25% of core staff are university graduates.

The Gross budgetary allocation for 2005, 2006 and 2007 was €46.6m, €55.5m and €52.3m respectively. The significant difference in 2006 is due to the Census of Population which was carried out in April this year.

The Statistics Act, 1993 established the CSO as an independent statutory body in the Irish Civil Service under the aegis of the Department of the Taoiseach (Prime Minister). This legislation sets out the institutional structure of the Office; the independence of the Director General of the CSO on statistical matters; the collection of information; the use of administrative records of public authorities for statistical purposes; and the protection of confidential information. The Director General of the CSO is appointed by the President of Ireland following nomination by the Taoiseach and has a maximum term of seven years or a maximum age of 60 years.

Statistical activities in the Office are currently organised into the following three Directorates: Macro-Economics Statistics, Social and Demographic Statistics and Business Statistics. There are a number of business support functions in the Office; Administration and Finance, Human Resources and Informatics and Methodology.

The Central Statistics Office publishes a Statement of Strategy every three years. The current CSO strategy covers the years 2004-2006. This details the main targets and objectives of all areas of the Office during the period in question. Progress reports in relation to the Statement of Strategy are produced and publicised on an annual basis.

The National Statistics Board, which has existed since the mid-1980s, was established on a statutory basis under the Statistics Act, 1993. The Board is advisory in nature. Its function is to guide the strategic direction of the Central Statistics Office. In particular the Board is responsible for establishing priorities for the compilation and development of Irish official statistics. It may comment on the resources of staff, equipment and finance available for the compilation of official statistics. The NSB publishes an overall Strategy for Statistics every five years. The NSB's current strategy for 2003-2008 has emphasised the development of a "whole-system" approach to official statistics across the Public Service in Ireland. This aims to achieve the maximum use of existing data and provide additional official statistics to support evidenced-based policy-making.

Under the Statistic's Act, the CSO is responsible for co-ordinating official statistics of other public authorities and for developing the statistical potential of their administrative records. The Government has also asked the CSO to develop a strong central role in the provision of guidance on statistical matters to all producers of national statistical information.

The CSO has the legal authority to require members of the public and business enterprises to provide statistical information. The office maintains close and regular contact with the principal users and suppliers of statistical information. Many network groups have been setup to facilitate consultation with external stakeholders.

The confidentiality of the individual information relating to persons and undertakings collected by the CSO is protected under the Statistics Act. Information relating to people or businesses may only be used for statistical purposes and may not be disclosed to any other agency. The CSO lodges anonymised micro-data file from the Census of Population, the Household Budget Survey and the Quarterly National Household Survey with the Irish Social Science Data Archive (ISSDA). The CSO also facilitates research based on business microdata, by enabling access for researchers under strict conditions. In May 2005 the CSO published a Protocol describing its approach to data linking.

The Office is committed to the efficient and timely provision of high quality statistics needed by society, policy makers and organisations at local, regional, national and international levels. A weekly announcement, Statistics Due for Release, is available by e-mail from CSO Information Section each Thursday and also appears on the CSO web site www.cso.ie. It lists the releases and publications due for release in the following week. A four-month advance calendar of release data for regular Statistical Releases and publications is similarly available at the end of each month.

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