

Statistics Iceland and Icelandic Official Statistics

The mission of Statistics Iceland is to provide statistical information on economic and social issues and to ensure that reliability, integrity and impartiality are the corner stones of official statistics. Statistics Iceland does its utmost to enable the government, the economy and the public to base their decisions on reliable sources by publishing timely statistics with equal access for everyone. Statistics Iceland is a Government Ministry but is professionally autonomous.

During the last years, Icelandic official statistics have gone through a marked organisational evolution. Two decades ago, Icelandic official statistics were quite decentralised. Statistics Iceland was the central statistical office but substantial parts of the official statistics were produced elsewhere. This was the case with national accounts, fisheries and agricultural statistics, education statistics, important aspects of labour market statistics, parts of government finance statistics as well as statistics on health and education. Starting in the late 1980's, most of the decentralized activities have been merged with the activities of Statistics Iceland. The first transfers of activities involved health and social security statistics. These were followed a few years later by educational statistics and fisheries statistics. National accounts and central government sector accounts were merged with related activities of Statistics Iceland in 2002 and wage statistics in 2004. A further centralization of statistical responsibilities is ongoing, involving the transfer of the statistics of foreign trade in services from the Central Bank of Iceland to Statistics Iceland.

Against this, Statistics Iceland has on its own initiative been relieved of important administrative responsibilities, the operation of the National Register of Persons since it was established in the early 1950's and of the Register of Enterprises since its beginning in 1969. These register activities have in the last few years been transferred from Statistics Iceland to other parts of the central administration in order to separate the administrative tasks from the proper role of official statistics.

The system of official statistics in Iceland has Statistics Iceland at its core. The Central Bank of Iceland is responsible for monetary and financial statistics but other public institutions have limited roles within the system. Thereof, mention can be made of the Directorate of Fisheries, the Agricultural Economics Institute, the Directorate of Labour (registered unemployment), National Energy Authority, the Directorate of Health and the State Social Security Institute.

The legal basis for Statistics Iceland and its work is mainly the Act on Statistics Iceland of 1913 and related acts (e.g. on the consumer price index), and the Act and statutes on the Central Government

Administration. There are also important provisions in other legislation on the obligation of administrative systems to deliver and the right of Statistics Iceland to receive administrative data for statistical purposes. Statistics Iceland also operates in accordance with the United Nation's Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics, the European Code of Practice (an Icelandic version of which has been adopted by the Government as a universal Code of Practice in official statistics and published in an announcement in the Official Journal) as well as the Act on the Protection of Privacy regarding the processing of personal data. Furthermore Statistics Iceland has laid down its own Rules of Procedure for Treating Confidential Data.

According to the Statutes of the Central Government Administration, Statistics Iceland is responsible for the following affairs:

- Organising, coordinating and producing Iceland's official statistics.
- Collecting data and processing statistics on economic and social conditions in Iceland, providing statistical information and issuing statistical reports.
- Compiling national accounts.
- Developing and computing price and wage indices.
- Communications and cooperation with international bodies in the field of statistics.

Iceland is one of the countries where there is a strong tradition for utilisation of administrative records and registers for statistical purposes. This practice is of enormous importance for the coverage and the efficiency of the statistical production in a small society like the Icelandic one. Without such access to administrative data, the data collection activities would in many instances be prohibitively expensive. Among the main registers utilized are the National Register of Population, the Enterprise Register, various tax registers as well as registers from the Directorate of Customs and the State Social Security Institute.

The head of Statistics Iceland is the Director-General who is directly responsible to the Minister for Statistics Iceland (presently the Prime Minister). The institution is divided into three divisions, of economic statistics, social statistics and resources and services. Statistics Iceland is based in Reykjavik, the capital of Iceland, and has no regional offices. The present number of staff is 84 excluding interviewers, of which women are more than the half and almost three-quarters are university graduates. There is no statistical council but Statistics Iceland operates several permanent user and advisory groups such as in national accounts, price statistics, wage statistics and labour market statistics.

For more information: <http://www.statice.is>