

Summary

The Household Budget Surveys (hereinafter the HBS) are sample surveys that provide a wide range of information on households and are carried out in most countries around the world, including Slovenia and the EU. All national surveys conducted by EU countries are based on Eurostat's common methodological recommendations and guidelines. The member states are harmonising their national methodologies with these recommendations as best they can.

In Slovenia, as in the other new EU member states, the beginnings of the HBS date back to the 1960s. The fifteen old EU members have a much longer tradition in this field. Some started carrying out these surveys as far back as the mid-19th century. With each survey round carried out to date, great improvement has been achieved. Nevertheless, Eurostat, as the co-ordinator of the project, continually faces new challenges and opportunities for improving the quality of survey data. It organises and directs survey work at EU level and has been committed to improving the quality of HBS statistics in co-operation with the member states' national statistical offices for a number of years. Eurostat pursues two main objectives: to achieve optimum harmonisation of the survey methodology with the methodologies of other, more complex and comprehensive statistical frameworks (and consequently ensure the best possible comparability of survey data with the data from these statistics) and to ensure the highest possible comparability of survey data between EU countries.

The attempt to harmonise the HBS with national accounts is one of the main characteristics of the pan-European HBS. In some areas these efforts have been highly successful while in others results are less promising. The highest level of harmonisation can be seen in the concepts of the two main survey variables: private households and household final consumption expenditure. Both of these variables are based on the European System of Accounts, and both of the statistical systems use the same classification of expenditures. Conversely, the lowest comparability and coherence with the ESA has been achieved in the so-called borderline cases of household expenditure. Regarding the quality and adequacy of HBS data for use in national accounts at the EU level, it should be noted that most expenditures in HBS are lower than in national accounts, and some expenditures are seriously underestimated. In regular or frequent expenditures there are some minor differences between the results obtained by the HBS and the national accounts, while the corresponding differences in the less common expenditures are much bigger. Due to these differences and problems of comparability, the harmonisation between the HBS statistics and the system of national accounts at the EU level will continue under Eurostat's supervision, particularly in those areas where harmonisation is currently poorest.

With regard to the national accounts statistics, the Slovenian HBS is fully harmonised with Eurostat's recommendations and does not show any major inconsistencies. However, the timely release and sampling size of HBS data are a much bigger problem of the Slovenian national accounts statistics. Another deficiency of the Slovenian HBS is the (non-)measurement of imputed rentals, an area which is critical in all new EU members. This also seriously limits the possibilities for accurate international comparison of the overall level and structure of household expenditure. The collection of these data will therefore have to be brought into line with Eurostat's requirements and recommendations as soon as possible. According to the HBS department of the Slovenian Statistical Office, efforts to construct an appropriate method for analysing the Slovenian rental market are already well under way.

Key words: households, consumption, Household Budget Survey, methodology, sampling, national accounts, European Union, Slovenia