

New EU-harmonised Labour Force Surveys (LFS) as from April 2005

Since Sweden joined the European Union, major changes have been made in many areas of Swedish society, not least in the field of official statistics. It is now time to introduce the EU-harmonised Labour Force Survey (LFS). The survey will be published for the first time on 31 May 2005 at 1300 hrs and will refer to data for the month of April.

Over the last two years or so, SCB has been working hard to further harmonise the LFS in line with the EU's regulatory framework. As part of these efforts, we have used¹ as a guiding principle for what LFS should include and how the survey should be conducted. The Regulation specifies not only which labour market-related variables the survey should measure but also in which order the various questions are to be asked.

Harmonisation will further improve international comparability of the surveys performed by the various member states.

The main change is the introduction of a new interview form to better measure and report the population's degree of attachment to the labour market.

Other changes aimed at improving quality are also being implemented in connection with the introduction of an EU-harmonised LFS. These include better statistical methods including a more modern and better seasonal adjustment method. The visible effects of these changes for the user are mainly better scope in the long term for more seasonally adjusted series, complete estimations of the inaccuracies in the values calculated and better consistency in estimates between different study domains.

The publication of LFS has also been reviewed as part of the EU harmonisation work. Most of the statistics will gradually be made available on the SCB website and/or in SCB databases during 2005.

All in all, however, the changes being made have caused a break in comparability for LFS over time. As from the second quarter in 2005, results are consequently not comparable with the results from previous LFS surveys. To begin with, only annual comparisons will be possible pending the introduction of linked seasonally adjusted data.

¹Commission Regulation (EC) No 430/2005 of 15th March 2005 implementing Council Regulation (EC) No 577/98 on the organization of a labour force sample survey in the Community

The most important changes between the current and the new LFS

Changes to definitions

- 'Work abroad' is ranked the same as 'work in Sweden' (in the current LFS, it is included in the 'Not in the labour force' category). This change also applies to job seekers.
- Being unemployed is now defined by being able to work and actively seeking work (wanting to work during the reference week is no longer a deciding factor as it is in the current LFS)
- Simply studying advertisements with the aim of finding a job is included in the new LFS as actively seeking work.
- Waiting to start a new job within 3 months' time is included as actively seeking work (the limit is 1 month in the current LFS)

New variables

- The length of absence and whether the interviewee is collecting some kind of salary or income compensation while absent
- Whether the interviewee has some form of managerial or supervisory responsibility
- Whether the lack of childcare (or care service for other family member) is a reason why the interviewee works part-time and is not seeking full-time employment
- Whether the interviewee made use of the employment agency's services to secure his/her current job
- Direct questions on overtime work (overtime is defined in the current LFS as the difference between actual and agreed working time during the reference week)
- Whether the interviewee has a contract with a staff recruitment agency or not

New order of questions

- The question on having performed work during the reference week must precede the questions about having a job
- Questions on having sought work are primary data and may not be filtered out (this question is preceded in the current LFS by one on wanting to work)

Other changes

- Direct questions on absence are put to employees (this is captured in the current LFS through the difference between actual and agreed working time)

- Hours absent during the reference week will no longer be sub-divided into different causes of absence
- Quality will be improved as a result of a large amount of the industrial and occupational coding being performed during the actual interview (in the current LFS, this is done afterwards)

Changed publication

LFS is published monthly, quarterly and annually. As before, national reporting of LFS will continue to be based on the 16-64 age group.

A new aspect of the new LFS is that it will be possible to seasonally adjust more of the data and almost all the variables and tables will be obtained with inaccuracy ratios in the form of confidence intervals.

Another new aspect of the new LFS is that additional results of considerable public interest will also be made available in 'Supplementary Tables' on the SCB website.

By no means all the tables will be ready for publication in May 2005, however, which is why only a sample of the new 'Basic Tables' will be published. To begin with, they will not therefore be available in printed form. The aim is for all Basic and Supplementary Tables to be ready by the end of 2005. By this time, Sweden's Statistical Databases should also include the data in the Basic Tables.

Monthly publication

In accordance with a predetermined publication plan, a press release will be issued containing the most important findings from the survey.

On the SCB website and LFS product web page www.scb.se/aku and www.scb.se/lfs our Basic Tables will be published free of charge:

- These include 40 or so tables and make up Sweden's Official Statistics from the labour force survey. Gradually, these will also be printed and sold.
Their content is vastly different compared to the current Basic Tables. For more information, see Appendices 1-3.
- Supplementary Tables which also include 40 or so tables of considerable interest. This data does not comply with the requirements laid down for official statistics. It will not be printed but will only be available online. For more information, see Appendix 4.
- Required tables and diagrams

Apart from the data on the LFS product web page, a new set of time series will be constructed as part of Sweden's Statistical Databases (SSD). These will include the same data as is available in the Basic Tables. SSD will therefore contain three sets of time series: LFS pre-1987; LFS 1987 to 2004 inclusive, and LFS 2005 and onwards.

Quarterly and annual publication

A Statistical Bulletin is to be published on the LFS product web page quarterly and yearly. This is in addition to the findings that are also published monthly in SSD, in press releases and the regular Basic and Supplementary Tables.

Introduction of the new LFS - comparability with the current LFS

LFS will be reported in its new format starting with the data for April 2005. This also means that LFS as from the second quarter 2005 will be reported in accordance with the new LFS format.

A tough user requirement has been for LFS time series to be unbroken. Such comprehensive change, however, makes it impossible to avoid breaks in time series. Parallel surveys are however being undertaken with findings from both new and current LFS during the period October 2004 to March 2005 inclusive to comply with users' requirements. With the help of this data, it will then be possible to report 30 or so of LFS's most important variables as unbroken time series using a process called 'linking'. All of these variables will not however be available from the publication in May.

It will not be possible to report seasonally adjusted series to begin with. To be able to seasonally adjust the data, which is necessary in order to be able to compare e.g. two adjacent months, we will need four to five years of observations. In combination with the introduction of a new seasonal adjustment method and the work needed to link the current LFS to the new LFS version, this will mean that LFS will, to start with, not be able to report monthly comparisons. It will only be possible to make annual comparisons. The first seasonally adjusted figures from the linked time series are expected to be published during the late autumn of 2005.

Gradually, an increasing amount of seasonally adjusted data will be published for a maximum of the 30 or so linked time series.

Other issues

On SCB's website and the AKU product web-page, there is access to:

- Questionnaire LFS 2005
- Table of contents for the new Basic Tables (3 - monthly, quarterly and annually)
- Table of contents for the new Supplementary Tables

On 27 May at 1300-1500 hrs, a user seminar on the new EU-harmonised LFS will take place at SCB (in Swedish). An invitation will be put on the SCB website at the beginning of May (www.scb.se/aku).

On 31 May at 1300 hrs, a 30-minute press conference will be held (in Swedish) on the findings of the LFS and information about the changes.
Venue: "Hagaparken", Conference Centre, Karlavägen 100.

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