

Diversified services of social protection statistics in Hungary – challenges + answers = good practice?

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Abstract

The Hungarian Central Statistical Office has a wealthy warehouse of social protection statistics. In this field the statistical work to a great extent relies on data deriving from organizations, institutions and persons providing basic and specialized social, child welfare and child protection services. Thirteen full scope data collections with 100% response rate ensure that good quality, comparable data are available on different groups of population, especially on the most vulnerable ones (e.g. elderly, children, disabled, homeless). Due to the challenges we face HCSO has to maintain and continuously develop diversified, customer-oriented services, which can be considered as a good practice. The paper presents the diversified services of social protection statistics that contribute to evidence-based policy making, the reducing of the burden on respondents, the better understanding of data and the increase of statistical literacy.

Keywords: social protection statistics, encouraging evidence-based policy, reducing burden on respondents, statistical literacy

Paper

Introduction

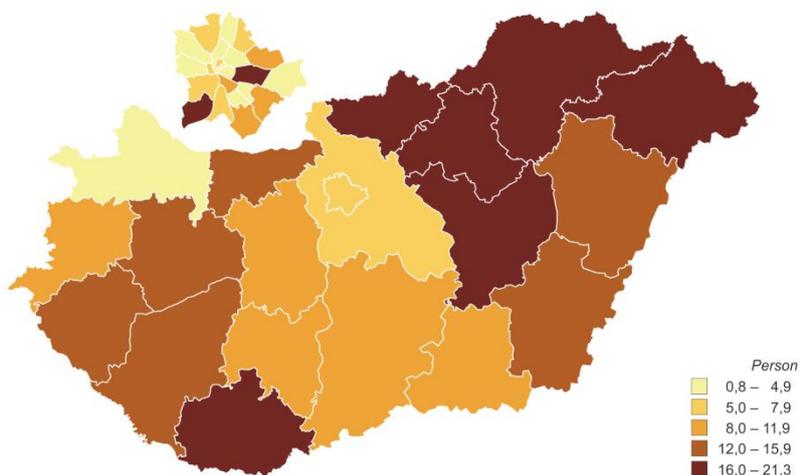
The Hungarian Central Statistical Office (HCSO) has a wealthy warehouse of social protection statistics. In this field – apart from some surveys and administrative data – the statistical work to a great extent relies on data deriving from organizations, institutions and persons providing basic and specialized social, child welfare and child protection services. Thirteen full scope data collections with 100% response rate ensure that good quality, comparable (even at settlement level) data are available on different groups of population, especially on the most vulnerable ones (e.g. elderly, children, disabled, homeless). The range of users became extremely wide, from policy makers to media different user needs emerge. Due to the challenges we face HCSO has to maintain and continuously develop diversified, customer-oriented services, which can be considered as a good practice.

Encouraging evidence-based policy

In order to best provide customer-oriented services we build the needs of different stakeholders in statistical data collections, especially that of ministries, international organizations. Every year when planning the National Data Collection Programme we always consult our main users (what they want) and data providers (what is feasible) and analyse information on the usage of our data (data requests, web statistics).

It is essential to pursue the legislation process, since social protection statistics – definitions, sources, data collection methods – rely to a large extent on legislation that changes 4–5 times per year on average. We also provide decision makers data and analyses to enable evidence-based policy making. The best example when the reorganization of the public administration system in Hungary (formation of districts) took place, which largely affected the organization of public guardianship authorities and also the statistical data collection on guardianship. HCSO reorganized the data collection in a way best fit for data providers. Local governments from where some of the public guardianship tasks were to be shifted to districts were asked to fill in questionnaires before the transmission of duties, then the relevant data collection had to be replanned according to the new public administration structure. For the calculation of human resource needs in the district guardianship authorities the Ministry in charge used statistical data on the number of children at risk or taken into child protection and for what reason, data on co-ordination tasks, adoption cases etc.

Registered children taken into child protection per thousand inhabitants of corresponding age¹



Participation of HCSO in projects conducted by international organizations is aimed at developing measurement methods of different social protection related issues.

Task Force on Ageing-related Statistics lead by United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE):

- The issues that have to be considered are the following: How well do the current indicators meet policy needs? Do current indicators adequately cover the issues within different statistical domains? How can data gaps be filled and comparability be improved? How can surveys cover institutionalized population?
- HCSO participates in developing a concept note regarding health and independence among older persons. The main findings are that measurement of the health status and health and social care of older persons is fairly robust, the majority of UNECE countries routinely produce official statistics in this domain. Yet, important gaps remain at conceptual and measurement levels.

Ad-hoc Working Party on Roma Inclusion lead by European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA):

- The European Union (EU) Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020 has stressed the need for robust and comparable data to assess the impact of Roma integration policies and measures. We work together with the FRA in developing a set of indicators on Roma integration in the framework of the Fundamental Rights Charter and in line with the Europe 2020 strategy. This work complements and builds upon other efforts to develop human rights indicators and monitor processes at EU and national level.

- In Hungary the Ministry of Human Resources initiated a monitoring system for the national social inclusion strategy, for which the HCSO provides statistical inputs. The Hungarian Central Statistical Office in order to meet user needs regarding statistical information on Roma inclusion included the question on ethnicity in large sample surveys. The method of questioning is based on the population census and was tested during population census and also in Labour Force Survey before introducing it in 2013. The European Health Interview Survey conducted in 2014 used the same questioning method. In 2014 ethnicity was also included in EU-SILC.

Situation of children under child protection provision – UNICEF TransMonEE data collection:

- How can comparable data across countries be provided if child protection systems including legislation, definitions, statistical methods differ? „In some cases it is more difficult to put a small ball into a large hole than to a hole the same size of the ball.”
- HCSO when executing the data transmission task for UNICEF can easily provide data deriving from organizations, institutions and persons providing child welfare and child protection services, while other countries conducting household surveys not covering institutionalized population have difficulties. However providing data is a tailor-made service. In order to facilitate international comparison statisticians should include a detailed description of the social protection system with the comprehensive explanation of the relevant legislation. National statistics need to be converted to fit for a general system, which sometimes contradicts the national phenomenon. For instance UNICEF collects data on children in foster care, guardian care and residential care. In Hungary every child without parental care enters guardian care, also those in foster and residential care. To avoid double accounting of children, we have to transform our data.

Reducing burden on respondents

One of the main measures to put non-excessive burden on respondents is the use of administrative sources whenever possible to avoid duplicating requests for information. HCSO uses 10 different administrative data sources in the field of social protection statistics mainly covering cash benefits like pension, social security and family benefits. Our main partners are the Central Administration of National Pension Insurance, the Hungarian State Treasury and the National Health Insurance Fund Administration.

In order to ensure the use of administrative data for statistical purposes HCSO participate in the development of administrative records. There is an ongoing co-operation with the National Office for Rehabilitation and Social Affairs in the development of the register of social institutions and services, the register of recipients of services and the register of social benefits. One of the main challenges we face is the use of different identification number in registers (other than the tax number used by HCSO to identify social institutions), which cause problems in data matching. Another issue to be solved is that the administrative records cover only social services that are bound to license and recipients of services only if the service is financed by the state. For statistical purposes more information is needed, thus the use of administrative data cannot entirely substitute statistical data collections. One example is the new child welfare service called sure start children centre, the aim of which is to help the social inclusion of both socially and culturally disadvantaged pre-school aged children and their parents by providing preventive services. These services support the healthy development of children and strengthen parental competencies. The service is not bound to license and some are not financed by the state, however full scope statistical data on sure start children centres are essential for the monitoring of Roma inclusion.

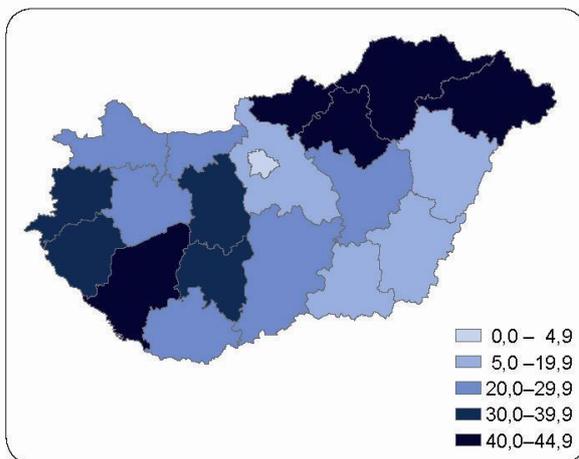
HCSO has developed an electronic data collection system called ELEKTRA to reduce the burden on respondents. All statistical data collections regarding social protection are included. The electronic questionnaires are simplified compared to the previous printed versions, pre-filled with basic data and automated controls are built in to facilitate the work of the respondent institutions. HCSO also helps data providers in harmonizing electronic data transmission means of institutions (e.g. public guardianship authorities) with ELEKTRA.

Making data meaningful

In the field of social protection statistics we are keen on producing data and analysis on topics in the spotlight (pensions, child abuse, day care, children in reformatories), telling a story through analysing the situation of vulnerable groups putting the problem of individuals in the focus.

Regarding regional analysis it is very important that besides region–county–district–settlement level analysis the availability of social services should be reviewed by the population size categories of settlements since the mandatory social services maintained by the state are linked to different settlement types and there are extreme disparities.

Ratio of children aged 0–2 years not having access to day care on place (%)²



In Hungary 22 per cent of children aged less than 3 years live in settlements where day care services are not available. The number of places available for day care for the disabled is only sufficient for 1.5 per cent of all disabled persons living in private households, the regional difference is 11-fold. The regional coverage of family assistance services is 95 per cent, however only 1 in 5 provides service on place, half of the services supply other settlements, too, every fifth more than 5 settlements, and there is a service covering more than 40 settlements.

Increasing statistical literacy

In co-operation with Ópusztaszer Heritage Park, HCSO organized a programme called „Preserving national heritage seasoned by 100 years of statistics” where students could learn statistics through games. For instance in the authentic scene we presented the change in the functions of districts from the 16th century through data. Upon the correctness of the answer to the quiz it was decided if „Sziszi” one of the 14 thousand children taken into child protection due to missing more than 50 classes was punished. In a country school of the 19th century students got some basic statistical skills inter alia on the importance of measurement scale („Are the 1851 goals scored by the Hungarian national football team a lot? And if they were achieved on 884 matches?”) or sound definitions („How many cattle do you see on the picture? And if one of them is a calf or a pregnant cow?”).

Our „Open days” programme provides the opportunity for visitors to become a statistician for a few minutes and take a look behind the scenes of how statistics are made. The poster exhibition illustrated what mistakes can be made when designing a graph, and told anecdotes regarding statistics and statisticians.

Bonus feature

What is common in a statistician and a folk dancer?
Both disseminate data. (In Transsylvania disseminating data means that a folk artist transfers his knowledge to someone.) The HCSO preserves national heritage not only by keeping the traditions of statistics, but also by maintaining a folk dance group.



References:

¹ Hungarian Central Statistical Office (2014): Yearbook of Welfare Statistics, 2013, Budapest.

² Hungarian Central Statistical Office (2014): Statistical Reflections 2014/82 („Helyzetkép a kisgyermek napközbeni ellátásáról, 2013 – Kötelezettségek, lehetőségek, tények”), Budapest.