

Coherence of register and survey data - results from a register survey on marginal employment

La coherence entre les données issues de registres et d'enquêtes résultats d'une enquête parmi des personnes inscrites comme "employé marginal"

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Coherence in many respects is a highly relevant topic for statisticians. Besides being one of the standard quality criteria for statistical data, coherence receives even growing attention over the last years. Incoherent results can challenge the credibility of the statistics and lead to intensive public debates – like in the case of marginal employment in Germany.

The number of marginally employed persons³ is a striking example for incoherent results from two different statistical sources. This subgroup of employees is measured by two official statistics which show heavily deviating results. One source is a statistical register that captures all marginally employed persons that have been registered by their employer under the social insurance system. The other source is the Labour Force Survey (LFS) which asks for any kind of employment following the ILO guidelines and differentiates the marginally employed by a separate question. Although the LFS refers to the same concept, the figure from the register is nearly 40 % higher compared to the result from the LFS.

Following a (nationwide) discussion regarding the “correct” number of marginally employed, Destatis in cooperation with the German Federal Employment Agency, carried out a project which culminated in a register survey in order to find explanations to possible measurement errors. In the register survey a random sample of persons registered as marginally employed were interviewed. As the micro data from the register and the register survey can be linked, detailed analyses were possible regarding measurement errors in either source.

The register survey delivers further insight into the target group of marginally employed persons, their demographic and social structure as well as into their labour market environment.

First results confirm once more that capturing marginal jobs is problematic in household surveys as persons often have their main status in mind when answering a questionnaire. This is especially true for specific subgroups of the population. But there are also hints that strengthen some assumptions that have been set up in the preparation of the survey.

Just to give a few examples: There is some evidence that misclassification of the respondents in a survey concerning their official registration status as well as the discontinuity of this type of employment are further reason for the differences. The register survey even enabled us to get some hints regarding the possible influence of the misuse of this type of employment that benefits from reduced social contributions and taxes.

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³ Marginally employed ('Geringfügig Beschäftigte') in Germany in a legal context are employees with low working hours and earnings below 400€ per month in a yearly average. This type of employment is only partially subject to social insurance contributions and benefits from reduced income taxation. Nevertheless it is a legally defined type of employment that needs to be registered in the employment register of the Federal Employment Agency by the employer.

The contribution will introduce the methodological set-up of the register survey, present important results and explain possible reasons for the deviations between both official sources on marginal employment.