

Sanitary measures at Statistics Mauritius

In line with Government approved Strategy, a phased resumption of activities at Statistics Mauritius started as from 11 May 2020 with all heads of Divisions/Technical Units/Administrative units. This was followed by 30% of other staff as from 15 May and a second batch of 30% staff to replace the first batch as from 22 May 2020. Normal resumption of work took place on 01 June 2020.

During that period, enhanced sanitary measures were put in place and a Dedicated Response Team set up to ensure enforcement. Actions taken are, amongst others

- Reconfiguration and cleaning of offices, surfaces and equipment;
- Provision of hand sanitizer and face masks;
- Promoting social distancing;
- Establish a mechanism of Health Check to monitor temperature of all persons entering the premises;
- Electronic Attendance system replaced by a manual system;
- "Isolation room" identified to isolate officers showing symptoms of COVID-19; and
- Use of air conditioners discouraged

Moreover, officers of the Ministry of Health and Wellness conducted a Rapid Testing of COVID-19 for some 145 staff on Thursday 04 June 2020.

Business continuity

The second quarter of 2020 was subject to a confinement period, which started on 19 March 2020 when the office was closed for work. In line with the Government Strategy and Action Plan, activities gradually resumed at the office.

During the period of full to partial confinement, we ensured business continuity to the extent possible by adopting teleworking practices. We interacted by phone and emails and participated in e-meetings and working sessions.

Our data collection operations were affected. The Survey of Inbound, Outbound and Domestic Visitors was stopped. The Continuous Multipurpose Household Survey had to be discontinued and no interviews were done in April. From May to July, a telephone survey is being conducted with World Bank to capture key information on labour and on the effect of Covid-19 on household welfare. Price collection for the PPI discontinued and CPI had to switch from collection at retail outlets to collection by phone and online as well as through personal shopping experience of staff. In addition, we experienced delays in receiving administrative data from some ministries and government departments and this impacted our dissemination plan. Out of the 29 statistical releases scheduled during the confinement period, 12 were released on time and 17 were delayed.

Webinars followed by SM staff

During the second quarter of 2020, the global COVID-19 crisis has affected critical operations of statistical systems. To share guidance, tools, and best practices to facilitate the operational continuity of programmes, regional and international organisations organised webinars on a wide range of subjects. SM was invited to participate and our staff attended some 10 Webinars which covered CPI, poverty and SDGs, Business and trade, innovation and new technologies, civil registration and vital statistics and business continuity. It was an opportunity to learn from the experience of other countries on the innovative ways to satisfy users' statistical needs. Some lessons learnt are:

- Use of non traditional tools such as web scrapping, drones to collect data. Also standard imputation methods and seasonal adjustments techniques had to be revisited to adapt to the new reality of the pandemic.
- The use of ICT solutions plays a critical role in ensuring business continuity. It has been observed that Africa needs to build capacity and develop own innovations and technologies that address problems specific to Africa.
- Partnership with private sector to have access to data owned by private businesses and use of administrative data from the public sector to compile experimental statistics.
- The compromise between quality and timeliness and the importance of communicating on the issue to users.

One of the main conclusions of the Webinars is national statistical offices need to adapt to the new situation created by the pandemic and experimental solutions could be the new methods to be adopted.

Budget 2020/2021

Budget was shaped under difficult conditions this year. Both the preparation and the submission of the budget proposals took place during the lockdown period and emphasis was laid on ensuring an efficiency gain in the recurrent budget.

SM received an amount of Rs 231.4 M to finance both its capital and recurrent expenditure during the financial year 2020/2021.

The negative impact of COVID-19 on the economy led to a drastic cut of 10 percent on the recurrent budget. with an allocated amount of Rs 170.4 million compared to the Rs 188 Million of the previous financial year. As a result, the Housing and the Population Census is now postponed to 2022.

As far as the capital budget is concerned, an additional amount Rs 60 M has been granted for the acquisition of tablets in connection with the forthcoming Housing and Population Census.