

## **SM amid the Covid-19 pandemic**

Government lockdowns, social distancing and other related restrictions to contain the spread of COVID-19 pose important challenges to data collection, compilation and dissemination of official statistics worldwide and Mauritius is no exception.

### **Data collection operations have been significantly affected and have to be adjusted**

Most administrative data were not available and surveys had to be halted, redesigned or postponed:

- The ongoing 2020 Survey of Inbound, Outbound and Domestic Visitors which started in January 2020 and targeted tourists, had to be stopped since it no longer met its objectives.
- The Continuous Multipurpose Household Survey shifted from face-to-face to phone interviews but with mitigated success. Non-response rates were higher. The office is now working together with the World Bank on a short telephone survey - reduced sample and a shorter questionnaire - to capture key information on employment and unemployment as well as the effect of COVID-19 on household welfare.
- Alternative modes of price collection were used for the Consumer Price Index (CPI). Prices were collected online, by telephone, and through personal shopping experience of staff.

Accordingly, the office reviewed its

- computation methods which warranted more imputations due to fewer data both in time and space, based on international guidelines;
- release calendar – some publications had to be postponed due to non-availability of the data on time. Users were informed of the changes through our website.

### **Working practices were reorganized**

We ensured business continuity to the extent possible by adopting teleworking practices mainly for those staff at professional level. We interacted by phone and emails. When needed, we held and participated in working sessions and meetings through online solutions. We faced some challenges though - mainly due to unavailability of adequate tools, in particular an Electronic Data Management System that staff can remotely access for day to day work. Also, our staff at the sub professional level who mainly work on desktop computers in the office, did not have the required IT equipment to work at home.

During this complete lockdown period, only key staff providing essential services called at office on specific days.

When the country switched to partial lockdown, staff office attendance was done on a rotation system and social distancing rules observed.

### **Higher demands for data were faced**

As in all times of crisis, demands for data increased and the office did its best to meet them in order to inform responses to the pandemic.

Following the outbreak of the COVID-19 and prior to the lockdown period, Statistics Mauritius with the support of the Ministry of Finance Economic Planning and Development (MOFEPD) worked out a dashboard comprising important international and national economic and social indicators. SM updated the dashboard on a daily basis with information gathered from various government ministries and departments.

As the outbreak became more severe in the country, we provided decision-makers with forecasts on GDP by sector, inflation and unemployment according to different scenarios. We provided specific statistics on tourism, poverty and income inequality, SMEs, self-employment and informal sector.

In addition, we are supporting the COVID-19 Solidarity Fund Managing Committee in processing the data furnished by applicants.

### **Networking with the statistical community**

We participated in online seminars bringing together the international statistical community where countries shared challenges met and measures taken. Examples are “Webinar on Consumer Price Index, Producer Price Index and International Trade Price Indexes during extraordinary times” hosted by Statistics Sweden and the “Regional Seminar on CPI” over ten days hosted by United Nation Economic Commission for Africa with the participation of ILO, IMF, INSEE France, ONS UK, Statistics Norway, Statistics South Africa and other member states. International organizations such as the UNSD, ILO and the IMF are providing guiding notes to national statistical offices to ensure business continuity, including technical notes on treatment of special cases and government policy interventions while respecting established international standards. SM stands guided by these notes.