

Chapter 1

How OECD Countries Use Perception Surveys in the Regulatory Policy Cycle

Perception surveys are a powerful tool that can be used for a variety of purposes. This chapter provides an overview of the ways OECD countries use perception surveys in the regulatory policy cycle. This chapter also presents how perception surveys used by OECD countries differ in terms of survey design and how they are conducted.

OECD countries commonly use perception surveys to measure the performance of regulatory reform programmes, in particular in the area of administrative burden reduction. Two main categories of surveys can be identified:¹

- *Surveys on regulatory reform programmes:* Such surveys focus on the evaluation of particular regulatory reform programmes. For example, the Regulation Barometer in Sweden, conducted by the Board of Swedish Industry and Commerce for Better Regulation, evaluates the government's administrative burden reduction programme (see Box 1.1). Another example is the Belgian tax-on-web survey which looks at how satisfied users are with the possibility to complete their tax declarations online as part of the simplification programme.

Box 1.1. The Regulation Barometer: Evaluating the Better Regulation Programme in Sweden

The “Regulation Barometer”, conducted by the Board of Swedish Industry and Commerce for Better Regulation in May 2009, asked 600 proportionately selected entrepreneurs and business leaders over the telephone to comment on the government's Better Regulation Programme, to specify the impact of regulation on their company and to indicate their expectations for the near future.

In order to improve the accuracy and homogeneity of the responses, a definition of relevant terms preceded the actual questions, where appropriate. For example, one question asked: “By regulations we intend all laws and rules that you as an entrepreneur and your company have to comply with. Do you think it is important for the Government to simplify regulations that affect business?”

The results of the survey indicated that most of the businesses were aware of the government's reform, indicating that the communication strategy was successful. However, 75% of respondents thought that the burden of regulation had remained almost the same over the last 12 months and still 58% said that administrative burdens would be more or less the same in the following year – despite the government's plans.

According to the Board of Swedish Industry and Commerce, the survey fulfilled two purposes. It was designed to present businesses' perception of regulation and also to put pressure on the government to start evaluating the results of its Better Regulation Programme.

Source: www.nnr.se/assets/files/publikationer/NNR_Regulation_Indicator_2009.pdf. See also Table A.1 in the Annex and Table A.2 (available online at www.oecd.org/regreform/measuringperformance).

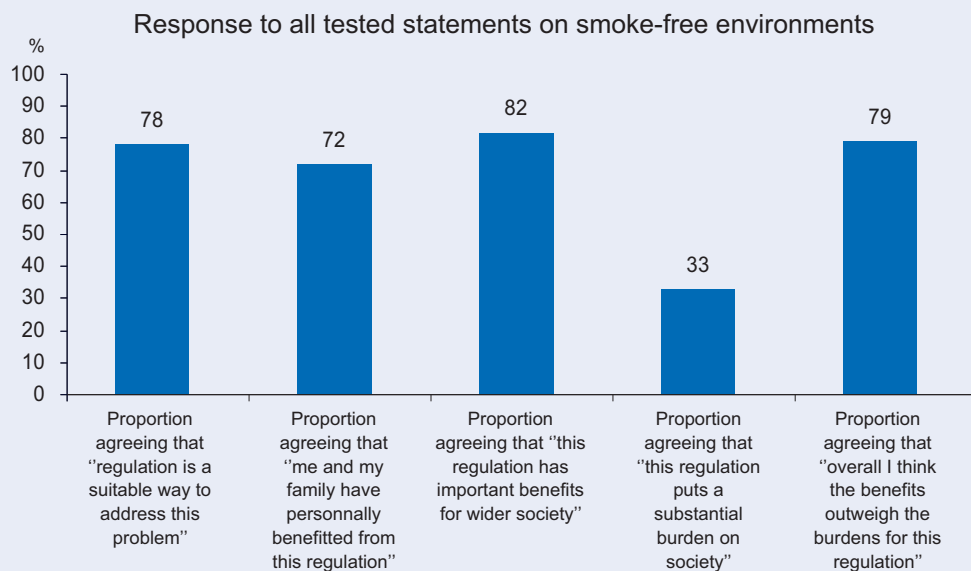
Box 1.2. The benefits of regulation: Perception of smoke-free environments

The UK Better Regulation Executive commissioned a survey which looked at citizens' perception of regulation in general and in specific areas of direct concern to citizens: Health and safety at work, Environmental standards, Food hygiene regulations and Smoke free environments.

The study, conducted by FreshMinds, consisted of more than 1 000 personal interviews with private individuals carried out proportionately across the country. For each of the specific areas, respondents were asked to answer to five statements, using a 5-point scale from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree".

In the case of Smoke free environments (see figure below), "broad support for regulation tended to exist". Interestingly, support for smoking regulation differed considerably across regions (65% in the North-West compared to 89% in the North-East), age groups (individuals aged 55+ more in favour than younger age groups) and social grades (affluent members of society more in favour than semi or unskilled workers or people on benefits).

The survey's results will "inform future work, in areas such as Impact Assessments".



Source: See both the main report and the research report at www.bis.gov.uk/policies/better-regulation/benefits/better-benefits; see also Overview Table A.1 in the Annex and Table A.2 at www.oecd.org/regreform/measuringperformance.

- *Surveys on individual regulations and agencies:* In contrast to surveys on regulatory reform programmes, little information has been found on surveys which look at the performance of individual regulations and agencies. For example, the UK survey “The Benefits of Regulation: A public and business perception survey” included questions about individual regulations such as the smoking ban, maternity and paternity leave regulation, food hygiene, alcohol licensing and discrimination regulation (see Box 1.2 above). The results of the survey will inform the assessment of future regulatory initiatives.

Characteristics of questionnaires

Within these two categories – surveys on regulatory reform programmes and surveys on individual regulations and agencies – questionnaires are designed to fulfill one or more of the following three functions:

- *Evaluation:* Questions can be designed to evaluate specific regulations, or the success of regulatory reform programmes. For example, the Regulation Barometer conducted in Sweden asked whether respondents thought that it had become easier or more burdensome for them and their company to comply with government regulation over the previous 12 months;
- *Information on awareness level:* Some surveys contain questions about business and citizens’ level of awareness of regulations, regulatory reform programmes and regulatory bodies. For example, the Canadian Survey of Regulatory Compliance Cost asked small and medium-sized businesses: “Are you aware that over the last three years, the federal, provincial, and municipal governments have been implementing initiatives to reduce the cost of regulatory compliance for small businesses?”;
- *Diagnosis to inform future reform:* Perceptions surveys can also be designed for use as a diagnostic tool in order to identify areas of concern to the general public or to stakeholders, thus facilitating future regulatory reforms. The Irish Business Regulation Survey, for instance, included the following

question: “Which area of regulation do you think that the Government should tackle as a priority? Please think specifically of the regulations affecting each of these areas rather than other issues such as investment in the areas.”

In addition to those categories and functions, surveys differ with respect to a number of other characteristics.

- *Target population:*
 - Most surveys, for which the OECD has information, targeted businesses. Surveys differed with regard to the size of businesses sampled. The Finnish SME Barometer, for example, focused exclusively on small-medium enterprises while the Dutch Macro Business Sentiment Monitor sampled businesses of varying size, sector, and life cycle.
 - Some surveys were directed towards the general public regardless of the respondents’ involvement or knowledge of the subject in question. Others targeted explicitly citizens or businesses directly concerned by specific regulations or administrative burdens, or users of particular services. For example, the Belgian ‘Tax-on-web satisfaction survey’ and the Turkish ‘Customer Satisfaction Survey’ aimed to measure the performance of on-line services which were designed to simplify administrative procedures, and therefore only addressed users having already had experience with those services.
- *Number of respondents:* The number of respondents in the surveys ranged from 15 to more than 10 000. For example, surveys of business leaders usually had a small sample size: The survey “Regulation Barometer”, a survey of entrepreneurs and business leaders in Sweden, sampled 600 respondents. In contrast, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business (CFIB) Survey interviewed 10 566 small- and medium-sized business owners.
- *Repetition of surveys:* Some surveys were conducted only once, while others are repeated, most of them annually or biannually. The Survey on Administrative Burdens in Belgium, for example, has been conducted on a biennial basis since 2000.

- *Type of questions:* Some questions are very specific, while others are more general. The Belgian Citizen Satisfaction Survey, for example, asked very specifically: “How do food chain operators feel about controls and the services provided by the Federal Agency for Food Chain Security?” An example for a more general question can be found in the Korean Regulatory Reform Satisfaction Survey which asked respondents: “How satisfied are you with the regulatory reform process in general?” Furthermore, some questions ask about respondents’ direct experience with regulations or regulatory reform as opposed to their general opinion. For example, the Dutch Perception Monitor Regulatory Burden asked: “If you look at the regulatory burden of the government that affects your business, has this increased, decreased, or remained more or less equal compared to the situation one year ago?”
- *Answer choices:* Another aspect of question design concerns the answer choices given to respondents. Many surveys (e.g. surveys conducted in Australia, Korea, the Netherlands, New Zealand, the United Kingdom) employed questions using a scale to measure perceptions of compliance burden. For example, the Dutch Perception Monitor Regulatory Burden inquired: “Can you indicate by giving a mark ranging from 1 to 7 to what extent the regulatory burden impacts your business operations? Figure 1 means ‘not at all’ and 7 ‘severely’.” Other questions, especially those dealing with awareness, used a simple yes-or-no format.
- *Data collection method:* Common methods to collect data are phone or personal interviews, and paper or online questionnaires. For example, interviews for the Australian Business Perception Survey were conducted via telephone, partly with computer assistance. ‘The Benefits of Regulation: A public and business perceptions study’, conducted in the United Kingdom, consisted of more than 1 000 personal interviews. In some cases, different data collection methods were combined: The Irish “Better Regulation Survey” combined its postal survey with intensive telephone follow-up. In addition, 32 of the more than 800 respondents to the postal survey were selected for an additional qualitative interview via telephone.

- *Source:* Many surveys were initiated by government ministries (the Norwegian Ministry of Trade and Industry, for example), others by business organisations (Board of Swedish Industry and Commerce for Better Regulation, among others). Consultancy firms and research institutes were frequently entrusted with conducting the surveys. For example, the survey “Perception Monitor Regulatory Burden” was commissioned by the Dutch Regulatory Reform Group (Ministries of Finance and Economic Affairs) and was conducted by the market research company Stratus. Finally, some private research companies such as Gallup routinely provide data on perceptions of regulations.

Table A.2 (available online at www.oecd.org/regreform/measuringperformance) provides information on the key findings of surveys. While it is difficult to compare the findings of surveys that differ significantly with respect to their focus and design, some patterns in the results can be identified:

- The results of a number of surveys indicate that businesses are often aware of government programs and intentions to reduce administrative burdens (e.g., in the Netherlands, New Zealand, Sweden and the United Kingdom), but many doubt that governments can or are successfully realising their targets;
- Despite large investments in regulatory reform programmes, among the surveys for which the OECD has information, few indicate that stakeholders perceive improvement.² More frequently, no improvement is reported. The Canadian, Swedish and British surveys, for example, inquired whether or not administrative burdens and/or compliance costs have decreased over the recent past. Stakeholders indicate no or, at best, very limited improvements – despite the considerable emphasis placed on administrative simplification in these countries and more fact based analysis supporting reduction in administrative burdens.

Do these findings mean that the regulatory reform programmes were a failure? Not necessarily. Negative survey responses can also stem from the design of the survey (see Chapters 2 and 3), the current economic situation, government and media communication, experience with front-line service and prior expectations (see Chapter 4). The explanation for the negative findings is likely to be different for different countries and

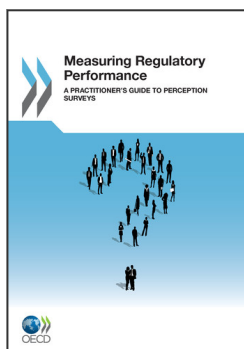
surveys. Understanding and interpreting the reasons underlying these responses is therefore very important to identify the best policy responses (see Chapter 5).

Conclusion

Perception surveys are increasingly used in OECD countries to evaluate the performance of regulatory reform programmes, in particular in the area of reducing administrative burdens. Perception surveys are also used to obtain information on citizen and business levels of awareness and confidence in regulatory reform programmes, and as a diagnostic tool to identify areas of concern to business and citizens as a means to inform future regulatory reforms. Results of a number of surveys in OECD countries indicate that most often it seems that businesses do not feel any improvement in the regulatory environment. These findings do not necessarily indicate a failure of regulatory programs, as survey responses are influenced by many other factors. The aim of this guide is to assist officials to understand the reasons for positive or negative survey results and maximise the benefits from stakeholder surveys for evaluating, communicating and improving regulatory policy.

Notes

1. This chapter draws on information provided by OECD member officials in 2010 on perception surveys in their countries. Please see Tables A.1 and A.2. Table A.1 in the Annex summarises information on the focus, purpose, target population and methodology used for each survey. Table A.2 (available online at www.oecd.org/regreform/measuringperformance) provides more detailed information including survey questions, key findings and some information on the policy use of the results.
2. One of the few surveys that report an improvement is the “Administrative Burdens in Belgium” survey. Results indicate that businesses estimate the costs of administrative burdens to be lower in 2008 than in 2000 (see Tables A.1 and A.2).



From:

Measuring Regulatory Performance

A Practitioner's Guide to Perception Surveys

Access the complete publication at:

<https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264167179-en>

Please cite this chapter as:

OECD (2012), “How OECD Countries Use Perception Surveys in the Regulatory Policy Cycle”, in *Measuring Regulatory Performance: A Practitioner's Guide to Perception Surveys*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264167179-4-en>

This work is published under the responsibility of the Secretary-General of the OECD. The opinions expressed and arguments employed herein do not necessarily reflect the official views of OECD member countries.

This document and any map included herein are without prejudice to the status of or sovereignty over any territory, to the delimitation of international frontiers and boundaries and to the name of any territory, city or area.

You can copy, download or print OECD content for your own use, and you can include excerpts from OECD publications, databases and multimedia products in your own documents, presentations, blogs, websites and teaching materials, provided that suitable acknowledgment of OECD as source and copyright owner is given. All requests for public or commercial use and translation rights should be submitted to rights@oecd.org. Requests for permission to photocopy portions of this material for public or commercial use shall be addressed directly to the Copyright Clearance Center (CCC) at info@copyright.com or the Centre français d'exploitation du droit de copie (CFC) at contact@cfcopies.com.