

Quarterly economic outlook survey in the building crafts

Presentation of the survey

The INSEE Short-Term Analysis Department conducts a quarterly survey in the building craft industry. The scope of the building crafts selected concerns businesses with fewer than 11 employees (excluding civil engineering activity).

The sample used for this survey consists of approximately 1,500 businesses. Enterprises are drawn according to an optimal stratified sample plan. The sample consists of strata, each of which corresponds to a sector (grouping of activities defined from NAF Rev.2).

Questions asked in the survey

Most of the questions are qualitative with three choices. They cover all the business' activities. Moreover, those concerning trends in activity are widened to the different types of work (new housing, new building or improvement and maintenance) and construction sites (public or private ones).

Trend in activity

- Trend in your activity observed over the last three months...
... increase (+) ... no change ... decrease (-)
- Trend in subcontracting work received over the last three months...
... increase (+) ... no change ... decrease (-)
- Expected trend in your activity over the next three months...
... increase (+) ... no change ... decrease (-)

Financial situation

- Compared to the last survey, is your financial situation...?
... better (+) ... equivalent ... worse (-)
- Are your customers' payment times tending to...?
... get shorter (+) ... stay the same ... get longer (-)

How is employment changing within your business?

- Are you experiencing recruitment problems?
Yes No
- Do you train apprentices?
Yes No
- Staffing level trends observed over the last three months...
... increase (+) ... no change ... decrease (-)
- Expected trend in your staffing levels over the next three months...
... increase (+) ... no change ... decrease (-)

What is your opinion on activity in building construction in general?

- What trend do you forecast for the building construction industry as a whole over the next three months?
... increase (+) ... no change ... decrease (-)

Presentation of results

The results are presented as balances of opinion, meaning the difference between the percentage of "up" answers (+) and the percentage of "down" answers (-). This representation offers improved readability without significant loss of information. Some questions have two response modes (yes/no or ticked/not ticked). The result presented for such questions is the percentage of "yes" answers (percentage of ticked) or the percentage of "no" answers, as appropriate. Finally, when the questions are quantitative, the result that is presented corresponds to the weighted average of the answers.

The processing of a short-term question is carried out in two steps:

1. First the weighted averages of the individual responses in each elementary stratum are calculated. The weighting coefficient is data provided by the business. This coefficient is based on the employed workforce for the questions on staffing and recruitment problems, and on the turnover (total, by type of work or clientele) for the other questions.
2. The second step in processing uses external data. For a given question, the balance of opinion for a grouping of elementary strata is calculated as the weighted average of the elementary balances of opinion. The weighting takes into account the relative importance of the stratum in the survey field as a whole. The adjustment coefficients come from the last known annual enterprise survey. All the questions are weighted by turnover. The question on general prospects is not weighted. We then calculate a simple average.

Seasonality tests have been conducted on all the series. Consequently, the published series show no residual seasonality. A series that initially showed no seasonality is presented as a series corrected for seasonal variations with a zero coefficient. Interpretation of series should be addressed with care: we always focus more on any trends in the series, rather than on actual levels. However, if we do want to try to qualify a level, the reference must always be the long-term average of the series in question, in order to take account of the usual response behaviour of business leaders.

The data from the last available survey is provisional. It is revised when the next survey is published, taking account of responses that were received late.

Detailed documentation

- **The quarterly outlook survey in the building crafts: description and methodology**
<http://www.insee.fr/en/methodes/default.asp?page=sources/sou-enq-conj-artisanat.htm>
- **"The French business tendency survey in the building craft industry"**, *Insee Méthodes N°123*, November 2009.