
INTRODUCTION

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France's Business Survey on the Situation and Outlook in the Building Industry (Enquête de Conjoncture sur la Situation et les Perspectives dans l'Industrie du Bâtiment; hereafter "Building Survey" or simply "Survey") tracks recent activity and short-term expectations of business owners by recording their qualitative opinion on these issues on a monthly basis. The survey covers building-industry enterprises with more than ten employees.

Sub-annual business and consumer surveys such as the Building Survey provide invaluable information for short-term analysis and forecasting. As a rule, the data supplied by these surveys on the recent past are of very high quality. But the crucial advantage of this information source is that the data are gathered far more rapidly than the quantitative statistics. The main users of the results are economists, forecasters, decision-makers, and journalists¹.

The Building Survey meets demand from official organisations both nationally and internationally. Like most INSEE business surveys, it forms part of the Joint Harmonised European Union (EU) Programme of Business and Consumer Surveys. Its questionnaire is thus highly consistent with those of France's EU partners. Its main results form the French source for European Commission publications on construction-survey results in Member States.

Like all INSEE business and consumer surveys, the Building Survey was redesigned in the second half of the 1990s². In January 2004, the questionnaires were revised to reflect advances in the harmonisation of European business surveys.

The Survey results are disseminated nationally via the INSEE Macroeconomic Database (Banque de Données Macroéconomiques: BDM), the *Informations Rapides* bulletin, and the online publication of the latter on the INSEE website (<http://www.insee.fr>).

The present volume of *INSEE Méthodes* describes the main characteristics of the redesigned Building Survey and puts it in a European perspective. We also provide a framework for interpreting its results.

¹ For more details, see the summary technical description of the Building Survey in Appendix 1 (item 9).

² The new version was launched in July 1999. A long-term backward extrapolation was performed on the Survey series.