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Session 4: Administrative Data

Data linking and macroeconomic indicators: First results for Switzerland

Combining the information of different administrative sources to derive new characteristics is relatively new in Switzerland. The unique business identifier (UID) has been gradually introduced in the various fields/registers and is systematically used since 2016. Thanks to the UID, it is now possible to link data from the statistical business register with customs data, VAT data, and data collected in business surveys. The paper will focus on first results for Switzerland. Customs data show for example that six firms active in the manufacture of basic metals accounted in 2016 for 18% of all exports of goods and for 29% of all imports mainly because of their business with non-monetary gold. The distinction made in customs declarations between importers and consignees gives interesting insights on their activities and their role within domestic or international MNE and informs to some extent about the ownership of goods crossing the Swiss border. Customs data also allows pinning down the trade activities of non-established firms and to shed light on the kind of activities they undertake in Switzerland. The paper will also review first results of the comparison between VAT turnover and turnover collected in surveys. Results contrast sharply in certain areas (precious metals, electricity, lotteries, ...). This may be due to different elements like the way enterprises report some results (gross versus net), the way a margin is calculated or the fact that it is difficult to split values given by one responding unit on the various entities that constitute a group. Subsidies play also a specific role in areas like transport, health and entertainment. Special attention was devoted to large groups that are often heterogeneous world actors. Here VAT data may be biased by fiscal optimization, distorting transfer pricing schemes and the fragmentation of the production process. Insights about the structure of the groups are key elements in understanding the results and often provide very useful information on the way some positions may be interpreted or corrected. These first results show that administrative data are a precious help in the consolidation process and consistency analysis of macroeconomic indicators (National Accounts, productivity Analysis, etc.) but they illustrate also that economic reality is difficult to grasp. The use of secondary data also raises concerns about the impact of changes in these sources on the statistical production process (What does for example a NSI do if there are changes in the definition or the content of variables? Etc.). Thus there are still a large number of questions left unanswered so far.

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