

Interwar period (1918-1940)

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On September 1, 1919 the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Latvia established State Statistical Office by adopting its interim by-laws. However, first statistics on Latvia as a territorial unit were compiled already before 1919 – by Margers Skujenieks, the prominent politician, statistician, and publicist of those days.

From 1907 to 1911 M. Skujenieks studied in Moscow, especially focusing on statistics, history and national economy of Latvia. Despite unfinished formal higher education, later M. Skujenieks became an important political worker and statistician of the first Republic of Latvia. In 1912 his book “Nacionālais jautājums Latvijā” [The National Issue in Latvia] was published. It is worth to note because in this publication for the first time demographic statistics are compiled on Latvia as a territorial unit. While other pre-war publications provided data both on Baltic States and on Kurzeme and Vidzeme regions, in this publication the area, the number of population and the national composition in the territory of Latvia are calculated for the very first time.

M. Skujenieks was involved in posts related to statistics (the Statistical Office of Refugee Committee in Riga; Statistical Department of the Land Council of Vidzeme) already before proclamation of the Republic of Latvia and establishment of national statistical institute. As an active publicist M. Skujenieks attempted to shape the public opinion for the support of Latvia's political and economic independence. In 1918 he chaired the meetings of the Democratic Block, a coalition of Latvian parties, which played important role in the efforts to prepare for the declaration of independence of Latvia. M. Skujenieks personally participated at the National Council's meeting on November 18, 1918 when the Republic of Latvia was proclaimed.

In 1919, when State Statistical Bureau was established, M. Skujenieks was appointed as its Director. Initially, State Statistical Bureau consisted of two departments – demographic and agricultural statistics departments. In the successive years 7 departments were formed: demographic, agricultural, general, industrial, foreign trade, domestic trade, as well as price and labour statistics departments.

Few months after the State Statistical Bureau was established preparation for the first Population and Agricultural Census started which was carried out in summer 1920. In neighbouring countries – Estonia and Lithuania – first census in independent country was carried out 3-4 years later when Latvia had already started preparation works for the second census in 1925.

After years of wartime and general confusion with streams of refugees it was M. Skujenieks' amazing capacity for work and his professional experience which assured that demographic data on 1920 could already be compiled and published when first “Statistical Yearbook of Latvia 1921” was released. In the future statistical data were annually published in the main publication of the State Statistical Bureau “Statistical Yearbook of Latvia”. First yearbook was released in 1921, but last – in 1939. First “Monthly bulletin” was released in April 1926 and in the future it was published monthly on a regular basis until soviet occupation stopped its publication. Statistical publications were bilingual – Latvian and French – because they were also used abroad.

Library of the State Statistical Bureau inherited Vidzeme Knighthood Statistics Department book collection with 3540 volumes. Unfortunately, it has not remained as the property of Central Statistical Bureau until nowadays. The Bureau also had its team who draw charts, maps and other illustrations for statistical publications, and even nowadays these drawings can be evaluated as of exceptional quality.

In the first ten years of activity the State Statistical Office employed around 100 employees, however, in the following years the number of employees grew rapidly. In 1937 a newspaper article on the moving to premises in Lacplesa Street 1 mentions already 379 employees who until that moment were forced to work in shifts due to unsuitably narrow premises in Stabu Street 12.

Advertisements in the printed press of those days present evidence that price collection was done with the help of voluntary correspondents who received “Statistical Yearbook of Latvia” as remuneration for their work during a year.

The State Statistical Bureau developed very rapidly; became one of internationally recognised statistical institutions, and its managers were such remarkable personalities and politically significant figures as Margers Skujenieks and Voldemars Salnais.

<https://www.csp.gov.lv/en/interwar-period-1918-1940>