

Quality declaration of Statistics Netherlands

Publisher
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Quality declaration of Statistics Netherlands

Quality obliges...

The Quality declaration of Statistics Netherlands describes how Statistics Netherlands secures the quality of its products and services and all elements contributing to this output. The Quality declaration is intended for everyone involved in Statistics Netherlands ('stakeholders').

Quality policy

The policy of Statistics Netherlands is to guarantee the quality of the statistical information. This involves all aspects of quality of the output. In case of statistics this concerns:

- Relevance
- Accuracy and reliability
- Timeliness and punctuality
- Coherence, comparability and consistency
- Accessibility and clarity

Statistics Netherlands aims to maintain the continuity and to manage the costs of its statistics by producing them efficiently and by minimising the administrative burden on its respondents and data suppliers.

The quality policy of Statistics Netherlands serves several aims:

- Complying with the mission of Statistics Netherlands
- Maintaining public trust in Statistics Netherlands and its products
- Complying with national and international laws and regulations
- Satisfying users and clients

The following legislation applies to Statistics Netherlands. For the EU this is the Statistical Law (Regulation (EC) No 223/2009)ⁱ and the European Statistics Code of Practiceⁱⁱ. Statistics Netherlands also adheres to the 'good practices' in the ESS Quality Assurance Framework (ESS QAF)ⁱⁱⁱ. The European statistics are based on European legislation. The statistics supplied to the IMF come under the Data Quality Assessment Framework (DQAF)^{iv}.

Important legislation at the national level are the Act on Statistics Netherlands (*de CBS-wet*) and the government and general data protection acts: *Voorschrift Informatiebeveiliging Rijksdienst* (VIR)^v, and its *Baseline Informatiebeveiliging Rijksdienst* (BIR)^{vi} and the *Wet bescherming persoonsgegevens*^{vii}.

Statistics Netherlands also determines its own frameworks related to the statistical process and its output. One of these frameworks is the series on statistical methods^{viii}. The methods in the series are described and published online.

A key instrument in the policy are the Quality Guidelines ('*Kwaliteits-richtlijnen*') where Statistics Netherlands has integrated the national and international legislations and its own



frameworks. Periodic audits and self-assessments take place on the basis of these quality guidelines.

Code of practice for European Statistics

Statistics Netherlands endorses the European Statistics Code of Practice for statistical authorities and puts this code into practice.

The Code of Practice is intended to guarantee public trust in the statistical authorities and the European statistics. It describes how the European statistics are developed, produced and disseminated in accordance with the principles of professional independence, impartiality, objectivity, reliability, statistical confidentiality, cost effectiveness and the statistical practice. Reference is made to the Code of Practice in the European Regulation on statistics. The Code of Practice is a self-regulating instrument.

According to the Code of Practice it is the mission of the European Statistical System (ESS) to provide the European Union, the rest of the world and the general public with independent, high quality information about the economy and society at the European, national and regional levels for decision making, research and debate.

To realise this mission and vision, the members of the ESS aim to co-operate and continuously interact with the users in accordance with the principles of The European Statistics Code of Practice and the general principles of quality management. Apart from integration and harmonisation this requires involvement of the leadership, co-operation with third parties, satisfaction of the workforce and continuous quality improvement.

The European Statistics Code of Practice consists of the following principles:

Institutional environment

1. Professional independence.
2. Mandate for data collection.
3. Adequacy of resources.
4. Quality commitment.
5. Statistical confidentiality.
6. Impartiality and objectivity.

Statistical processes

7. Sound methodology.
8. Appropriate statistical procedures.
9. Non-excessive burden on respondents.

Statistical output



10. Cost effectiveness.
11. Relevance.
12. Accuracy and reliability.
13. Timeliness and punctuality.
14. Coherence and comparability.
15. Accessibility and clarity.

The institutional framework underwent a peer review in 2006 by staff from other national statistical institutes. The findings of this review have been published in the Peer Review Report.^{ix}

The next chapters describe how Statistics Netherlands meets the Code of Practice. The names and numbers of the paragraphs below match those of the fifteen principles of the Code of Practice.

Institutional framework

1. Professional independence

Statistics Netherlands' professional independence from other parts of government and from the private sector assures the credibility of published statistics.

The legal basis for Statistics Netherlands is the Act on Statistics Netherlands (CBS-wet) of 20 November 2003 (*Staatsblad* 2003, 516)^x.

Under this Act, the task of Statistics Netherlands is to carry out statistical research on behalf of the government for the purposes of practice, policy and science, and to publish the statistics it compiles on the basis of information collected by this research.

The statistical research programme (long-term programme^{xi} and annual work programme¹) of Statistics Netherlands is set by the Central Commission for Statistics (CCS)^{xii}. This is an independent commission that safeguards the independence, impartiality, relevance, quality and continuity of the statistical research programme. The research programme is published, and progress is regularly reported on.

The Director General of statistics is autonomous with respect to decisions on research methods and on the publication of results.

Statistics Netherlands is required to comment publicly on statistical matters if there is a reason to do so, for example in the case of criticism or misuse of official statistics.

¹ The work programme is part of the annual plan which can be found on Statistics Netherlands' website.



2. Mandate for data collection

Statistics Netherlands has a legal mandate to use data from registrations kept for the implementation of legal tasks, such as those kept by central government, provinces, municipalities and water boards and independent government bodies.

Examples of such registrations are those kept by the tax authorities and by the organisation charged with implementing social security benefits (UWV), the municipal population registration, and the new trade register (NHR).

When the registrations do not provide the necessary data or provide unusable data the Director General has the mandate to request data from companies, professionals, institutions and legal persons.

Statistics Netherlands also has a legal mandate to collect information for statistical purposes. Companies are generally required to participate in surveys conducted by Statistics Netherlands, but individual persons are not. Statistics Netherlands is obliged to limit the response burden for respondents to a minimum.

If a survey is mandatory, companies receive an accompanying letter telling them so. Statistics Netherlands is entitled to impose an administrative fine on companies who do not supply the required information, or do not do so on time.

Statistics Netherlands makes every effort to convince the person/party concerned of the importance of their cooperation. It also makes this effort for parties legally obliged to cooperate. However, Statistics Netherlands is also obliged to limit the response burden for respondents to a minimum. Under the Act on Statistics Netherlands, the institute must check first if there is useful data available from registrations.

3. Adequacy of resources

Statistics Netherlands makes sure it has sufficient financial, personnel and IT resources to make the statistics which fulfil the qualitative and quantitative demands for national and European statistics.

At least once every five years, the Director General of statistics drafts a long-term programme setting out the main lines of activities to be carried out by Statistics Netherlands in the coming years. This long-term programme comprises a description of goals to be realised in the medium and long-term, the main policy lines leading to these goals, and the financial and organisational conditions to be fulfilled to achieve them.

After approval by the CCS, the long-term programme is submitted to the Minister of Economic Affairs. The minister discusses the financial and organisational conditions to be fulfilled for the programme with the Council of Ministers. The Director General, the CCS and the House of Representatives are informed of the outcome of this discussion. It is also published in the government gazette *Staatscourant*.



Every year the Director General of statistics drafts the annual work programme for the coming year. The annual work programme must also be approved by the CCS. This work programme lays down which activities Statistics Netherlands will carry out, taking into account the available resources.

Statistics Netherlands' annual and long-term statistical research programme is endorsed and monitored by the Central Commission for Statistics. One of the tasks of this independent commission is to safeguard the quality of the statistical work programme.

4. Quality commitment

Statistics Netherlands uses a quality assurance system aimed at keeping control of the accuracy and punctuality of its statistics. Risk assessment is used to establish control measures for each statistical process.

In addition, quality assurance measures at office level are established in this system. This system of quality assurance is also intended to fulfil the information security regulations for government use (*Voorschrift Informatiebeveiliging Rijksdienst (VIR)*) and the Data Protection Act (*Wet Bescherming Persoonsgegevens (Wbp)*) and the Act on Statistics Netherlands.

Statistics Netherlands has its own Code of conduct^{xiii}, which addresses a number of important quality aspects: impartiality, relevance, accuracy, statistical confidentiality, efficiency and transparency. This code of conduct is based among other things on the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics of the United Nations^{xiv}.

The staff working on statistics for a certain field is familiar with the relevant underlying social phenomena and maintains intensive contact with respondents and their representatives and users of the statistics concerned, such as ministries and trade organisations.

Statistics Netherlands regularly undergoes audits by supranational organisations, for example the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for the Report on the Observance of Standards and Codes (ROSC)^{xv} and the GNI Information visit by the European Union (EU)^{xvi}. The latter audit measures the extent to which the Dutch gross national income complies with the legal requirements for the annual payments by the Netherlands to the EU.

5. Statistical confidentiality

The policy on confidentiality by Statistics Netherlands is as follows:

Statistics Netherlands undertakes to protect the identity of its data suppliers (persons, companies, government services and other respondents) and the confidentiality of the information they supply, and also to use the information for statistical purposes only.

The Act on Statistics Netherlands lays down that Statistics Netherlands may only use the information it receives for statistical purposes. Information may only be made public in a way that no individual person, household, company or institution can be identified. An exception is made for situations in which there are legitimate reasons to think a company or institution would not object to publication.



The Director General is responsible for putting in place the required technical and organisational provisions to safeguard the data against loss or damage, unauthorised disclosure, and changes in and transfer of these data.

All staff employed at Statistics Netherlands is sworn in and are required to sign a document obliging them to keep all information coming to their knowledge confidential. There are strict protocols^{xvii} for external users who have access to statistical micro data for research purposes.

In compliance with the Data Protection Act, Statistics Netherlands has employed an official data protection officer since 2004. This officer advises on and supervises procedures that ensure that the greatest care is taken in the processing of personal and company data.

6. Impartiality and objectivity

Statistical production and publication processes at Statistics Netherlands are scientific, independent, objective, professional and transparent. All users of the statistics are treated equally.

The statistics are compiled using justified scientifically substantiated statistical methods, while keeping in mind the wishes and expectations of users.

Statistics Netherlands makes an annual publication planning. This planning is available at the website www.cbs.nl^{xviii}.

Errors in published statistics are corrected and all corrections are publicly announced.

Statistical processes

7. Sound methodology

Statistics Netherlands applies reliable scientifically justified statistical methods to make statistics. Statistics Netherlands has developed and documented a series of validated statistical methods^{xix}. In principle only these methods are used.

The organisation recruits staff with a suitable background. The staff is trained by means of participation in relevant (inter)national courses and conferences. They maintain contact with networks at national and international levels with other statisticians to exchange knowledge and experiences, to learn from prominent colleagues and to improve their own expertise.

Statistics Netherlands encourages collaboration with the scientific community. There are regular collaborative projects with university institutions within and outside the Netherlands. Statistics Netherlands also regularly takes part in research projects financed by the EU.

8. Appropriate statistical procedures

Statistics Netherlands uses scientifically justified procedures to collect, check and correct the basic material for the statistics. This approach is a pre-condition for making high quality statistics.



When data are taken from external sources (administrative data) Statistics Netherlands gathers as much qualitative information about these sources as possible. In this way it is possible to gain a proper insight in the quality of the administrative data.

If sample surveys are used to collect the information, the samples are always selected randomly. This makes it possible to make accurate estimations. This accuracy is quantified.

The questionnaires used in the surveys are first tested by experts in Statistics Netherlands' questionnaire lab, to make sure that the right questions are asked and that they result in the right information.

Statistics Netherlands mainly collects information through computer-aided interviews. These make it possible to check the answers as they are given, thus preventing errors. Moreover, the information is checked thoroughly after collection and, where necessary, corrected.

9. Minimal burden on respondents

Reliable statistics cannot be made without the cooperation of the suppliers of the data (persons, companies and other organisations). Therefore Statistics Netherlands wants to maintain a good relationship with these respondents.

Statistics Netherlands aims to minimise the administrative burden for data suppliers. The burden should be in keeping with the needs of users.

The CCS sees to it that the administrative burden for companies and other organisations is kept to a minimum.

The Act on Statistics Netherlands lays down that Statistics Netherlands uses administrative sources to collect data. Information may only be collected by means of surveys if it is not available in administrative sources or if the data in administrative sources are not usable for statistical applications.

In the design stage of the questionnaires, this minimum burden is an important consideration for the questionnaire lab. Statistics Netherlands monitors the response burden continually and sets targets to reduce it.

The response burden is spread across the survey population as widely as possible.

If possible, companies must be able to extract the information requested from them directly from their accounts. Response procedures are simplified as much as possible by using IT tools.

10. Cost effectiveness

Statistics Netherlands works cost effectively (efficiently). All effort is made to minimise the costs of statistical production and to prevent errors in the production processes and in the statistics. To this end the quality of the production processes is checked regularly and where necessary improved.



Statistics Netherlands always tries to take data from existing sources first. Where possible datasets are linked to make new products. This minimises the costs of data collection.

Statistics Netherlands uses computer assisted data collection methods. This results in high quality data which can be collected quickly and require little post-processing.

Cost-saving methods and techniques are applied to check and correct the data. Wide use of IT eliminates the relative costly manual checks and correction processes.

Statistical processes are automated and standardised as much as possible. Standardisation is also intended to increase the maintainability of the automated systems.

Statistical output

11. Relevance

Statistics Netherlands compiles statistics that meet the needs of users. The needs and expectations of users and potential users determine the publication of existing statistics and the development of new ones.

In addition to the Central Commission for Statistics, six advisory committees guide Statistics Netherlands in order to safeguard the social relevance of its statistics.

Furthermore, Statistics Netherlands has many direct contacts with users and pursues an active customer relations management.

12. Accuracy and reliability

Statistics Netherlands' statistics aim to present an accurate picture of reality. By using appropriate methodology the figures are as close as possible to the real values.

13. Timeliness and punctuality

The statistics of Statistics Netherlands are up-to-date. They are published as soon as possible after the collection of the data concerned. Statistics Netherlands complies with the planning of the publication of statistics that has been approved and published beforehand.

14. Coherence and comparability

Consistency between statistics is an important goal for Statistics Netherlands. Figures on different phenomena referring to the same period can be combined where possible. The various statistics of Statistics Netherlands can therefore be combined with each other. They give a consistent picture of the part of reality to be described.

Measurements of the same phenomenon at different times, in different geographic areas and for different domains, such as sectors of industry, are also sufficiently comparable.



To guarantee comparability and consistency Statistics Netherlands has developed standards for concepts, variables and classifications. These standards are the building blocks for the statistical systems such as the National Accounts.

Comparability and consistency are also served by sampling from standard sampling frameworks, such as the population register (GBA) for samples of persons, and the business register of Statistics Netherlands for samples of companies.

The business register is based on the data from the Chambers of Commerce.

15. Accessibility and clarity

The statistics of Statistics Netherlands are presented in a clear understandable form, and published through suitable and user-friendly channels. Statistics Netherlands aims to publish as much information as possible in English.

In principle, published statistics become available and accessible to everyone at the same time. Exceptions are published at the website of Statistics Netherlands (publication policy^{xx}). The statistics are accompanied by sufficient explanations to enable users to understand them.

All statistics of Statistics Netherlands are accessible free of charge via Statistics Netherlands' website^{xxi}. The available search options make it possible for users to find what they are looking for quickly and easily.

Publications and statistics are made available in different formats: printed and online.

Telephone and online support is available for questions concerning statistics and publications (CBS Infoservice). Customer satisfaction with this support is monitored annually.

In conclusion

The Quality Declaration of Statistics Netherlands was approved by the Directors of Statistics Netherlands on 28 April 2008. The Declaration was adapted to the new mission statement of Statistics Netherlands on 1 February 2011. This declaration was amended again on 1 October 2012 following a new version of The European Code of Practice. The Quality Declaration of the European Statistical System no longer applies because it is integrated in this new version of the Code of Practice.

The version of 2 December 2013 incorporates the full texts of the policies on quality and confidentiality of Statistics Netherlands.



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