

European Statistics Day

Quality Data and Reliable Statistics: benefits for all Users and Citizens

Quality data and reliable statistics are a public good for everyone. In fact, official statistics:

- are vital drivers to strengthen democracy and to measure the progress of nations and regions;
- shape and are shaped by many individual and social activities in a citizen's daily life;
- play an essential role in the modern development of scientific knowledge;
- provide relevant evidence to support policy formulation and evaluation.

If quality data and reliable statistics are to become successful drivers for democracy, development, innovation, competition, prosperity and well-being, they need to be complete, relevant, coherent, accessible and timely. Official statistics already meet this high-quality standard. However, this is not enough and specifically we must also have:

Trust: all citizens need to trust the reliability of official statistics. Otherwise, there is a danger that demagogues, populists, parties and powerful groups with vested interests or simply illiterate statistical users with their own unchecked data will provide their false "truth" of what is going on across society. That is why strengthening trust in statistics and their appropriate analysis and use is essential for society to prosper.

Such trust must be firmly built on the independence of NSIs and all producers of official statistics from all external political or interest-group interference in the production of their data. This independence requires: clear, rigorous and harmonized statistical concepts and definitions; statistical methodologies based on scientific criteria only; professional independence of statisticians from third parties who commission statistical analysis; capacity to produce all the relevant statistics required to describe what is going on across society; adequacy of human and financial resources and autonomy of NSIs and other statistical agencies from public or private sector operators. Data production processes must be sensitive and responsive to society's needs, and therefore must be transparent and accountable, with confidentiality protected.

Skills: in the 21st century society, citizens need skills to understand and analyse statistics, including appropriate skills for interpreting reality, for decision-making based on empirical evidence and for developing well-founded opinions.

All citizens must acquire these competences at an appropriate level to ensure their inclusion in the Information Society. To achieve this, a stronger engagement is required between statisticians and citizens in relation to data access, communication and training. This is especially relevant for the new potential users at all ages and stages of life, with particular emphasis on fostering statistical literacy in schools. The networked knowledge society of the 21st century, as well as big data, mobile devices and remote sensing, also offer huge new challenges and opportunities for citizens in the decades to come to engage with official statistics.

In summary, the heart of our message for the European Statistics Day lies in the need for a commitment across Europe to increase the culture of statistics as a public good by combining five main statistical goals: independence, quality, trust, accessibility and literacy.

Key words: Quality Data and Reliable Statistics; Official Statistics; Statistical Science; Data Producers Independence and Professionalism; Data Trust and Literacy; Users of Statistics and Citizens