Glossary:Metadata

Statistics Explained

Metadata can be defined as information that is needed to be able to use and interpret statistics. Metadata describe data by giving definitions of populations, objects, variables, the methodology and quality.

A distinction is generally made between structural and reference metadata.

- **Structural metadata** are used to identify, formally describe or retrieve statistical data, such as dimension names, variable names, dictionaries, dataset technical descriptions, dataset locations, keywords for finding data etc. For example, structural metadata refer to the titles of the variables and dimensions of statistical datasets, as well as the units employed, code lists (e.g. for territorial coding), data formats, potential value ranges, time dimensions, value ranges of flags, classifications used, etc.

- **Reference metadata** (sometimes called **explanatory metadata**) describe the contents and the quality of the statistical data from a semantic point of view. They include explanatory texts on the context of the statistical data, methodologies for data collection and data aggregation as well as quality and dissemination characteristics. In Eurostat this information is presented in files based on a standardised format called ESMS (Euro SDMX Metadata Structure) This standard is based on previous standards (including the Standard Data Dissemination Standard developed by the International Monetary Fund) but has been substantially extended in order to include more information on data quality. These files are associated to the data series published by Eurostat on its website .

Further information

- ESS Reference Metadata Reporting Standards