

# Statistics in development cooperation - data availability

Statistics Explained

This article is part of a [set of background articles](#) providing an '*outline of knowledge*' of international statistical cooperation between the [European Union \(EU\)](#) and developing countries, for non-statisticians needing to deal with statistics in development programmes and projects. The outline serves as an entry point and introduction to the much more detailed [Eurostat](#) publication 'Guide to statistics in European Commission development cooperation', downloadable in [PDF format](#) in English, French and Spanish (further down referred to as '*the Guide*').

Many developing countries have weak statistical systems and mechanisms for measuring results. Good, reliable statistics are essential for measuring progress in reaching development goals and provide essential information about the effectiveness of policies and programmes. They help governments improve their policies and to be transparent and accountable about the delivery of development results. Reliable statistics are a key element towards better measurement, monitoring and management of the results of [development assistance](#).

Availability and reliability of [data](#) is an important indication of the condition of the statistical system. Data available through the national statistical system (NSS) should be given priority for any analysis at national level. This is important to assure national ownership in line with the [Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness](#) principles, and to [strengthen the case](#) for using national data in the developing countries' policy making. Data from international sources have been processed to achieve international comparability, thus they typically do not match the national statistics.



The [national statistical system \(NSS\)](#) is the key producer of official statistics. It usually encompasses: the national statistical institute (NSI - which is the main body of the NSS; however, its responsibilities may vary), the Central Bank, line ministries and surveys funded by external assistance (which are organised independently of national statistics operations).

- **Data sources**

Basic distinction: [administrative collection](#) and survey data collection (censuses, sample surveys)

- **Elaborated data**

Information based on existing data pools: [aggregates](#) , indicators, [estimations](#) , models, [forecasts](#) and other elaborated information

- **Examples of some important statistics and operations**

- [National accounts](#) (main output: [GDP](#) )
  - Core censuses and samples surveys: population censuses; price surveys (e.g. [consumer price index - CPI](#) ); household surveys (e.g. [household budget surveys - HBS](#) , living standards surveys)
  - Mainly based on [administrative data](#) : business registers; external trade; civil registers
  - Internationally standardised household surveys: [Living standards measurement studies \(LSMS\)](#) (from the World Bank); [Demographic and health surveys \(DHS\)](#) ; [Multiple indicator cluster surveys \(MICS\)](#) ; [Education management information systems \(EMIS\)](#)

- **Statistical process for surveys and censuses**

Analysis and design > Data collection > Data checking and correction > Analysis of results > Dissemination of results

#### *Guide examples and practical information*

- *B.2 How statistics are made*

## **Data on developing countries from international sources**

- **What?**

Main tasks of international and regional organisations concerning statistics:

- Development and agreement on international standards for statistical activities, including quality standards;
- Harmonisation in a region (methodologies, nomenclatures, comparability);
- Compilation, [aggregation](#) , consolidation and dissemination of statistical information;
- Support for countries' efforts to strengthen their NSS through technical and financial means;
- Coordination of international statistics-related activities.

- **How?**

International and regional organisations compile and publish data in their fields of competence, based on information they receive from national authorities. These organisations process the data by making adjustments. These organisations may also make forecasts (mainly of economic data, but also for population, resources, etc.)

Objectives of the adjustments: to ensure comparability across the countries, producing estimations for missing data and disseminating the results through public databases and publications.

- **What for?**

Inter alia: to support international and/or regional policies, for high profile development aid allocation, for investment decisions and for regional integration

- **Warning:**

**Since the data has been processed to achieve comparability, international data publications typically do not match the national statistics publications of developing countries.**

This is the source of a continuing debate between developing countries and international organisations, in particular about:

- data transmission from developing countries to the international organisations,
- the transparency of the [data processing](#) and [estimation](#) methodologies used by the international organisations to harmonise statistics across countries.

- **Where?**

Entry points for *EU staff* to find data on developing countries:

- [BASEXT](#) provides a presentation of the main statistical databases from external sources used by the Commission. It covers all external data negotiated by Eurostat for use within the European Commission.
- Third Countries Database: Eurostat selects international data on the developing countries, based on the "Country at a glance" tables (key macro-economic and poverty indicators). Entry point: Eurostat public website [database](#) , login (Commission username and internet password, then click on the left in "statistics database" > database by themes > general and regional statistics > non-EU countries > ACP/ALA/HIC - a demo is available when you open the interface)

#### **Guide examples and practical information**

- B.2.4 *The role of international and regional organisations with statistical activities*
- Box 2.9: *Selected publications and databases of international organisations*
- Box 2.10: *Access to international databases for European Commission staff*
- Box 2.11: *Activities of international organisations in statistical co-operation*
- Box 2.12: *Selected regional organisations with statistical activities*

#### **Focus on two initiatives coordinated by [PARIS21](#)**

- **The International Household Survey Network (IHSN)**

**Objective** : the [IHSN](#) seeks to improve the availability, quality and use of survey data in developing countries

**Means** :

- sharing information and mobilising international support for more efficient household surveys in developing countries;
- developing recommendations for household-based economic and social data;
- maintaining the global information centre containing household survey and metadata and good dissemination practices.

**Website** : <http://www.ihsn.org/>

- **The Accelerated Data Program (ADP)**

**Objective** : the [ADP](#) supports developing countries in producing statistical data relevant for policy design, monitoring and evaluation, by making better use of existing data and aligning survey programs and statistical outputs to priority data needs

**Means** :

- assistance to countries that do not have a coherent long-term survey program in strategizing their data collection activities;
- building national capacity in microdata preservation, analysis, anonymisation and dissemination;
- working with national data producers and secondary users on the production of updated estimates of key indicators, by further exploiting existing datasets and collecting new data.

**Website** : <http://adp.ihsn.org/>

## National data or international data?

Important aspects influencing data availability are:

- Accessibility (dissemination)
- [Overall data quality](#)
- [Coverage](#) (time, sector, region, country)

Data on developing countries are available through the [national statistical system](#) and/or international organisations.

### Guide examples and practical information

<p><b>Data available through the NSS should be given priority for any analysis at national level</b></p>	<p>Using international sources <i>should only be a temporary solution</i> , if:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the national data is not available, or if</li> <li>• the quality of the national data is debatable, or if</li> <li>• international comparison is needed.</li> </ul>
<p>Why ?</p>	<p>Why should the priority be given to national data?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• because of the nature of international data (see above);</li> <li>• according to the <a href="#">Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness</a> principles (ownership);</li> <li>• <a href="#">advocacy</a> for an evidence-based decision-making in developing countries;</li> <li>• avoiding the "vicious circle": not using national data &gt; not supporting the NSS &gt; worse and worse quality of the national data.</li> </ul>
<p>Building the capacity of the NSS for good governance</p>	<p>The quality and availability of data depend on the <b>capacity</b> of the institutions involved in the collection of data. If key data are missing at national level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the medium and long term objective must be to develop the <a href="#">NSS capacity</a> to provide such data, according to sound methodology, international standards and classifications and with good quality;</li> <li>• above all, the NSS must be enabled to produce the data long term: the sustainability of the data provision process must be assured.</li> </ul>

- B.1.3.3 *The statistical implications of Managing for Development Results*
- C.5.1 *The importance of National Statistical Systems*

## Finding (national) official data

The key issues when evaluating the national statistical system (NSS) of a developing country:

- Is the NSS capable of producing good statistics in terms of quality and quantity?
- What statistics does the NSS actually produce?

Availability and reliability of the data is a basic indicator of the condition of the statistical system. These data tables should be drawn directly from national sources to ensure that the country analysis is based on the most up-to-date data available and that there is agreement among the development partners on the data sources to be used.

## Other articles

- [International statistical cooperation](#) (online publication)
- [Statistics in development cooperation](#) (online publication to which this article belongs)

## Dedicated section

- [International statistical cooperation](#)

## Publications

- [Guide to Statistics in European Commission Development Co-operation](#)

## External links

### About available data and national versus international sources:

- [Accelerated Data Program \(ADP\)](#)
- IMF: [Statistical Annexes](#)
- [International Household Survey Network \(IHSN\)](#)
- [Survey catalogues](#)
- UNSD:
  - [Developing countries' NSI websites](#)
    - [Millennium Development Goals indicators database](#)

### About metadata:

- Eurostat's Metadata Server [RAMON](#)
- IMF:
  - [General Data Dissemination System \(GDDS\)](#)
    - [Special Data Dissemination System \(SDDS\)](#)
- International Statistical Institute (ISI): [Multilingual Glossary of Statistical Terms](#)
- OECD:

Issue in the analysis process:	if the answer is <b>NO</b> :	if the answer is <b>YES</b> :
<p><b>1 - Overall development strategy:</b> Is there a national development strategy or a poverty reduction strategy?</p>	<p>if <b>no</b> : there might be a need for advocacy for evidence-based policy-making.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The <i>Guide</i> can help you to build an <a href="#">advocacy action</a> ; PARIS21 has released an <a href="#">Advocating for the National Strategy for the Development of Statistics: Country-level Toolkit</a> , and their <a href="#">Knowledge base</a> includes several examples of advocacy campaigns for the development of statistics.</li> </ul>	<p>if <b>yes</b> : is the <a href="#">strategy for statistical development / capacity building of the NSS</a> / particular statistical operations mentioned in the overall development strategy?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In Word or PDF documents, a quick keywords search (ctrl+F) can inform you (search: data, indicator, survey, census, statistics, statistical).</li> </ul>
<p><b>2 - National Strategy for the Development of Statistics (NSDS):</b> Is the country working on a NSDS or another kind of strategy for statistics?</p>	<p>if <b>no</b> : <a href="#">elaborating a NSDS</a> might be a good starting point to develop the NSS.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The <i>Guide</i> can help you to support the elaboration of a NSDS; PARIS21 has released <a href="#">A Guide to Designing a National Strategy for the Development of Statistics (NSDS)</a> , and their knowledge base includes several examples of NSDS.</li> </ul>	<p>if <b>yes</b> : is the NSDS under elaboration? Was it adopted? Is it being implemented? Is there a new NSDS being prepared? Was the previous strategy assessed?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The PARIS21 <a href="#">NSDS status report</a> provides information about NSDS in all developing countries.</li> </ul>
<p><b>3 - Compatibility of the overall development strategy and the NSDS:</b> If a NSDS was adopted, is it compatible with the overall development strategy?</p>	<p>if <b>no</b> : there might be a need to improve the <a href="#">performance monitoring system</a> . This system should include <a href="#">MDG indicators</a> and it should be agreed by the country and all donors.</p>	<p>if <b>yes</b> : read on!</p>
<p><b>4 - Analysis of data coverage and quality:</b> Is there any recent expert analysis of data coverage and quality?</p>	<p>if <b>no</b> : you should analyse a set of core indicators for performance monitoring, look at what data exist and what their status is.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"<a href="#">Country at a glance</a>" tables present a selected set of core macro-economic and MDG and poverty indicators. In the absence of an agreed performance monitoring system, these can provide a core indicator set to analyse, but they should not be used as the target for support.</li> </ul>	<p>if <b>yes</b> : you should be able to match the outcome of the analysis with the performance monitoring system and decide whether to rely on the national data.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This <i>Guide</i> and the <a href="#">EuropeAid Policy Steering: the role and use of performance measurement indicators</a> could help.</li> </ul>
<p><b>5 - Getting to know the NSS better:</b> Is there a statistical law? How is the NSS organised?</p>	<p>Please refer to the <a href="#">NSS section</a> to get familiar with the key issues when assessing the NSS of a country</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Guide</i> chapter B.2 <i>How statistics are made</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>6 - Key questions for examining national data availability</b></p>		
<p>Are data that cover the performance indicators available from national sources?</p> <p>Is the current data easy to obtain? Can it be found on the internet?</p> <p>Are there 'competing' data sources on the same subject, published by more than one organisation?</p>	<p><b>National sources</b> : the national statistical institute (NSI), the Central Bank and sometimes line ministries.</p> <p><b>Means of dissemination of national data</b> : country statistical yearbooks, periodic statistical digests (usually quarterly or annual), summary publications, press releases (they give the most recent information, although they can be subject to revision), website (many developing countries' NSIs and Central Banks have websites, which vary enormously in quality, especially in how frequently they are updated) and regional integration organisation websites or publications (if their mandate and/or if their Member States authorise it, they can disseminate the data provided by the Member States)</p>	
<p>Is the statistical information about the sector sufficiently up to date so that it can be used to evaluate progress against a baseline?</p> <p>Will the frequency of</p>	<p>'<b>Up to date</b>' : how frequently, easily and rapidly data can be collected, processed and published.</p> <p>Statistics in development cooperation - data availability</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Guide</i> section C.5.1.2 <i>Data available through the national statistical systems</i> discusses international recommendations for the frequency of economic, social and MDG data dissemination</li> </ul>

- [Data and Metadata Reporting and Presentation Handbook](#)
  - [Glossary of Statistical Terms](#)
- [UNSD: Classification Registry](#)