



## **Quality declaration of Statistics Netherlands**

The mission of Statistics Netherlands is to publish reliable and coherent statistical information that meets the needs of society. In view of this mission, the quality of the statistical information must be guaranteed.

For this reason Statistics Netherlands has introduced a system of quality assurance based on the highest international standards. Statistics Netherlands aims to be one of the best performing statistical institutes in an international perspective in terms of quality, without using complex and detailed quality systems.

Statistics Netherlands regularly undergoes external audits, by among others the IMF (the so-called ROSC Mission) and the European Commission (Gross National Income commission), and regularly reports on quality issues to Eurostat, the EU bureau of statistics.

Statistics Netherlands endorses the [European Statistics Code of Practice](#) for statistical authorities and puts this code into practice. The European 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.



Statistics Netherlands also endorses the [Quality Declaration of the European Statistical System](#), and puts this declaration into practice. This declaration comprises the following principles:

1. User focus.
2. Continuous improvement.
3. Product quality commitment.
4. Accessibility of information.
5. Partnership within and beyond the European Statistical System.
6. Respect for the needs of data suppliers.
7. Commitment of leadership.
8. Systematic quality management.
9. Effective and efficient processes.
10. Staff satisfaction and staff development.

The eighth principle of the Quality Declaration of the European Statistical system (ESS) refers to systematic quality management. Statistics Netherlands puts this principle into practice by applying the EFQM Excellence Model, of the European Foundation for Quality Management. The European Code of Practice is related to the EFQM Excellence Model ([European Foundation of Quality Management](#)).

The explanatory notes set out how the European Code of Practice and the Quality declaration of the ESS are put into practice.

Statistics Netherlands quality declaration was approved by the Board of Directors on 28 April 2008. The declaration has been adapted on 1 February 2011 to the new formulation of Statistics Netherlands' mission.



## Explanatory notes on Quality Declaration of Statistics Netherlands

Statistics Netherlands' Quality Declaration describes how Statistics Netherlands assures the quality of its products and services and all contributing factors. The declaration is intended for all stakeholders in Statistics Netherlands.

The mission of Statistics Netherlands is to publish reliable and coherent statistical information that meets the needs of society. In view of this mission, the quality of the statistical information must be guaranteed.

Statistics Netherlands applies the highest quality standards for the statistics it produces. The statistical methods and processes used are based on internationally accepted scientific principles. Statistics Netherlands constantly seeks to improve the efficiency of the processes and the quality of its statistics.

Statistics Netherlands has endorsed the [European Statistics Code of Practice](#), and as a direct result of this has developed and implemented its own quality declaration.

Under the fourth principle of the European Code of Practice, Statistics Netherlands is obliged to work and cooperate in accordance with the principles of the [Quality Declaration of the European Statistical System](#). Statistics Netherlands is part of the European Statistical System (ESS).

According to its Quality Declaration, the mission of the ESS is to provide the European Union and the rest of the world with high quality information on economy and society at European, national and regional levels. This information must be available to everyone for the purposes of policy decision-making, research and debate.

Statistics Netherlands uses the Excellence Model of the [European Foundation of Quality Management](#) (EFQM) to realise quality assurance systematically. In doing so, it complies with the eighth principle of the Quality Declaration of the ESS.

The following sections explain how Statistics Netherlands already complies with or will comply with the European Code of Practice and the Quality Declaration of the ESS.

The titles and numbers of the paragraphs in de Quality Declaration of Statistics Netherlands correspond with the fifteen principles of the European Code of Practice and the ten principles of the Quality Declaration of the ESS.



## European Statistics Code of Practice

In this section Statistics Netherlands explains how it intends to comply with the European Statistics Code of Practice.

Sections 1-6 refer to the **institutional framework**. Institutional and organisational aspects substantially influence the efficiency and credibility of Statistics Netherlands. The most relevant aspects in this respect are professional independence, an adequate mandate for data collection, sufficient resources, strong quality awareness, statistical confidentiality, impartiality and objectivity.

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](#).

Sections 7-10 refer to the **statistical processes** of Statistics Netherlands. In all processes concerning the organisation, collection, processing and publication of official statistics, Statistics Netherlands adheres to European and other international standards, guidelines and best practices.

Credibility of official statistics is enhanced by a reputation for good management and efficiency. In this respect the most relevant aspects are scientifically justified methods, appropriate statistical procedures, minimum response burden and cost effectiveness.

Sections 11-15 concern the **quality of the statistical output**. Products and services must meet users' needs. They must also comply with the European quality standards for relevance, accuracy, reliability, timeliness, punctuality, coherence, comparability, accessibility and clarity.

### 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). This Act was most recently amended on 15 December 2004 (*Staatsblad* 2004, 695).

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 this information.

The statistical research programme (long-term programme and annual work programme) of Statistics Netherlands is set by the Central Commission for Statistics (CCS). 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.



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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.

### **2. Mandate for data collection**

Statistics Netherlands 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.

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.

If there is no legal obligation to participate in a survey, 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.

Under the Act on Statistics Netherlands, the institute must use data from registrations kept for the implementation of legal tasks, such as those kept by central government, provinces, municipalities and water boards.

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 trade register (Chambers of Commerce).

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

### **3. Adequacy of resources**

Statistics Netherlands makes sure it has sufficient financial resources to make the statistics which fulfil the 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.

Every year the Director-General of statistics drafts the annual work programme for the coming year. This work programme lays down which activities Statistics Netherlands will carry out, taking into account the available resources.



After approval by the CCS the work programme is submitted to the Minister of Economic Affairs. The minister discusses the financial and organisational conditions to be fulfilled for the work 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*.

#### 4. Quality commitment

Statistics Netherlands endorses the Quality Declaration of the European Statistical System, and the view of the European Statistical System that statistics should be based on justified scientific principles and methods. The last section of Statistics Netherlands' Quality Declaration explains how it meets the demands of the Quality Declaration of the ESS.

Statistics Netherlands' 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.

Statistics Netherlands regularly and systematically looks for the strengths and weaknesses in its statistical output and in the underlying production processes, for example with the aid of audits. Where necessary improvements are made. Quality is viewed from a strategic long-term perspective. Short-term effects are weighed against long-term effects.

Statistics Netherlands also regularly undergoes audits by supranational organisations, for example the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for the Report on the Observance of Standards and Codes (ROSC), and the GNI Information visit by the European Union (EU). 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.

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)).

Statistics Netherlands has its own [Code of conduct](#), which addresses a number of important quality aspects: impartiality, relevance, accuracy, statistical confidentiality, efficiency and transparency. This Code of conduct, which can be seen as a precursor to the Quality Declaration of Statistics Netherlands, is based among other things on the [Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics](#) of the United Nations.



## **5. Statistical confidentiality**

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 are sworn in and are required to sign a document obliging them to keep all information coming to their knowledge confidential. There are [strict protocols](#) 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.

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 high quality statistics. It uses the necessary instruments, procedures and expertise to do this. Only [statistical methods validated and documented](#) by Statistics Netherlands are used.

The organisation recruits staff with a suitable background. These staff are trained by means of participation in relevant international 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's Framework Programmes.

### **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.

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

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

Statistics Netherlands collects a lot of 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.

If data are taken from external sources, such as registers, Statistics Netherlands collects as much qualitative information about these sources as possible. This helps to determine the quality of the statistical data based on these sources as accurately as possible.

### **9. Non-excessive 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 and may not be too heavy for respondents.

In the design stage of the questionnaire, 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 Act on Statistics Netherlands lays down that data is collected in such a way that the administrative burden for suppliers is as small as possible. The CCS makes sure that this is in fact the case.



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The response burden is spread across the survey population as extensively as possible by using suitable sampling methods. The principle of 'survey holidays' is applied.

As far as possible, information requested from companies must be able to be extracted directly from their accounts. Response procedures are simplified as much as possible by using IT provisions.

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.

Respondent satisfaction is measured annually.

### **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 first to take data from existing sources. Where possible datasets are linked to make new products. This minimises the costs of data collection.

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

Where possible and reliable, model-based estimations are calculated to produce results. This makes minimum use of data.

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 which 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.



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

### **12. Accuracy and reliability**

Statistics Netherlands' statistics aim to present an accurate picture of reality. The statistics are reliable as they measure what they are intended to measure. The figures are very close to the real values. Where possible, margins of error are quantified.

One purpose of Statistics Netherlands' quality assurance system is to control the accuracy of the statistical output.

### **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 aims at keeping the period between the collection of the data and the publication of the statistics as short as possible.

All publications comply with publication schedules published beforehand.

### **14. Coherence and comparability**

Consistency between statistics is an important goal for Statistics Netherlands. Figures on different phenomena measured at the same time 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 but for different periods (month, quarter, year) are sufficiently consistent with each other. The same is true for provisional and definite figures.

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 safeguard comparability and consistency, Statistics Netherlands has developed a system of standards for concepts, variables and classifications. These standards are the building blocks for systems of statistics 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.



## **15. Accessibility and clarity**

The statistics of Statistics Netherlands are presented in a clear understandable form, and published through suitable and user-friendly channels. In principle published statistics become available and accessible to everyone at the same time. 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](#). 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.

Telephone support is available for questions concerning statistics and publications. Customer satisfaction with this support is monitored annually.

## **Quality declaration of the European Statistical System**

This part of the Quality Declaration of Statistics Netherlands describes how Statistics Netherlands aims to comply with the Quality declaration of the European Statistical System. Where it overlaps with the European Code of Practice, reference is made to this code.

### **1. User focus**

Statistics Netherlands assures its user focus in the same way as it complies with principle 11 of the European Code of Practice on the relevance of statistical products.

### **2. Continuous improvement**

The needs of users and the methods of Statistics Netherlands are changing continually. Globalisation and advances in methods and technology will provide new possibilities to make statistics more efficiently. Statistics Netherlands is continually improving its statistical production processes.

### **3. Product quality commitment**

Statistics Netherlands uses scientifically justified methods to produce high quality statistics. It compiles the statistics objectively, and guarantees the confidentiality of respondents. It provides information on the main quality aspects of each product so that users can assess product quality.

### **4. Accessibility of information**

Statistics Netherlands assures the accessibility of the information in the same way as it complies with principle 15 of the European Code of Practice on accessibility and clarity of statistical products.



## **5. Partnership within and beyond the European Statistical System**

Statistics Netherlands collaborates intensively with national statistical institutes in the present and future member countries of the European Union, other statistical institutes across the world, universities and research institutions. By working together we can learn from each other, and so continually improve the production of statistics. By combining the knowledge and experience of statisticians, respondents and users, Statistics Netherlands can continually improve its work.

## **6. Respect for the needs of data suppliers**

Statistics Netherlands assures respect for the needs of data suppliers in the same way as it complies with principle 9 of the European Code of Practice on non-excessive burden on respondents.

Statistical confidentiality (principle 5 of the European Code of Practice) is also relevant in this respect.

## **7. Commitment of leadership**

High quality staff are needed to produce high quality statistics. Therefore Statistics Netherlands develops and sustains a culture of quality in the organisation. Staff tasks include quality improvement of statistics.

## **8. Systematic quality management**

Statistics Netherlands assures quality management in the same way as it complies with principle 4 of the European Code of Practice on quality commitment.

In addition Statistics Netherlands uses the Excellence Model of the European Foundation of Quality Management (EFQM) to realise systematic quality assurance. This model has an even wider scope than the Quality Declaration of the ESS and the European Code of Practice.

## **9. Effective and efficient processes**

Statistics Netherlands assures efficient processes in the same way as it complies with principle 10 of the European Code of Practice on cost effectiveness. An important instrument in this respect is an integrated regular planning and control cycle in the organisation.

Effective production is realised by delivering the right products and services. Statistics Netherlands does this by complying with principles 11-15 of the European Code of Practice on the quality of statistical output.

## **10. Staff satisfaction and staff development**

Good, competent staff are vital for Statistics Netherlands. First-rate statistics cannot be produced without first-rate workers. To attract and keep competent staff, Statistics Netherlands involves them as much as possible in preparations for



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the work programme and in the improvement of statistical processes. An extensive training programme helps to maintain staff quality.

The Explanatory notes on the Quality Declaration of Statistics Netherlands were approved by the Board of Directors of Statistics Netherlands on 16 June 2008. The declaration has been adapted on 1 February 2011 to the new formulation of Statistics Netherlands' mission.