



## Publication Policy of Statistics Netherlands (CBS)

*Statistics Netherlands (CBS) is responsible for compiling official statistics and publishing the results.*

*CBS publishes these results in different ways. The subject of this memorandum is the policy which CBS applies in this regard. A transparent publication policy on the part of CBS helps build trust in statistics. This memorandum sets out the basic principles on which the publication policy is based and states the legal context. The memorandum came into existence following internal evaluations and discussions with users and the Communication Board. The advice of the Advisory Council of CBS has been incorporated in this memorandum. The Advisory Council endorses the principles of the publication policy. If the situation so requires, it is possible to depart from the policy in individual cases. This is at the discretion of the Director General. The "comply or explain" principle applies in all cases. This means that in the case of a departure from the general policy, an explanation will be given as to why it is considered important to depart from the general policy rule in that specific and individual case. CBS' publication policy is evaluated annually and the results of this evaluation will be presented to the Advisory Council. In response to internal evaluations, questions and feedback from users, CBS may decide to amend the formulated policy, as part of CBS' general quality policy.*

### **Trust in the provision of statistical information**

*CBS' professional independence is essential to maintain trust in the provision of statistical information. The principle is that CBS itself determines which data it publishes and when and how it does so.*

The availability of objective, high-quality statistical information which can also be accessed in a user-friendly way, is an essential precondition for the proper operation of a democratic society. For official statistics to be able to fulfil their role effectively, they must enjoy the trust of citizens and businesses. The statistics must have an authoritative and undisputed reputation.

The Statistics Netherlands Act states that CBS is responsible for: carrying out statistical research for practice, policy and science purposes and publishing statistics compiled on the basis of such research.<sup>1</sup> This duty is described in the Explanatory Memorandum to the Act as the production of statistics for which there is a demonstrable need. That document also states that CBS is expressly entrusted with the task of publishing the results<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Section 3 of the Statistics Netherlands

<sup>2</sup> House of Representatives, 2001-2002 session, 28 277, no. 3 (Explanatory Memorandum), p.6.

The Act also states that CBS has legal personality<sup>3</sup> and that the Director General of Statistics is an autonomous administrative authority (ZBO)<sup>4</sup>, as a result of which CBS is not hierarchically subordinate to the minister<sup>5</sup>.

The Director General determines CBS' work programme and specifies the methods by which research incorporated in the work programmes and multi-annual programmes is carried out, and the way in which the results of that research will be published<sup>6</sup>.

At national level CBS is legally entrusted with the production of European statistics<sup>7</sup>. This makes up the bulk of the CBS work programme. European legislation and regulations also include principles of independence, impartiality, objectivity and reliability in order to increase trust in European statistics<sup>8</sup>. For example, the statistical principle of professional independence holds that the development, production and dissemination of statistics must take place independently, without interference from political or other interest groups, nor from the European Union or national bodies<sup>9</sup>. This means that the Director General has sole decision-making power with regard to the content and time of statistical releases and publications for all European statistics developed, produced and disseminated by the national statistical institutes<sup>10</sup>. This also means that the Director General is not permitted to solicit or accept instructions from other private or government institutions<sup>11</sup>. The Director General and his employees do, however, maintain contact with users of the statistics with regard to their experiences and needs.

In accordance with the European Regulation on statistics, CBS also complies with the European Statistics Code of Practice. This code is based on fifteen principles concerning the institutional framework, the statistical production process and the statistical output. With regard to CBS' publication policy it is particularly important that there is professional independence vis-à-vis other private and government institutions (principle 1), statistical confidentiality by means of privacy guarantees and strict protocols on access to the data (principle 5); impartiality and an objective, professional and transparent method of operation in which all users are treated equally (principle 6); timeliness and punctuality in the publication of data by means of a fixed publication schedule (principle 13); and accessibility and clarity of the statistical output (principle 15)<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Section 2 of the Statistics Netherlands Act

<sup>4</sup> Section 2a of the Statistics Netherlands Act

<sup>5</sup> Section 1 of the Framework Law on Autonomous Administrative Authorities

<sup>6</sup> Sections 15 and 18 of the Statistics Netherlands Act

<sup>7</sup> Section 4 of the Statistics Netherlands Act

<sup>8</sup> Recital 20 of Regulation (EC) no. 223/2009

<sup>9</sup> Article 2 paragraph 1(a) of Regulation (EC) no. 223/2009

<sup>10</sup> Article 5 bis paragraph 2(a) of Regulation (EC) no. 223/2009

<sup>11</sup> Article 5 bis paragraph 2(c) of Regulation (EC) no. 223/2009

<sup>12</sup> European Statistics Code of Practice dated 28 September 2011; article 11 of Regulation (EC) no. 223/2009

## Figures for everyone

*The purpose of CBS' publication policy is to promote the (correct) use of relevant figures.*

CBS figures are there to be used<sup>13</sup>. That is why CBS shares its wealth of information and knowledge with other authorities, politics, science, media, business and citizens every day. The more CBS succeeds, the more social debates, research and decision making can be based on reliable and relevant statistical information. The source must be acknowledged whenever CBS figures or information are used<sup>14</sup>.

CBS publishes statistics in various forms: by means of tables in the StatLine database that can be accessed via the CBS website, as well as publications based on it, such as news releases and other productions on the CBS website. These publications may be accompanied by commentaries by CBS experts or a press conference. External experts or government officials can be invited to answer additional questions from the media which are not within CBS' remit and possibly to debate the results. The statements made by external experts or ministers are made on their own account and fall expressly outside the responsibility of CBS.

The CBS website and the StatLine database are accessible to everyone free of charge. The statistics are offered to the various target groups in different forms that meet their needs. For example, there is special teaching material for secondary schools and videos are available with clear explanations of the statistical results. All tables in the StatLine database are available as open data. CBS also offers as much information as possible in English. Users can request information through the free information service. To answer questions from the media, CBS has a number of experts who can comment on the results as spokespersons.

In order to serve the various target groups in society directly, CBS not only uses its own communication resources but also works with media such as newspapers, online news platforms and broadcasters. That collaboration enables the media to obtain the results and associated media productions in a way that is efficient for them. The guiding principle is that there is no exclusivity.

In accordance with the European Statistics Code of Practice, the principle that CBS results are made available to everyone at the same time applies also in the case of

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<sup>13</sup> Principle 15 of the European Statistics Code of Practice

<sup>14</sup> Unless stated otherwise, the content of the CBS website is subject to Creative Commons Attribution. The content of the website may therefore be reused, provided that CBS is cited as the source. That means it is compulsory to state that the data comes from the CBS website. When reusing and citing the content, the impression must not be given that CBS endorses the tenor of the derived work or that CBS agrees with the content of the work. Reuse is not permitted if it is stated in a particular section (for example a document) that a copyright exception applies to that section.

Creative Commons attribution does not apply to:

- Rights to the design and style of the website. This means among other things that no impression must be given that a website on which CBS data is used originates from CBS or is associated with the CBS website.
- Patent and trade mark rights. This includes, for example, the CBS logo. The CBS logo, a logo that closely resembles it or a logo that is based on it must not be used without the consent of CBS.
- The rights of others, such as image or privacy rights.

commissioned work. The client can be granted pre-release access under embargo. With regard to the time and method of publication (for example only a table with results on the special customised page of the CBS website, a news release and/or other publicity), prior written agreements are entered into force between the client and CBS. This means that the results of the research do not determine whether publication will take place or the method of publication to be used. These written agreements therefore also concern the first publication of paid assignments. CBS always reserves the right to issue separate publications of research results, possibly at a later stage. The client shall be informed of this in advance. The above has been included in the general terms and conditions for commissioned work.

### **Time of publication**

*It is known in advance when the results will be published.*

The [publication schedule](#) on the CBS website provides a list of the dates and times at which results will be published by means of a news release. Other statistics are published in table form in the StatLine database from midnight. This point of time has to do with the regular daily technical update of the database that takes place at night. The publication schedule is updated in any case weekly on Fridays. This schedule also contains information on the nature of the reporting (the subject and the kinds of figures or the period covered by the publication).

European legislation specifies the time at which or the period within which statistics must be published<sup>15</sup>. This applies, for example, to frequent, regularly produced indicators such as GDP, unemployment and consumer price index figures. The publication of these figures is entered in the publication schedule a long time in advance.

More generally, new figures are published as soon as possible. It also happens that figures that are already available in the StatLine database are published at a later time in another form, such as a news release. The reasons for this are as follows:

- Anticipating foreseeable news events. Foreseeable events, provided CBS has relevant information on the subject, may trigger publications. Examples are International Women's Day, a state visit or a trade mission by a government delegation. At such times there is strong demand in society for figures on that subject. Proactive anticipation of this type of subject is also an efficient operating method for CBS, because that is how it anticipates demands in society.
- In response to user demands. When specific developments occur in society, CBS often receives a large number of questions from media, political parties, citizens and public institutions. People are often also interested in trends. These questions are answered with figures that are not necessarily new. For many parties (including

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<sup>15</sup> Article 12 paragraph 1(d) of Regulation (EC) 223/2009; Principle 13 of the European Statistics Code of Practice dated 28 September 2011; PUBLICATION SCHEDULE

professionals such as journalists and policy staff), CBS' vast StatLine database is not so readily accessible that all the relevant information can be rapidly marshalled. CBS experts then assist in answering those questions. In cases where there are many questions on the same subject, CBS may therefore decide, for information purposes, to issue a release itself with the required data together with a commentary. In this way information is made available not exclusively to the requesting party, but to everyone. CBS thus fulfils a social duty and promotes correct use of the figures.

CBS also publishes new and previously available figures in the form of longer series of publications with a fixed publication schedule, or as a broadening or deepening of previous publications.

Without receiving questions on the subject from an external party, CBS produces and publishes no statistics in direct response to unforeseen events in society or with the aim of contributing to ongoing, current political debates.

In all its releases CBS states the reason for publishing a release. It also states in releases whether new figures are being presented, or whether the release is based on figures that had already been published or on a new statistical analysis of previous figures.

CBS does not determine publication times on the basis of political opportunism.

CBS can issue new releases before the official publication date and time stated in the schedule under embargo to grant pre-release access to government organisations, institutions and news organisations.

The pre-release policy is stated on the CBS website.

### **Content of the publication**

As previously stated, CBS publishes statistics in various forms: from tables and news releases to videos and statements by spokespersons. With regard to the content of these, CBS applies the following principles:

- Responsible. The statistics are produced using responsible, scientifically based statistical methods. Information on these methods and definitions can be found on the website.
- Accurate and reliable. CBS' statistics are accurate and intended to present a reliable picture of the reality.
- Empirical. CBS publishes on the basis of measurements obtained, for example, from its own surveys, data recorded or maintained by other institutions, or from big data. Information on the sources used is publicly available on the website.
- Phenomenon-oriented. CBS strives to give the fullest possible description of all or part of the reality (phenomenon) by presenting statistics in context. The complexity of many developments in society precludes faithful characterisation based on only one or a few indicators. The combination of multiple indicators increases insight

and reduces the risk of misinterpretations. As far as possible CBS explains what is and what is not described.

- Relevant. CBS provides statistics that are aligned with the requirements of the users and with social developments. In order to keep abreast of the requirements, CBS maintains intensive contact with users through permanent relationship managers and user councils in the various fields in which it produces statistics. CBS also carries out commissioned work.
- Objective. The statistics are drawn up objectively on the basis of purely statistical considerations. The statistical information, explanations and oral communication concerning them are objective and neutral. The results are not influenced by stakeholders.

The statistics are accompanied by sufficient explanation in order to understand what the figures relate to. This is known as "technical interpretation". For example, underlying data, such as a breakdown by region, sector or demographic, provide greater insight into the phenomenon described. CBS provides information on the definition and significance of the indicators and observed developments in order to prevent misinterpretations of results and to increase the usefulness and value of the statistics provided. CBS also states, for example, whether the figures are provisional or final, to what extent they have been adjusted and – as far as possible – what the margins are.

Methods used by CBS to interpret the results technically are:

- Quantitative decomposition. Here changes in stock statistics are broken down 'arithmetically' into underlying flow statistics. Examples are trends in the number of vacancies, unemployment and the population size.
- Multivariate analysis/standardisation. This takes account of ('corrected for') characteristics in which comparable groups differ and which play a role in the phenomenon being described (the target variable). Such a correction is necessary to avoid connections or developments being misinterpreted. For example in the case of connections with health, such as between health and level of income, the age differences are often kept constant, because age is closely associated with both income and health.
- Obvious explanation. This draws on explanations which have repeatedly been confirmed in empirical research conducted by a renowned institution (such as the WHO) or published in a highly respected scientific journal and about which there is no doubt in the outside world.  
An example is the causal relationship between smoking and lung cancer.
- Intentional explanation. Here the units to be investigated (persons, businesses) themselves state how an event or situation has arisen, upon request with a more detailed explanation of their own motivations.

There are also forms of interpretation which are inappropriate or less appropriate for the role of CBS and which CBS therefore avoids, sometimes with explicit reference in the texts of releases ("...this does not mean..."). The guiding principle is that CBS does

not speculate, particularly with regard to causal relationships and the future.

Here are some examples:

- Making causal suggestions that have not actually been investigated. CBS will therefore avoid statements such as ‘a possible factor is that ...’ or ‘this may be associated with ...’.
- Drawing causal conclusions if variables that are assumed to play a role have not been included in the analysis due to the lack of data.
- Establishing mutual causal relationships. An example of this is the question of whether people with frequent social contacts are happier because they have those contacts. It may also be that they have many social contacts because they are happier and more positive in life. It is also possible that both are true.
- Except for the population forecast, CBS does not produce forecasts, futures studies or hypothetical scenarios. The planning agencies CBP (Netherlands Bureau for Economic Policy Analysis), SCP (Netherlands Institute for Social Research) and PBL (Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency) do, however.

These principles also apply to oral communication on the results, such as the commentaries given by spokespersons at press conferences or in response to questions from the media, or the answers from the information service to questions from other users.

CBS can give public commentaries on statistical matters, including criticism and abuse of statistics, if this is considered appropriate. This commentary will then be published on the CBS website.

### **Quality assurance**

*Inaccuracies in publications are corrected.*

The production of a publication is recorded in a protocol. Aspects such as statistical integrity, empirical evidence, accounting for the results of statistical analyses and drawing up the header and content of a release in line with the obtained results are expressly guaranteed. Each step is supervised by the manager who has specific responsibility. The Director General is involved in the final phase. The process includes final editing as a check against the principles prior to publication. In addition a retrospective random evaluation is carried out by a team of CBS experts who are not involved in the production of publications. Findings from these evaluations are discussed with the parties concerned in accordance with a fixed protocol. Feedback from users concerning the published results is also used to improve the quality of the reporting. As part of CBS-wide ISO certification, the aim is that this process will be ISO 9001 certified at the beginning of 2018.

The fact that the content or the time of publication of a CBS release is not to the liking of another party is no reason for CBS to amend the content or the time of publication.

CBS corrects releases and figures if they prove to be incorrect or if there are grounds to do so on the basis of the guidelines formulated in this publication policy. Corrections are made by publishing a revised release and/or correction in the respective StatLine table, according to a fixed protocol. A list of all corrections in StatLine is available on the [CBS website](#) (only available in Dutch).

In addition to reviewing the content of its publications, CBS also monitors the effectiveness and reach of the reporting. CBS views the extent to which its statistics are used to be an indicator of the fulfilment of its mission. The results show how effectively the statistics are taken up and used by society. This is reported on in the CBS annual report.

*The Hague, 15 May 2017*

*The Director General of Statistics,*

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