



Advisory Council

Advisory report on the CBS Multi-Annual Programme 2019-2023

22 December 2017

Importance

The Advisory Council believes that the provision of reliable and high-quality public data is an essential requirement in a democracy. Data of impeccable quality provide the cornerstone of modern government policy, the basis for the decisions taken by citizens and businesses, and the foundation for research. Especially in these times of economic transition and social change, this is a matter of considerable importance. The Council also notes that respect for the facts is not always self-evident in today's public debate. That is one of the main reasons why it is so important that society can rely on the information provided by Statistics Netherlands (CBS).

Need

In preparing the multi-annual programme, CBS has carefully identified how users of statistical information think the current programme meets their information needs, in addition to identifying their additional needs. Its findings show a widespread and ever increasing need for statistical information.

The Advisory Council sees these conclusions reflected in the multi-annual programme: the current basic programme contains mandatory European statistics and also includes statistics of great social value which are widely used. The environment analysis has shown that this programme does not contain statistics that have outlived their usefulness. The statistics included in the 2018 basic programme will be continued in the new planning period.

Government bodies are making increasing use of the ability of CBS to furnish statistical information in addition to the basic programme at cost price. Given that economic statistics in particular are subject to a European mandate, these statistics tend to dominate the basic programme. The statistics directly funded by government organisations on a multi-year basis therefore tend to be those in the social domain. The statistics made available in this way represent a growing addition to the basic programme.

In addition, there is a need for new statistical information. This need is described in the multi-annual programme, but can only be operationalised once funding is available. The Advisory Council draws attention to the statistics that are not included in the basic programme, in particular those for which no single direct user can provide funding. Examples include the duration of flexible jobs, online commerce and the blurring of boundaries between sectors, the settlement pattern of migrants, sustainability of homes and real estate, various sub-regional breakdowns (e.g. population composition, care and appropriate education), health and care for elderly people, the energy transition, the food chain, sustainable development goals (SDGs), the circular economy,

cybercrime, environmental impact, religious diversity, and diversification of cultural activities.

In the context of continuity, the Advisory Council points out that interrupted series cannot be restored, or only at a very high cost. The Advisory Council is aware of the limited nature of public funds, but advises that statistics should be paid as much possible through central financing. This will improve the comprehensiveness and continuity of the provision of statistics on behalf of the government to ensure that they meet the needs of professionals, policymakers and academics.

Accessibility

In recent years, CBS has taken concerted action to improve the accessibility of its information and will continue to do so in the planning period. The Advisory Council emphasises the importance of ensuring that the information published by CBS serves the needs of those who use the data, in terms of both form and content. This increases the value of the provision of statistical information in the realms of policy, science, press and public.

Added value

The environment analysis carried out by CBS also highlighted areas in which the organisation can step up the statistical services it offers. One of these areas is the need for data at regional level, a need to which CBS is responding by setting up urban data centres (UDCs) or provincial data centres (PDCs) in collaboration with regional authorities. CBS also creates added value in its role as data hub for the government. The Advisory Council believes that this makes the provision of statistical information both more efficient and more effective. This requires CBS to be forward-looking in its approach to data security and privacy protection.

Information security and privacy protection

The Advisory Council recognises the importance of devoting ongoing attention to information security and in particular to the protection of privacy when collecting, processing and publishing data. By having the various processes certified by external parties, CBS demonstrates that it meets the requirements in this area. In addition, CBS operates proactively and reflexively with regard to the data protection and privacy aspects of data processing.

The Advisory Council therefore supports the ambition of CBS to strengthen its role as a data hub for the government. In addition to CBS having the right knowledge and experience to fulfil this role, the centralisation of data at CBS offers an extra guarantee in terms of both information security and privacy protection. For example, use can be made of the possibilities offered by the Statistics Netherlands Act to combine data from

different parties without the results being traceable to individual persons, companies or institutions. This improves the provision of statistical information.

Quality

In order to engender trust in statistical information, the quality of the statistics published should be beyond all doubt. The Advisory Council therefore believes it is important that not only the processes are ISO-certified, but also that the outcomes and the methods and techniques used are validated on a regular basis.

IT development and process renewal

The financial situation leaves very little scope for necessary investments in IT development and process renewal, while the enormous changes in the field of technology and data in particular mean that modifications in these areas are a prerequisite for the efficient and reliable production of statistics in the face of a mounting threat to the required level of information security. The Advisory Council believes that the quality of the statistics may be increasingly difficult to guarantee if the necessary innovations cannot be accommodated within the available budget. The Council therefore recommends that the content of this multi-annual programme be evaluated annually in relation to the financial frameworks and reconsidered when necessary.

Legal framework

In accordance with Section 14 of the Statistics Netherlands Act, the Multi-Annual Programme 2019-2023 will be presented to the Minister of Economic Affairs for approval. The Advisory Council performs its advisory task on this multi-annual programme in accordance with Section 20 of the Statistics Netherlands Act. The Council's advisory report was prepared by the Audit Committee, the ICT Committee and the Programme Committee.

The Advisory Council requests that the Director General publish this advisory report.