

DGINS 2015, Lisbon, 23-24 September 2015,
Statistical session on "Indicators for decision making and monitoring"

Lisbon memorandum

As adopted by the ESSC on 25th September 2015

Given

- a. the important role indicators play in the infrastructure of statistical information, as also set out in the European statistical programme;
- b. that the importance of indicators for policy making at regional, national, European and global level is increasing over time, for instance for the monitoring of Europe 2020 targets in the context of the European Union's annual cycle of economic policy coordination (the European Semester) or for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs);
- c. that indicators represent a particular subset of statistical information, directly related to a special purpose such as monitoring specific policy objectives, and this has significant consequences for the quality requirements for indicators and indicator sets;
- d. that the different stages in policy cycles may require appropriately adapted quality of indicators and indicator sets, thus highlighting the need to accommodate the fit for purpose approach, for example through the use of experimental statistics for the design stage of policies;
- e. the need to enhance quality assurance for statistical indicators given the risks for NSIs from the increasing use of statistical measures as policy targets;
- f. that, in a rapidly evolving world, producers of official statistics should be in a continuous exchange with their stakeholders and react quickly to new policy demands;
- g. that effective and informed policy-making and evaluation call for close cooperation between official statisticians and other analysts;
- h. the challenges and the opportunities of using a combination of new and traditional data sources within solid statistical frameworks and models to produce fit for purpose indicators and ensuring timely delivery;
- i. the challenge of understanding statistical indicators as a transformation of quantitative information into knowledge and to see these as one element in the 'information' package together with qualitative information (underlying framework, contextualisations, etc.) and expert analysis;
- j. the growing importance of social and environmental dimensions for the measurement of objective and subjective wellbeing and sustainable development;
- k. the experience of the European Statistical System (ESS) in monitoring national and European long-term strategies.

The DGINS

1. Stress the importance of a clear distribution of roles between policy makers and statisticians. Policy makers define policy objectives and targets while statisticians work independently on the statistical development of indicators. Close cooperation between policy making and statistical spheres needs to be ensured, with policy makers assessing the relevance of proposed indicators for a given policy and statisticians assessing the measurability of policy targets. This should be an iterative process with statisticians being involved from an early stage.
2. Underline that indicators and indicator sets need to be defined according to the following general criteria: relevance, consistency, timeliness, measurability and transparency. A conceptual framework and solid methods for the selection of key indicators are crucial in this context. Indicator sets should include a limited number of indicators, a few of which are identified as key indicators, to make the set relevant, of analytical value and practically manageable and to ensure clear and concise communication. In order to reach the widest possible audience, including non-specialised users, modern visualisation and communication tools should be used for their dissemination.
3. Emphasise that indicator sets should take into account the links between different policy targets. In this way, indicator sets can contribute to an integrated assessment of the underlying policies, thus highlighting possible synergies.
4. Recommend that statistical indicators from European Statistics comply with the statistical standards and with the quality criteria laid down in the European Statistics Code of Practice.
5. Indicators should make full use of the European Statistical System as well as of the consistency that is guaranteed through this system, as also outlined in the European Statistical Programme. New indicator sets should as far as possible be based on existing statistics.
6. Call for scaled-up research on the interaction between statistical indicators and public policies, because statistical indicators do not only help in understanding reality but also influence policymaking. The research on this interaction is the basis for a common understanding between official statisticians, other analysts and policymakers.
7. Call for closer cooperation between official statisticians and other analysts, aimed at developing and evaluating indicators and at establishing shared standards and improving methodologies in this area.
8. Acknowledge the importance of disaggregation for many indicators along territorial, demographic and socio-economic characteristics. However, data at a high level of disaggregation can be very expensive and may not be of sufficient precision. Confidentiality issues should be carefully evaluated. While specific sub-populations are often of particular interest for a given policy, the collection of data on individual characteristics such as religion and ethnicity can be highly sensitive.

9. Recommend that the ESS actively works towards closing existing and new data gaps, for example in the context of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, so that new indicators can be produced and disseminated. However, appropriate financial and human resources are needed to achieve this objective. Establishing priorities is crucial for an appropriate allocation of the resources. The possibilities offered by the already existing data sources should be fully explored.
10. Commit to further developing an indicator terminology and methodology, capturing both the statistical aspects and the guidelines for adequate dialogue with users. Close cooperation with partners at UN level and with the OECD is of particular importance in this regard.
11. Underline the need for caution if producing or communicating composite indicators, which aggregate individual indicators of different nature and that are measured in different units. Composite indicators should meet the general criteria presented under point 2. Key elements for a correct interpretation of these indicators include education of users about their possibilities and limitations and the communication of detailed information on the underlying individual components, regarding both their evolution and the methodology for their selection and weighting.
12. Commit to promoting training, workshops and exchange of experience within the statistical community on using statistical indicators to convey knowledge, understanding, experience, insight and contextualised information. This entails referring to conceptual frameworks and to making use of modelling (for example to produce flash estimates) when necessary. Appropriate financial and human resources are needed to achieve these objectives.