

SWISS OFFICIAL STATISTICS
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Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
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Swiss Confederation

Federal Department of Home Affairs FDHA
Federal Statistical Office FSO

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Structure of the Charter of Swiss Official Statistics

The Charter has the following structure: the Preamble is followed by the Basic Principles. To the Basic Principles are added a set of indicators containing explanations and information about individual principles. The Annex describes the scope of application of the Charter and organisational arrangements related to the Charter. This is followed by the mandate to the Ethics Council for Official Statistics. A comparison of the Charter and the EU Code of Practice concludes the Annex.

The German and French versions of the Charter of Swiss Official Statistics were edited simultaneously. Both versions are equally authoritative. The wording of the indicators in German and French largely corresponds to that of the European Statistics Code of Practice.

Titles and functions are generally given in the masculine form and apply equally to women and men.

■ Preamble

The Federal Statistical Office (FSO) and the Swiss Conference of Regional Statistical Offices (CORSTAT) hereby adopt the following Charter of Swiss Official Statistics (hereinafter referred to as Charter)

- in view of the fact that official statistics is a public service that is essential to a democratic society which meets the information needs of the body politic as well as that of its various component parts and organs;
- in view of their professional and social responsibility as well as their credibility, which obligate them not only to use their expertise and technical know-how but also to adhere to non-negotiable ethical principles;
- aware of the fact that decisions and assessments made as part of their work involving official statistics must be justifiable and publicly accessible;
- taking into account the overall legal framework governing official statistics and data protection;
- taking into account the European Statistics Code of Practice, which applies to the FSO and other statistical agencies entrusted with the production and dissemination of European statistics.

Meaning and content of the Charter

The Charter is a code of practice. Based on a set of basic principles and indicators, it describes the aims to be pursued by statistical agencies. Reference to the same set of basic principles fosters cooperation among statistical agencies.

The basic principles are binding. In contrast, the indicators explain, clarify and specify the basic principles. The indicators provide, on the one hand, statistical agencies assistance in monitoring the degree to which they are applying the principles and, on the other hand, support peer reviews.

Four annexes are attached to the Charter:

Annex 1 describes the scope of application and contains definitions;

Annex 2 deals with organisational arrangements related to the Charter;

Annex 3 describes the mandate and competencies of the Ethics Council for Official Statistics;

Annex 4 compares the Basic Principles of the Charter with the European Statistics Code of Practice.

Addressees and accession to the Charter

The Charter is addressed to all statistical agencies that produce and publish official statistics.

The following may accede to the Charter:

- the Federal Statistical Office (FSO);
- Switzerland's regional statistical offices and statistical agencies which are members of the Swiss Conference of Regional Statistical Offices (CORSTAT);
- all other administrative units (as defined by the Federal Statistics Act) and all public institutions which are partly subject to the Federal Statistics Act and which regularly produce and publish statistical information under their own responsibility;
- all other administrative units or public institutions of a canton or commune which regularly produce and publish statistical information under their own responsibility.

All the institutions mentioned above are hereinafter referred to as statistical agencies.

Commitment of the statistical agencies

The signatories of the Charter

- undertake to respect and implement the basic principles;
- are called upon to make the Charter known among their partners;
- inform their superior authority about their accession to the Charter and ensure that they have its consent in principle;
- bring attention in their publications to their accession to the Charter.

Ethics Council for Official Statistics

The Official Statistics Section (SSS-O) of the Swiss Statistical Society appoints an Ethics Council on behalf of the FSO and CORSTAT. The Ethics Council is mandated to monitor compliance with the Charter, to provide advice and to disseminate the Charter. The SSS-O guarantees the independence of the Ethics Council.

■ Basic Principles

I. Public information

1. Mandate and relevance

Official statistics are mandated to meet the need for statistically relevant information of social interest as well as for the fulfilment of government functions.

Indicators:

- 1.1 There are procedures for the consultation of users. These procedures are used to monitor the relevance of existing statistics and highlight the needs and changing priorities of users.*
- 1.2 The priorities are reflected in the work programmes.*
- 1.3 The work programmes are published. Regular reports are made on the progress of the work.*

2. Legal basis

The acquisition, processing and storing of data of natural or legal persons are founded on a legal basis.

Indicators:

- 2.1 The mandate for the collection of data for the production and dissemination of official statistics is enshrined in law.*
- 2.2 Respondents are to be informed about the legal bases and aims of the surveys as well as about the measures taken to guarantee data protection.*
- 2.3 Statistical agencies can require respondents to comply with the obligation to disclose information based on binding legislation.*
- 2.4 The legislation allows statistical agencies to use administrative records for statistical purposes.*

3. Public good

Statistical information shall be publicly accessible and published while guaranteeing statistical confidentiality and sufficient quality.

Indicators:

- 3.1 Statistical information shall not be withheld.*
- 3.2 Statistical results are published or made available upon request provided that this is compatible with statistical confidentiality (cf. Principle 10).*

4. Transparency

Statistical information shall be well documented to ensure that it is easily understood and used correctly.

Indicators:

- 4.1 Information about the methods and procedures employed are publicly accessible.*
- 4.2 Statistics are presented in a way that facilitates proper interpretation and meaningful comparisons.*
- 4.3 Users are continuously informed about the methods used and the quality of statistical results.*

5. Archiving

Statistical information shall be preserved in as much detail as possible in an appropriate medium in order to ensure that future generations can use it.

Indicators:

- 5.1 Statistical agencies have an archiving concept.*
- 5.2 The archived data must be available in a technically easily accessible manner.*

II. Independence

6. Professional independence

Statistical agencies shall enjoy professional independence in the performance of their tasks, particularly from political authorities and interest groups.

Indicators:

- 6.1 In order to ensure compliance with the basic principle, the production and dissemination of statistical information is organised appropriately. Agencies that are not exclusively involved in statistics designate one or more statistical agencies for their statistical work.*
- 6.2 The head of the statistical body is hierarchically positioned to ensure senior level access to policy authorities and administrative bodies.*
- 6.3 The head has a professional profile of the highest calibre.*
- 6.4 The head is responsible for ensuring that the dissemination of statistics takes place in an independent manner.*

■ Basic Principles

- 6.5 *The head is responsible for the determination of statistical methods, standards and procedures, as well as contents and the publication schedule.*
- 6.6 *Statistical results are published separately from political messages.*
- 6.7 *When appropriate, the statistical body shall take a public position on statistical issues, including criticism of the results of official statistics and their misuse.*

7. Impartiality and objectivity

Statistical information shall be collected, analysed, presented and commented on impartially.

Indicators:

- 7.1 *The selection of sources, methods and statistical procedures is objective and based on scientific criteria.*
- 7.2 *The production of statistical results is founded on a methodologically sound basis.*
- 7.3 *The publication of statistical data and related explanations in press releases and media conferences is objective and impartial.*

8. Responsibility

Statistical agencies and their employees are professionally bound to avoid any methods of collecting, processing, analysing and presenting statistical data which may result in misleading interpretations.

Indicators:

- 8.1 *Appropriate validation processes are defined and in operation.*
- 8.2 *The appropriate training of employees is guaranteed.*

9. Caution

Statistical agencies are urged to call attention to misinterpretations or significant misuses of their statistical results.

Indicators:

- 9.1 *A method for the identification of problem cases is in place.*
- 9.2 *Appropriate measures are taken in case of problems.*

III. Privacy and data protection

10. Statistical confidentiality

Statistical agencies shall treat all data concerning natural or legal persons in the strictest confidence. They shall not distribute any information that might allow conclusions to be drawn about individual persons.

Indicators:

- 10.1 Statistical confidentiality is enshrined in law.*
- 10.2 The employees of a statistical agency sign a legally binding confidentiality agreement upon appointment.*
- 10.3 Instructions and guidelines are published for the protection of statistical confidentiality during the production and dissemination of statistics.*
- 10.4 Physical and technical safeguards are put in place to protect the security and integrity of statistical databases.*
- 10.5 Agreements guaranteeing data protection and statistical confidentiality are concluded with external users who wish to obtain access to statistical data for research purposes.*

11. Exclusive use

Data on natural or legal persons collected for statistical purposes may not be used as a basis for administrative decisions or measures concerning these persons.

Indicator:

- 11.1 The transfer for administrative purposes of personal data that was exclusively collected for statistical purposes is prohibited.*

IV. Cost effectiveness

12. Sufficient resources

Statistical agencies make every effort to ensure that sufficient resources are made available to them to be able to meet the quality requirements of official statistics.

Indicators:

- 12.1 Personnel, financial and IT resources are sufficient both in qualitative and quantitative terms.*
- 12.2 The scale, degree of detail and costs of statistics bear a reasonable relationship to the demand.*
- 12.3 Quality and utility of existing statistics are regularly monitored.*

13. Operational efficiency

Statistical agencies make a cost-effective use of their resources.

Indicators:

- 13.1 Internal and independent external measures monitor the use of resources.*
- 13.2 Routine work is automated as much as possible.*
- 13.3 The productivity potential of information and communications technology is being optimised for data collection, processing and dissemination.*

14. Proportionality and optimisation of burden

Statistical agencies shall only conduct surveys when administrative data are either unavailable or qualitatively inadequate.

The reporting burden must be proportionate to the needs of the users and must not be excessive for respondents.

Indicators:

- 14.1 The surveys are conducted in such a way as to keep the burden on respondents to a minimum.*
- 14.2 The range and detail of statistical data demands is limited to what is absolutely necessary.*
- 14.3 Data sharing within statistical agencies is generalised in order to avoid multiplication of surveys.*
- 14.4 Demands for new statistics are evaluated and justified based on costs/quality/utility.*

V. Quality

15. Quality standard

Statistical agencies set generally applicable and verifiable quality goals for statistical information.

Indicators:

- 15.1 The quality of statistical results is regularly monitored.*
- 15.2 Procedures are in place to monitor the quality of the collection and processing of data and the dissemination of statistical results.*

■ Basic Principles

- 15.3 *Procedures are in place to take account of various quality considerations – such as trade-offs between different quality aspects – and which make it possible to guide the planning of existing surveys as well as surveys to be conducted in the near future.*
- 15.4 *The quality guidelines are documented and provided to staff. These guidelines are set out in writing and made known to the public.*
- 15.5 *The questionnaires used for statistical surveys are systematically tested prior to the data collection.*
- 15.6 *Revisions follow standard, well-established and transparent procedures.*
- 15.7 *When statistics are based on administrative data, they must be based on definitions and concepts that are a good approximation of those used for statistical purposes.*

16. Methods

The concepts, methods and regulations relating to the gathering, processing, storage and publication of statistical information shall be elaborated on the basis of national or international standards, recognised scientific methodology and professional ethical principles. Information concerning the scope of validity of statistical information as well as the sources and methods used to obtain and process the data shall be made available in an appropriate form.

Indicators:

- 16.1 *Procedures are in place to ensure that concepts, definitions and classifications are applied consistently.*
- 16.2 *The registers are regularly evaluated and adjusted if necessary.*
- 16.3 *Regional, national and European classifications are harmonised.*
- 16.4 *Cooperation with the scientific community is promoted to improve methodology.*
- 16.5 *The surveys are regularly reviewed and if necessary revised or updated.*
- 16.6 *The statistical agencies recruit staff with a relevant university degree.*
- 16.7 *Staff take part in continuous training courses and conferences and exchange experiences.*
- 16.8 *Metadata are documented in a standardised form.*

17. Coherence and comparability

Comparability of information shall be ensured within and between various fields of official statistics. Nationally or internationally recognised concepts, classifications, terminology and methods shall be applied.

Statistical agencies shall guarantee the continuity and temporal comparability of the main statistical information.

Indicators:

- 17.1 Statistics are coherent internally and between each other.*
- 17.2 Statistics are compiled on the basis of common standards with respect to scope, definitions, units and classifications in the different surveys and sources.*
- 17.3 Statistics from the different surveys and sources are compared and harmonised.*
- 17.4 Statistics are comparable over a reasonable period of time or must be harmonised.*
- 17.5 Long time series are to be made available for the main statistical results.*

18. Accuracy and reliability

Statistical results portray the reality they represent accurately and reliably.

Indicators:

- 18.1 Raw data, intermediate results and statistical outputs are assessed and validated.*
- 18.2 The accuracy of statistical results is monitored and published.*
- 18.3 Revisions of statistical results are analysed regularly. The conclusions from these analyses are incorporated in the internal statistical processes.*

VI. Dissemination

19. Publication standard

Statistical information is clearly identifiable as a product of official statistics. Statistical agencies shall only publish statistical information that meets quality standards (cf. chapter V).

Indicators:

- 19.1 Statistical publications are clearly identifiable as such.*
- 19.2 The quality of statistical information from external sources included in the statistical agencies' publications is verified.*
- 19.3 The clarity of the presentation of statistical information is verified prior to publication.*

20. Accessibility

Statistical information shall be made available in a suitable form to meet the needs of the various users.

Statistical information shall be published in a clear and understandable form.

Indicators:

- 20.1 The manner in which statistics are disseminated meets the needs of the users.*
- 20.2 When ad-hoc analyses are conducted upon request, they are published in accordance with statistical confidentiality and quality standards.*
- 20.3 Statistical results are made available in a technically easily accessible manner.*

21. Punctuality and simultaneity

Regular statistical information shall be published according to a pre-announced schedule. Statistical information shall be disseminated in such a way that it is made available to all users simultaneously.

A limited and clearly defined group of users may receive advance information under embargo. This group of users is made public.

Indicators:

- 21.1 The date and time of the publication of statistical results are announced in advance.*
- 21.2 All users have access to statistical results at the same time and under the same conditions and the group of external users informed in advance is limited, controlled and publicised.*

■ Basic Principles

21.3 If information is disclosed to the public without authorisation, the modalities for advance release of information must be revised.

21.4 Every divergence from the dissemination time schedule is publicised in advance and explained.

22. Timeliness

Statistical agencies shall ensure that statistical results are published as quickly as possible after they have been collected.

Indicators:

22.1 The periodicity of statistics takes into account user requirements as much as possible.

22.2 Preliminary results of acceptable overall quality are released when this makes sense to provide up-to-date information.

23. Correction

Statistical agencies shall rectify any results that are marred by substantial errors or shall temporarily suspend publication and inform the users.

Indicators:

23.1 Errors discovered in published statistics are corrected at the earliest possible date.

23.2 Substantial errors are communicated to the public.

■ Annex 1: Scope of application of the Charter and definitions

1. Scope of application

The Charter applies to all activities relating to the production, analysis and distribution of official statistical information. The details are described below.

The indicators serve as criteria to self-assess compliance with the principles.

2. Relationship of Charter to legal provisions

The Charter complements the legal framework that governs statistical agencies and their activities.

3. Official statistical information

According to the terms of the Charter, statistical information includes:

- Official statistical results (including indicators) to be used as reference material by various users which must provide an accurate picture of a relevant aspect of reality and which are more than simple business management statistics;
- Data to be used directly for producing statistical results;
- Meta information (information about underlying contents, methods and concepts);
- Explanatory or analytical comments distributed with statistical results.

4. Activities covered by the terms of the Charter

All provisions of the Charter apply in full to activities that are connected with the production and dissemination of information from official statistics. This includes planning, preparatory work, implementation, analysis and review.

These activities involve:

- the systematic collection of data (with or without surveys) to be processed to produce statistical results;
- processing and transforming data obtained in this way, including connecting and linking information for this purpose;
- the preparation and the updating of classifications, nomenclatures and terminological collections;
- procedures for the publication or distribution as well as for the storage of statistical information;
- the maintenance and use of registers of observation or survey units;
- carrying out studies, analyses, models and evaluations upon request.

■ Annex 1: Scope of application of the Charter and definitions

5. Statistical agencies

Within the framework of this Charter, the following are statistical agencies:

- the Federal Statistical Office (FSO);
- CORSTAT and its constituent statistical offices and statistical agencies;
- all other administrative units of the Confederation (as defined by the Federal Statistics Act) and all public institutions which are partly subject to the Federal Statistics Act and which regularly produce and publish statistical information under their own responsibility;
- all other administrative units or public institutions of a canton or commune which regularly produce and publish statistical information under their own responsibility.

■ Annex 2: Organisational arrangements

1. Contracts and cooperation with third parties

Statistical agencies that commission third parties to carry out statistical work on their behalf must ensure that these sign a written undertaking to adhere to, and to ensure that their staff adhere to, the basic principles set out in this Charter. The commissioning statistical agencies shall be responsible for implementing this undertaking.

2. Signature of an accession declaration

By signing an accession declaration, statistical agencies undertake to respect the content of the Charter, to publicise the Charter and to provide to the Ethics Council the information it requests.

3. Exclusion from the group of signatories

The FSO and CORSTAT are jointly entitled – after consulting the Ethics Council – to exclude a statistical agency from the group of signatories if it repeatedly violates the Charter. Such a step must be justified. The exclusion shall be announced on the internet.

4. Evaluation of the Charter

The FSO, CORSTAT and the Ethics Council undertake to exchange experiences on the Charter whenever circumstances require it and at least every five years, as well as to periodically consider whether revisions are necessary.

5. Revision procedure

The FSO and CORSTAT shall jointly draw up modifications to be made to the Charter after due consultation with the statistical agencies that have signed it.

6. Coming into force

The revised Charter shall come into force upon signature by the FSO and CORSTAT.

7. Publication

The Charter shall be edited and published by the FSO and CORSTAT. These agencies shall also publish a list of statistical agencies that have acceded to the Charter.

The signatories of the Charter note in their publications their commitment to respect the Charter.

■ Annex 3: Mandate and competencies of the Ethics Council for Official Statistics

1. Mandate

The Official Statistics Section (SSS-O) of the Swiss Statistical Society establishes on behalf of the FSO and CORSTAT an independent body, the Ethics Council for Official Statistics (hereinafter called the Ethics Council). The Ethics Council shall see to it that the basic principles of the Charter are implemented and to help to disseminate them. The Ethics Council may monitor compliance with the basic principles through peer reviews commissioned by itself or by third parties and can also act as a mediator. The Ethics Council is authorised to note, recommend and inform. However, it does not have the power to impose sanctions.

2. Eligibility to submit a petition

The Ethics Council shall examine all petitions that are submitted to it in connection with the application of the basic principles of the Charter. Petitions that appear to be unfounded or malicious shall be rejected.

The Ethics Council can refuse to consider petitions but must justify such a refusal.

3. Own initiative

The Ethics Council can act upon its own initiative.

4. Confidentiality

Petitions shall be treated confidentially. No one may suffer any prejudice for submitting a petition to the Ethics Council.

5. Institutional affiliation

To ensure its independence, the Ethics Council is institutionally affiliated with the Official Statistics Section (SSS-O) of the Swiss Statistical Society.

6. Regulations

The SSS-O shall issue the regulations of the Ethics Council to be ratified by CORSTAT and the FSO.

7. Financial resources and funding

The costs incurred by the Ethics Council shall be borne in equal parts by the FSO and CORSTAT. Furthermore, the FSO shall assume responsibility for its secretariat and provide technical support to it.

■ Annex 4: Comparison of the Charter and the European Statistics Code of Practice

Basic principles according To Charter	Principles and indicators according to EU Code of Practice
1	1, 2, 11
2	2
3	6, 15
4	6, 15
5	–
6	1
7	6, 7
8	4, 12
9	1
10	5
11	5
12	3
13	10
14	9
15	4, 8
16	7, 15
17	14
18	12
19	1, 6, 14, 15
20	15
21	13, 6
22	13
23	6

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Peter Laube
President

Adopted by the Federal Statistical Office (FSO)

Neuchâtel, 31 May 2012



Dr Jürg Marti
Director General

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