

SWISS PUBLIC STATISTICS
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CHARTER

September 2002

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Office fédéral de la statistique
Bundesamt für Statistik
Ufficio federale di statistica
Swiss Federal Statistical Office

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CORSTAT
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In view of the fact that:

- public statistics are a public service which is essential to a democratic society and is aimed at helping to provide the information needed by the community as well as by its various component parts and organs,
- the pertinence, quality and credibility of statistical information are the prime aims of public statistics,

and that

- the professional and social responsibility as well as the credibility of statistical offices imply respect for intangible, basic ethical principles, apart from know-how and technical skills,

and in all awareness that:

- the choices and assessments they make as part of their work involving public statistics must be easily justified and presented to the public,

while in addition referring to:

- the Basic Principles of Official Statistics in the area covered by the United Nations European Economic Commission (April 1992), and
- the Declaration on Professional Ethics of the International Statistical Institute (August 1985),

and taking into account

- the primacy of the legal framework concerning public statistics and the protection of personal data,

the statistical offices in Switzerland, namely:

- the regional statistical offices which are members of the Swiss Conference of Regional Statistical Offices (CORSTAT), and
- the Swiss Federal Statistical Office (SFSO),

as well as other federal, cantonal and local bodies which produce statistics and public law institutions which together represent Swiss public statistics

hereby adopt the following Charter as their code of ethics.

They undertake to respect its terms and to ensure that they are respected by the members of their staff, and to encourage their partners to adopt the same code.

The Swiss Public Statistics Charter comprises:

- basic principles,
- an undertaking to set up an Ethics Board for Public Statistics which is responsible for helping to promote and ensure adherence to the basic principles, and
- recommendations for devising the public statistics system.

■ Basic principles

Public information

1. Aim of providing information

Public statistics provide statistical information to meet the general needs of society as well as those related to implementing public policies.

2. Publishing

No statistical information shall be withheld.

3. Transparency

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

4. Perpetuity

Statistical information shall be preserved in as much detail as possible in order to ensure that future generations can use it. Such information is part of a country's collective memory.

Independence

5. Scientific independence

Activities concerning public statistics shall enjoy scientific independence, in particular from political powers and all interest groups.

6. Impartiality

Statistical information shall be gathered, presented and commented on impartially, without any suggestion or recommendation of a political kind.

7. Responsibility

Statisticians are professionally bound to avoid any methods of gathering, processing, analysing or presenting statistical data which may be misleading.

8. Warning

Public statistics bodies reserve the right to comment on wrong interpretation and misuse of results they distribute.

Distribution

9. Availability

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

10. Simultaneous distribution

Statistical information shall be distributed in such a way that it is made available to all users simultaneously. Certain authorities may be sent prior information under special conditions in order to enable them to prepare answers to questions which might be raised.

11. Topicality

Public statistics bodies shall publish statistical results as quickly as possible after they have been collected.

12. Correction

Public statistics bodies shall rectify any results which are marred by significant errors or shall at least suspend distribution.

Quality

13. Credibility

The concepts, methods and regulations relating to the gathering, processing and distribution of statistical information shall be determined on the basis of professional standards, scientific methodology and ethical principles in such a way that the statistical results provide an accurate picture of the real situation.

14. Coherence

Compatibility of information shall be ensured in and between the various fields of public statistics. The concepts, classification systems, terminology and methodology set out and recognised on a national or international level shall be applied.

15. Continuity

Public statistics bodies shall guarantee continuity and temporal comparability of the main statistical information.

Protection of personal data

16. Exclusive use

Data on individuals or legal entities gathered for statistical purposes may not be used as a basis for decisions or administrative measures concerning those individuals or legal entities.

17. Statistical confidentiality

Public statistics bodies shall treat all data concerning individuals or legal entities in the strictest confidence; they shall not distribute any information which might allow conclusions to be drawn as to the situation of an individual or a legal entity.

18. Legality

The gathering of data concerning individuals or legal entities is based on current legislation.

19. Proportionality

Surveys shall be carried out only when information held by the authorities is not available or is inadequate. Surveys shall be implemented in such a way as to minimise inconvenience to those questioned.

20. Information

Those questioned shall be informed about the basis for and the aims of the survey, as well as measures to be taken to guarantee data protection.

■ Ethics Board for public statistics

Mission

The regional statistical offices, through CORSTAT, and the SFSO undertake to jointly set up a private body under the title of Swiss Ethics Board for Public Statistics (hereinafter called the Ethics Board) which shall be responsible for helping to ensure that the basic principles of the Swiss Public Statistics Charter are applied, as well as helping to promote the Charter. As far as concerns the application of the basic principles, the role of the Ethics Board shall be to note, to advise and to inform. It shall not have powers to sanction.

Right of seisin

The Ethics Board shall act upon all written petitions it receives from an individual, a legal entity or a public body regarding the application of the basic principles of the Charter, unless such petitions are clearly totally unfounded or malicious. Those who submit a petition to the Ethics Board shall not suffer any subsequent prejudice on this account.

Institutional links

The Ethics Board shall be attached to the Swiss Statistical Society (SSS) and shall constitute a committee within the Public Statistics Section (SSS-O).

Regulations

The SSS-O shall lay down the regulations of the Ethics Board. These regulations shall be in accordance with the spirit of the Charter and shall be ratified by the SFSO and CORSTAT.

Funding

The SFSO and CORSTAT shall finance the Ethics Board in equal parts. Furthermore, the SFSO shall provide technical support to its secretariat.

■ Scope of application of the Charter

Scope

The Charter applies to all activities relating to the production or distribution of public statistical information as described below.

Primacy of the legal stipulations

The terms of the Charter shall be applied within the framework of the legal stipulations governing public statistics bodies and their activities.

Public statistics bodies

According to the terms of the Charter, Swiss public statistics bodies are defined as the SFSO and the regional statistical offices which are members of CORSTAT, as well as all other federal, cantonal or local administrative bodies according to the terms of the federal law on statistics, and all departments of a public law body or institution which regularly and independently produce and distribute statistical information as defined below.

Statistical information

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

- statistical results to be used as reference material, including indicators, by various users and which must provide an accurate picture of a pertinent aspect of the real situation; simple management statistics shall not be considered statistical results;
- specific files which contain data to be used for producing statistical results;
- information concerning content, methods and definitions;
- explanatory or analytical notes distributed with statistical results.

Activities covered by the terms of the Charter

Activities of public statistics bodies which in their entirety come under the terms of the Charter include planning, preparatory work, implementation and evaluation relating to:

- the systematic gathering of data to be used for obtaining statistical results (data collection exclusively or principally for the purposes of drawing up statistics or principally for administrative purposes, whether or not it includes questionnaires);
- data processing, including comparisons and data coupling;
- drawing up and updating classifications, lists and terminology;
- distribution and preservation measures relating to statistical information;
- the maintenance and use of registers of observation or survey units;
- the development of the Swiss public statistics system.

The Charter applies to the following activities in a subsidiary way only:

- carrying out studies and analyses, drawing up scenarios, devising models and operating on request (including for the purposes of research or planning), except in cases where the results are explicitly designated as public statistics results;
- data collection as part of feasibility testing or studies;
- other forms of research in the field of public statistics.

■ Scope of application of the Charter

Identification of public statistics information

Public statistics bodies shall take the necessary measures to ensure that users and other partners in the field of public statistics can identify statistical information which constitutes public statistics information as defined above.

Collaboration with the Ethics Board

The signatories to the Charter shall supply the Ethics Board with any information it may require.

■ Coming into force and modification of the Charter

Preliminary conditions

The Charter may be signed by all public statistics bodies if the following three conditions are met:

- if it is adopted by the General Assembly of the Swiss Conference of Regional Statistical Offices (CORSTAT);
- if it is adopted by the Swiss Federal Statistical Office (SFSO) through a written declaration by the Director of the SFSO addressed to the Presidents of CORSTAT and the SSS-O;
- if the regulations of the Ethics Board are approved by the General Assembly of the Public Statistics Section (SSS-O) of the Swiss Statistical Society as well as by the SFSO and CORSTAT.

If the above conditions are met, the President of the SSS-O shall inform all public statistics bodies accordingly.

Coming into force

As far as the SFSO is concerned, the Charter shall come into force upon publication.

With regard to members of CORSTAT, the Charter shall come into force as soon as the corresponding director has produced a written and signed declaration addressed at the same time to the President of CORSTAT, the President of the SSS-O and the Director of the FSO.

In the case of other federal statistical bodies or a regional statistical office which is not a member of CORSTAT, the Charter shall come into force as soon as the corresponding director has addressed a signed declaration to the Director of the SFSO and the President of the SSS-O, and in the case of regional offices, to the President of CORSTAT.

Each body which signs the Charter shall be entered on the list of signatories.

Notification and agreement of superior authority

Each body which signs the Charter shall notify the authority to which it is responsible and obtain, if necessary, the latter's agreement.

■ Coming into force and modification of the Charter

Publication

The Charter shall be published along with a list of signatories to it. Signatory bodies shall take over the publicity for the Charter.

Evaluation of the Charter

The SFSO, CORSTAT and the SSS-O undertake to exchange opinions on the Charter whenever circumstances require and at least every five years, as well as to consider periodically whether the terms of the Charter should be revised.

The Ethics Board shall also take part in this evaluation.

Revision procedure

The SFSO and CORSTAT shall jointly draw up modifications to be made to the Charter, after due consultation with the signatories.

■ Recommendations for devising the public statistics system

Institutional collaboration

1. Competence centres

The statistics system at each institutional level shall be coordinated and represented vis-à-vis the public by its competence centre for public statistics. The Swiss Federal Statistical Office (SFSO) is the competence centre for federal statistics; the members of the Swiss Conference of Regional Statistical Offices (CORSTAT) are the competence centres for public statistics within their respective canton or municipality (hereinafter called the regional statistical offices).

2. Organisational independence

In order to ensure that the basic principles are adhered to, production and distribution of public statistics information shall be organised appropriately, for instance, through the creation of specialised independent administrative units.

3. Collaboration

The regional statistical offices constitute the Confederation's main partners at a regional level with regard to public statistics. The SFSO is the main partner of the cantonal and local authorities with regard to federal statistics. They shall work together to strengthen and expand the Swiss public statistics system.

4. Coordination

Public statistics bodies shall coordinate their activities in order to ensure coherence and efficiency and to avoid superfluous statistical information. In particular they shall endeavour to promote the harmonisation of administrative data used by public statistics.

5. Reciprocal notification

The federal statistical bodies shall notify the regional statistical offices of any joint projects with other regional administrative bodies. The regional offices shall notify the SFSO of any joint projects with other federal administrative authorities or with federal offices.

■ Recommendations for devising the public statistics system

6. Participation at an international level

Under the auspices of the SFSO, Swiss public statistics shall participate actively in international projects aimed at developing and revising public statistics. The SFSO shall notify the regional statistical offices of all projects in which it is involved.

7. Involvement of third parties

If public statistics offices commission third parties to carry out statistical projects, said third parties shall sign a written undertaking to adhere to, and to ensure that their staff adhere to, the basic principles set out in the present Charter. Public statistics offices shall be responsible for implementing this undertaking.

8. Updating

The area of observation and the production of public statistics shall be regularly evaluated in order to adapt them to new requirements. The users of these statistics and those questioned, as well as public statistics offices, shall be involved in this evaluation process.

The users shall be notified of major modifications relating to concepts, methods or regulations which affect the scope and continuity of statistical information.

9. Geographical dimension of statistical information

In principle, the production of statistics shall be oriented towards the institutional structure of Switzerland. The cantons and larger towns shall constitute priority regions.

The pertinence of the geographical delimitation shall be examined when each new project is planned or when existing statistics are due to be revised. In the case of federal projects the regional statistical offices shall be involved in this process.

10. Quality standards

Public statistics offices shall draw up common aims which can be monitored from the point of view of quality and topicality of the statistical information. They shall ensure that the statistical information published is in line with minimum quality norms.

The distribution of provisional results shall be limited to a strict minimum. Information concerning the scope of validity of statistical results as well as the sources and methods used to obtain the data and how it has been processed shall be made available.

II. Distribution schedule

A distribution schedule for the main statistical results shall be published in advance.

12. Availability

Distribution conditions and prices for statistical information shall be fixed in accordance with the requirements of the public service, and shall be published.

Policy concerning distribution and prices for statistical information shall be coordinated within and between statistics systems at different institutional levels.

Berne, 24 May 2002

Approved by the General Assembly of the Swiss Conference of Regional Statistical Offices (CORSTAT)



Gian Antonio Paravicini Bagliani
President

Neuchâtel, 14 May 2002

Approved by the Swiss Federal Statistical Office (SFSO)



Adelheid Bürgi-Schmelz
Director

