

ISI Advisory Board on Ethics

Statement on Professional Ethics

Confronted with serious questions the societies of our time need worthy information to inform related decisions. To overcome crises, to achieve global agendas as with the Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris climate, statistical evidence must be fit for purpose.

The necessary prerequisite for this is an efficient as well as ethically sound use of the ever growing and diversified existing data sources and methods of data science. In order for statisticians to be able to do their work along professionally recognised best practices and without undue (political) interference, the (political) framework conditions must be right. Statistical production and dissemination need to benefit from proper implementation of the rule of law.

Independence and integrity run through the critical conditions for this. The question of how the independence and integrity of statistics can be guaranteed is one with rising attention by many actors in society and should benefit from a proper political weight. In a situation where 'alternative facts' tend to be considered by many as equal to solid statistical facts, we can witness that the door is wide open for manipulation of any kind.

From past experience, [professional ethics](#) and [principles of good governance](#) in official statistics emerged, which have been universally acknowledged and partly codified in a legally binding way. These principles, whose aim is the Truthfulness and Integrity of Statistics, are worth being recalled.

The head of the statistical institution holds a pivotal position for the quality and trustworthiness of public sector facts. It must therefore be ensured that the procedures for the recruitment and appointment of heads of National Statistical Institutes (NSIs) are transparent and based only on professional criteria. The reasons for dismissal of heads of NSIs or their transfer to another position shall not compromise professional independence, either. The practice, sometimes common in other administrative areas, of replacing the heads of offices in the event of changes at the political level is not in line with these guidelines.

Statistical methodologies applied by official statistical institutions are thoroughly scrutinised and have to follow international standards. Such methods are continuously improved and adapted to evolving situations. However, their criticism on political grounds is not compatible with internationally agreed ethical and governance rules applicable to statistics and undermine the credibility of and trust in national official statistics, with adverse consequences in the international markets, including financial markets.

The ISI is concerned to raise and maintain professional ethical standards in statistics across the world. As a Non-Government Organization (NGO) ISI can take actions which may be politically difficult for other organisations. The ISI considers submissions on [ethical issues](#), issues statements and works with other organisations to raise and maintain ethical standards within the statistics profession.