



National Statistics Office
Uffiċċju Nazzjonali tal-Istatistika

CDU-POL-001: Dissemination Policy

January 2022

1. Overview

- 1.1 The National Statistics Office as established by article 9 of the Malta Statistics Authority Act, Chapter 422 of the Laws of Malta, has the functions of:

'Collection, compilation, extraction and release of official statistics'.

2 Abbreviations

DG:	Director General NSO
IMF:	International Monetary Fund
NSO:	National Statistics Office
SDDS:	Special Data Dissemination Standards
STATAMAP:	Statistical Maps

3 Definitions

- 3.1 **Anonymised Microdata:** Microdata refers to information as collected within surveys. A microdata file is created by coding and electronically recording each survey respondent's responses to all relevant questions. Despite the importance of microdata sets to satisfy the needs of researchers and the changing nature of research itself, the right to privacy and the protection of a person, household, or undertaking in the context of confidential data processing is protected at law. Hence, microdata files are anonymised in such a form that the information related to an identifiable entity/person cannot be directly or indirectly identified.
- 3.2 **Infographics:** A visual representation of information or data.
- 3.3 **Metadata:** Describes statistical concepts and methodologies used for the collection and generation of data and provides information on data quality. Reliable statistics necessitate good quality documentation of methodologies and statistical production processes.
- 3.4 **News Release:** These are a collection of tables with a related commentary on a specific topic for a particular period issued either on a monthly, quarterly or annual basis.
- 3.5 **Publication:** A collection of tables with related commentary on a specific topic for a particular period, being lengthier and in further detail than a News Release.
- 3.6 **STATAMAP:** Statistics are illustrated by district and locality using the Maltese Islands map. Data on various themes can be found on the NSO's STATAMAP portal.
- 3.7 **Online Database:** The NSO's statistical database showcasing statistical information on various themes which is accessed through the NSO's website.

4 Policy Objectives

- 4.1 This Policy is based on the principles as outlined in the European Statistics Code of Practice, in particular: impartiality, objectivity, accessibility and clarity in publishing statistics and making them available to the public in various forms.
- 4.2 NSO's statistics and analyses must be accessible and understandable in order to enable users obtain information on the Maltese society. NSO shall use its know-how to make the statistics coherent, understandable and accessible. NSO's statistics and analyses shall cover the needs of the general public and be extensive and detailed enough to cater for the business community and the authorities' needs for statistics for analytical and policy making purposes.

5 Scope

- 5.1 The aim of this policy is for NSO to meet its mission of producing high quality official statistics and analysis for better decision making in Malta. These shall be disseminated in an impartial, independent and timely manner, making them available simultaneously to all users.

6 Policy Statements

6.1 Dissemination Channels

- 6.1.1 General enquiries shall be directed to the Communication and Dissemination Unit. For specific enquiries on data published in a particular news release and/CDor publication, the relevant contact details of the compiling unit are included in all NSO news releases and publications.
- 6.1.2 The NSO's primary channel of dissemination for official statistics is its website (<https://nso.gov.mt/en/Pages/NSO-Home.aspx>) on which official statistics are published and made available to the public free of charge.
- 6.1.3 The NSO website allows users to access an online statistical database, which provides access to full time series data which is regularly updated on various themes for users or researchers who would like to engage in supplementary detailed analyses. No registration is required to access the online database. In addition, a number of selected indicators about all themes are available on the NSO's website (https://nso.gov.mt/Home/SELECTED_INDICATORS/Pages/Selected-Indicators.aspx).
- 6.1.4 The NSO also makes use of several social media venues as a platform to communicate its statistical outputs and salient points of releases. It publicly replies within reasonable timeframes to comments and criticism, concerning published official statistics, received on these platforms. When doing so, NSO restricts its comments only to statistical matters and refrains from commenting on policy developments or political views.
- 6.1.5 NSO's news releases and publications, whether in print or online, including feeds in social media platforms, shall include statistical information only. This information shall be without any reference to the implications of the statistics being published on the current state of the economy, society or policies be they governmental or otherwise.
- 6.1.6 The public is free to use, copy and quote the information published in all the channels, provided that the NSO is quoted as the source. Failure to quote the source correctly, especially in cases where the data is re-disseminated commercially, is subject to legal action as stipulated in the Copyright Act, 2000. The source, unless otherwise stated, shall be quoted as follows: *Source: National Statistics Office, Malta.*

- 6.1.7 It should be understood, however, that any calculations and conclusions drawn by users on the basis of the NSO's data are the intellectual product of the users themselves. In case of misuse, misinterpretation, misreporting or detection of errors in NSO information, these are communicated to the correspondent immediately upon detection. The NSO then ensures that the mistake is rectified as communicated.
- 6.1.8 The NSO reviews the mainstream media daily, including weekends. If quoted NSO information is erroneously or wrongfully reported or interpreted, a media clarification is sent to the editor or the source of information inviting him/her to correct the mistake. Such media clarifications are handled within reasonable timeframes and closely monitored to ensure that the mistake has been rectified as communicated. The NSO only publishes clarifications itself when there is a clear need to explain its results in more detail and when corrections by the newsroom are not implemented or are no longer possible.
- 6.1.9 Tailored requests for statistical information may be submitted through the NSO website (<https://nso.gov.mt/en/Services/Pages/Request-for-Information.aspx>). Special adaptations and ad hoc reports for individual users are subject to fees as per Legal Notice 28 of 2014 available on the NSO website: (https://nso.gov.mt/Home/ABOUT_NS/Documents/Legislation/LN28.pdf). The NSO shall always be quoted as the source when publishing such information. In justified cases, when such tailored requests are operationally demanding and would affect current commitments, the NSO reserves the right to refuse or postpone the provision of this information.
- 6.1.10 The NSO logo and all other products disseminated by the NSO, including but not limited to infographics and banners, may not be re-disseminated for commercial purposes.
- 6.1.11 User satisfaction will be monitored on a regular basis by means of a user satisfaction survey which is expected to be carried out every three years among our users. Users are defined as those who made a request for information through the NSO website and regular stakeholders interested in NSO information. Replies are monitored and areas for improvement are subsequently identified.
- 6.1.12 Results from User Satisfaction Surveys together with the Sources and Methods are made public on the NSO website: (https://nso.gov.mt/en/News_Releases/View_by_Unit/Unit_01/Methodology_and_Research/Pages/Under-Satisfaction-Survey.aspx)

6.2 News Releases

- 6.2.1 The NSO is the sole owner of all News Releases published by the Office and these are easily identified by the NSO logo and standard format displayed and applied to all releases. All NSO news releases follow a set of standardisation rules, which govern the layout of the releases including the positioning of the NSO and ESS logos, colour scheme, overall design and layout of the tables and commentary.
- 6.2.2 An Advance Release Calendar projecting three months of news releases (current and two subsequent months) is maintained by the NSO and published on the NSO website: (https://nso.gov.mt/en/News_Releases/Release_Calendar/Pages/News-Release-Calendar.aspx). This release calendar is largely linked to the activities of our international partners including Eurostat's release calendar, IMF's SDDS calendar and Eurostat's data transmission requirements.
- 6.2.3 The NSO may, from time to time, include ad hoc news releases focusing on thematic statistical content. These include news releases commemorating international days, special days and those representing ad hoc results. Such releases are marked as 'Special Releases' on the Advance Release Calendar and shall be inserted in the calendar with at least one week advance notice to inform all users. Occasionally,

their status is marked as 'Provisional' until their dissemination is confirmed at least 3 days before publication.

- 6.2.4 All releases are published on the NSO website and disseminated to the general public, media and all users at 1100 hrs whereas special releases mentioned in 6.1.3 are published between 1300 hrs and 1500hrs. Punctuality of all releases is recorded and monitored.
- 6.2.5 The NSO makes every effort to ensure that scheduled news releases are published on the date and time announced. However, in the event of unforeseen circumstances, news releases may be deferred to a later time or to another date. In such cases, the NSO shall indicate this rescheduling on the Advance Release Calendar listing the new release date and occasionally also the reason behind the rescheduling as soon as it arises with the original schedule remaining public.
- 6.2.6 Customarily, the NSO will publish one news release on a given working day. However, exceptional circumstances may warrant to have additional releases published in one day.
- 6.2.7 Prior to publishing a news release, the Communication and Dissemination Unit seeks the approval of the Head of the compiling unit, the respective Director and the Director General. No approval from any other member of the Malta Statistics Authority Board is sought or required for the publication of news releases.
- 6.2.8 NSO's news releases are available on the NSO website ([https://nso.gov.mt/en/News_Releases/View_Current_Year/Pages/2021/News-Releases-2021-\[3\].aspx](https://nso.gov.mt/en/News_Releases/View_Current_Year/Pages/2021/News-Releases-2021-[3].aspx)) downloadable in PDF format and whenever possible, tables are made available as an excel document.

6.3 NSO Publications

- 6.3.1 NSO publications are available on the NSO website (<https://nso.gov.mt/Home/Publications/Pages/Publications.aspx>) downloadable in PDF format and in some cases, a hard copy may also be produced.
- 6.3.2 The NSO is the sole owner of all publications published by the Office and these are easily identified by the NSO logo.
- 6.3.3 All publications are published on the NSO website and disseminated to the general public, media and all users at the same time. The NSO usually disseminates and publishes publications at 1300 hrs.
- 6.3.4 All NSO publications include methodological explanations and provide links to the specific area on the NSO website where methodological notes and definitions about the particular publication can be found.
- 6.3.5 The Communication and Dissemination Unit seeks the approval of the Head of the compiling unit, the respective Director and the Director General prior to publishing the publication. No approval from any other member of the Malta Statistics Authority Board is sought or required prior to the release of the publication.

6.4 Online Statistical database

- 6.4.1 The NSO is committed to publish statistical tables on major social and economic statistical areas. The main indicators will be presented in traditional products such as news releases while more detailed and time-series data will be published in the online database or in the Selected Indicators.
- 6.4.2 The NSO will update its online statistical database and the selected indicators on the day of publication of the news release. Moreover, additional data related to a particular news release, publication, or

transmission, shall be made available at the earliest possible time following the publishing of the information.

6.4.3 Whenever possible, the news releases and publications should indicate that further data is available on the online database.

6.4.4 Statistical data illustrated as maps, also called STATAMAP is also available on the website (<https://nso.gov.mt/en/Services/STATAMAP/Pages/STATAMAP.aspx>)

6.5 Metadata

6.4.5 Users are kept informed about the methodology of statistical processes including the use and integration of administrative and other data. Advance notice is provided to stakeholders on any major revisions and changes in methodologies including benchmark revisions. In such cases, a formal letter is sent to Eurostat, the Ministry of Finance and major policy makers impacted by the revision whereas a press information notice is issued and made public on the NSO website in advance. Meetings are also held with major stakeholders detailing the nature of the revision and the expected impact on main indicators.

6.4.6 All NSO products include methodological notes and definitions on the methods and procedures applied for the statistical domain under study. To complement this, the NSO website includes a dedicated page covering the main metadata aspects (<https://metadata.nso.gov.mt/>), as well as detailed methodological and technical information on the sources and methods in place (<https://nso.gov.mt/en/nso/Sources and Methods/Pages/Sources-and-Methods.aspx>). Links to these pages are included in the methodological section of every News Release and publication released by the NSO.

6.6 Handling of errors

6.6.4 While all efforts are made by the NSO to minimise errors in its statistical products, these may occasionally occur. In such cases, the error will be rectified and published as soon as possible after its detection.

6.6.5 If, and when, an error in published statistics is detected, this is adjusted in the PDF version of the news release or publication available on the website as soon as it is identified. An Errata Corrige note, indicating the changes made and the date on which the PDF was replaced with a revised version to reflect these changes will be published on the dedicated web page of the particular news release or publication.

6.6.6 A communication, indicating the changes made and providing a link to the dedicated page for the particular release or publication, will be sent by e-mail to all recipients of the NSO News Releases and publications, including the media and major policy makers.

6.6.7 In the case of printed publications, an Errata Corrige sheet should be prepared and printed. This sheet should indicate all the corrections made within the publication with the page number of the publication clearly indicated. Copies of this Errata Corrige should be inserted in all available publications and in all library copies and the title of the publication should be printed on the top right corner of the Errata Corrige insert.

6.6.8 In the event of an error in the data presented in the online database, a note should be included on the entry page of the database indicating the dataset which has been revised and the date of the revision. This note does not refer to regular updates but only to the handling of errors in the database.

6.7 Pre-Release Access

6.7.4 There may be matters that are impacted by the content of news releases. In line with the European Statistics Code of Practice, in such cases, limited and controlled pre-release access, under embargo, may

be granted to designated persons in high-level positions whose area of responsibility encompasses such matters. Pre-release access is given to specific individuals and not to entities and/or corporate bodies.

- 6.7.5 Any agreements drawn up in this regard are attached in the annex. All agreements are approved by the Director General.
- 6.7.6 Pre-release access may be granted for news releases and publications not more than 1 working day before publication and is meant to serve for information purposes only.
- 6.7.7 The aim is to allow sufficient time for these designated persons to consider the new statistical information and to prepare adequate responses to the media and main stakeholders.
- 6.7.8 Request for pre-release access by persons other than those covered by the pre-release access agreement is to be formally submitted to the Director General NSO. After consideration and DG approval, NSO may grant pre-release access to the designated persons.
- 6.7.9 In this regard, definite pre-established NSO news releases may be sent to designated persons who upon application have been granted pre-release access.
- 6.7.10 News releases' content shall be strictly embargoed until the official time of dissemination and hence, will be labelled as 'draft' and 'confidential'. Any information contained in the news release shall not be divulged to third parties prior to the official publication of the news release by the NSO.
- 6.7.11 The list of designated persons is to be regularly reviewed, updated and published on the NSO website.
- 6.7.12 Board Members of the Malta Statistics Authority except for the NSO Director General do not have the right to pre-release access.

6.8 Access to Microdata

- 6.8.4 Confidentiality is of utmost importance to the work carried out by the NSO. All information available to the NSO is used for statistical purposes only and the MSA Act precludes the NSO from sharing any information that can relate to an identifiable person or undertaking.
- 6.8.5 Anonymised microdata files contain microdata that are provided for statistical/research/non-commercial purposes only in such a form that the information related to an identifiable person/undertaking cannot be directly or indirectly identified.
- 6.8.6 Access to anonymised microdata is only granted under strict conditions to a selected number of institutions or persons accredited as research entities or researchers for use in research projects as defined on the NSO website: (<https://nso.gov.mt/en/Services/Microdata/Pages/Access-to-Microdata.aspx>).
- 6.8.7 Under no circumstance will access to anonymised microdata be granted to research entities or researchers whose main purpose of conducting the research project is for general information and/or commercial activity; and/or if alternative data sources are available.
- 6.8.8 Recognition as a research entity or researcher is limited to the stipulated time period and for the purposes of the particular research project.
- 6.8.9 Access to anonymised microdata is granted subject to the terms of reference included in the application form found on the NSO website (link in 6.7.3 above) and a contract agreement that is signed by both parties.
- 6.8.10 Access is normally granted for a definite period which is specified in the agreement.

6.9 Impartiality

- 6.9.4 In all the cases mentioned above, the NSO does not need or seek Ministerial approval prior to the release of its statistical products.
- 6.9.5 No Ministerial comment related to the data being published is ever included in any of the NSO publications and news releases. Whenever appropriate, any such comments are issued separately by the Ministries themselves and on their own initiative.
- 6.9.6 The content of statistical releases is the sole responsibility of the Director General, NSO as stipulated in the Malta Statistics Authority Act Chapter 422 of the Laws of Malta
- 6.9.7 In releasing official statistics, no interpretation or unreasonable selection of material is carried out by the NSO. Comments on the implications of the statistics for the current state of the economy, the state of society or the effectiveness of Government policies or programmes are never made. No comments are made on the policies of the Government.

7 Responsibilities

- 7.1 Although the content of statistical releases is the sole responsibility of the **Director General**, both the **Head of the respective Unit** and the **Unit Director** are responsible for the compilation of such content.
- 7.2 The **Communication and Dissemination Unit** is responsible for communicating errors in a timely manner, issuing statistical releases within the stipulated time-frames and granting pre-release access in accordance with the agreement.
- 7.3 The **Methodology and Quality Unit** is responsible for reviewing requests by researchers and research institution for access to anonymised microdata and granting right to use.

8 References

[1] European Statistics Code of Practice

9 Attachments

[1] Pre-Release Agreement between the National Statistics Office and the Ministry of Finance

10 Document Control

10.1 This policy needs to be formally reviewed by the Policy Owner at least once a year to address any of the following issues:

10.1.1 A change in business activities, which will or could possibly affect the current operation of the NSO's Communication and Dissemination Unit.

10.1.2 A change in how the NSO manages or operates its dissemination procedures and a change in the European Statistics Code of Practice.

10.1.3 An identified shortcoming in the effectiveness of this policy.

10.2 The current version of this policy, together with its previous versions, shall be recorded below.

Version History		
Version	Description	
1.0	Date Live:	02/02/2022
	Version Notes:	First version of the policy.

Version 1.0	
	Full Name & Role
Procedure Owner:	Lara Friggieri Cordina (Head of Communication and Dissemination Unit)
Reviewed by:	Silvan Zammit (Director Data Capability)
Reviewed by:	Catherine Vella (Head of Director General's Office)
Approved by:	Etienne Caruana (Director General)