

QUALITY POLICY OF THE CZECH STATISTICAL OFFICE

INTRODUCTION

The scope of authority of the Czech Statistical Office (CZSO) includes the acquisition of data, production of statistical information on social, economic, demographic, and environmental developments of the Czech Republic and its respective administrative units, provision of statistical information and its publishing. The CZSO is also responsible for ensuring the comparability of data and compliance with international commitments in statistics, which the Czech Republic is bound to. These activities form a comprehensive set of services financed from public funds, provided in the broadest public interest, and serving the purpose of supporting decision-making processes at all levels, both nationally and internationally.

The State Statistical Service of the Czech Republic is an integral part of the European Statistical System formed by Eurostat, national statistical institutions, and other national statistical authorities. Eurostat aims to harmonise the statistical outputs of national statistical systems, coordinating concepts, methods, software tools, documentation, common rules and, among other things, ensuring the required level of quality of European statistics.

The basic document creating the legal framework for the development, production and dissemination of European statistics is the Regulation on European Statistics. It defines, inter alia, general principles of professional independence, impartiality, objectivity, and reliability and confidentiality of the State Statistical Service, and the cost-effectiveness of its implementation. It contains a description of the various quality criteria and specifies how the quality requirements and quality reports will be determined.

Ensuring the necessary quality of the State Statistical Service in terms of statistical outputs and related production activities is an integral part of all core, management, and support processes of the Czech Statistical Office, which is clearly declared in the published CZSO Quality Commitment. Furthermore, the principles contained in the Regulation on European Statistics are specified by the European Statistics Code of Practice adopted by the Statistical Programme Committee. Together with the quality management principles set out in the Quality Commitment, the Code forms a comprehensive framework for quality management at the CZSO.

The CZSO unequivocally supports the fulfilment of principles and continuous improvement of quality management through its publicly available Quality Commitment and Quality Policy. This Quality Policy describes in more detail the approaches, procedures, and process settings of the CZSO in implementing the requirements of the Code while respecting the basic principles of quality management. It thus supports the implementation of the CZSO Strategic Plan and provides a framework for setting quality objectives.

INSTITUTIONAL ENVIRONMENT

1. Professional Independence

Professional independence of the CZSO is guaranteed by the Act on the State Statistical Service, which also represents the commitment to the credibility of statistics in the Czech Republic in accordance with the Regulation on European Statistics. In its activities, the CZSO unconditionally observes the principle of professional independence from political or other administrative institutions, as well as from private sector entities. This ensures the credibility of the produced statistical outputs and their high user value for the needs of civil society.

Among the basic pillars of the CZSO's professional independence are the impartiality and apolitical position of the President, who has a high rank in the civil service hierarchy. This results in strong independence of the CZSO in setting the quality parameters of statistical processes and outputs. Specifically, this includes

an unconditional compliance with professional ethics and independence in selecting the appropriate scientific methods, optimal procedures, methods of obtaining input data and organising statistical work, allocating available resources, and planning the work programme, including the dates of statistical data publication.

The CZSO, as the central authority of state administration, actively promotes the principle of professional independence within its own legislative activities and adopted measures of executive nature, always in accordance with the current conditions of the external environment and the need for continuous improvement of the State Statistical Service. The CZSO receives feedback and support for its activities from the Czech Statistical Council, an independent body of experts. Professionalism, independence, impartiality, expertise, objectivity, and ethical conduct are among the key shared values of the CZSO employees. These values are comprehensively embedded into the system of internal rules, by-laws, processes, and procedures and are supported by the top management.

1a. Coordination and Cooperation

The CZSO coordinates the State Statistical Service of the Czech Republic on the basis of a law that sets clear conditions under which other national statistical authorities can develop, create, and disseminate official statistics. The CZSO maintains and publishes an overview of these bodies. It provides them with methodical assistance in the form of planned regular and ad-hoc consultations through appropriate communication tools. It also issues national methodological guidelines for quality assurance in identified areas of importance. It monitors and reviews the fulfilment of these instructions using self-assessment tools, as well as an independent international quality assessment (known as peer review). For this purpose, it has the necessary processes and organisational structure in place.

The CZSO also performs a coordinating role within the national statistical system by managing the process of preparing the program of statistical surveys, optimising the administrative burden generated by statistical surveys, ensuring the protection of confidentiality, and issuing statistical classifications and code lists. The CZSO is the exclusive point of contact for Eurostat in statistical matters¹.

In accordance with the Strategic Plan, the CZSO supports, maintains, and develops effective forms of cooperation with other national statistical institutions, European Statistical System bodies, central banks, academic and scientific institutions, and other international organisations of which the Czech Republic is a member. It particularly prefers expert cooperation in areas where the CZSO experts can offer their own input or contribution, it also supports the sharing and comparison of data and other development projects contributing to increasing the quality of statistics.

In order to support innovation and continuous improvement, the CZSO has published a Change Management Policy and has set up appropriate processes for creating partnerships at the national and international level, motivating employees, and securing funding for development activities.

2. Mandate for Data Collection

The CZSO has a clear legal mandate for collecting data for the purpose of statistical outputs production in accordance with users' requirements. Respondents may, in justified cases, be legally bound to provide the data necessary for the creation of statistics. The CZSO is also entitled to use available administrative data sources, if they are compliant with the requirements for quality, form, and timely availability of the data. The legal framework allows the CZSO to use private data innovatively, with the support of cooperation tools and the development of EU legislation. All these processes are governed by very strict statistical confidentiality and data protection rules as well as information and cyber security principles.

As part of the continuous improvement process, in accordance with the Strategic Plan, the CZSO continuously implements processes aimed at proactively searching for new data sources and optimising the administrative burden. The CZSO has developed a Change Management Policy promoting innovation, and also a system of instruments for its financing. The need to implement a certain survey is regularly

¹ With the exception of selected legal acts for which responsibility has been assigned to other national authorities.

revised within the annual planning of the CZSO's work programme. The work programme is always the result of an assessment of the possibilities to optimise the number and scope of statistical surveys and the use of suitable alternative data sources. The owners of administrative data sources are obliged to discuss their creation, modification and termination with the CZSO. Government departments are also required to assess the impact of intended legislative changes on the State Statistical Service.

An integral part of data collection is the process of monitoring compliance with the reporting duty. The CZSO is entitled to impose sanctions for breaching this duty. The first priority is always given to motivating respondents to fulfil their reporting duty, mainly through urgent requests, dialogue, and consultations, emphasising the societal importance of the State Statistical Service. For this purpose, the CZSO proactively communicates the meaning and added value of the data provided to the respondents, including through a user-friendly web portal, social networks, a contact centre, a virtual advice centre (chatbot), publications and projects aimed at disseminating data and increasing statistical literacy.

3. Adequacy of Resources

The CZSO has its own budget chapter in the State Budget. The processes of planning the budget for the following fiscal year and the systematisation of official and work positions are an integral part of the creation of the Office's work program. In doing so, the CZSO takes into account the need for statistical data collection and production, especially in the areas set by the requirements of international and national commitments and users. The volume of allocated financial resources is subject to an annual external approval procedure within the budgetary process.

The CZSO systematically optimises the organisation and financial intensity of core, management, and support processes. For these purposes, it actively seeks possible new savings and efficiencies, always taking into account quality, safety, and risk management requirements. In particular, with the aim of ensuring development activities, it actively uses available additional funding sources, such as Eurostat's grant policy instruments, EU funds and national subsidy programs.

The human resources policy establishes clear principles and procedures for the implementation of personnel processes, including the corresponding competencies of senior employees. The development of available human resources is enhanced by an effective internal communication set up in accordance with the Internal Communication Policy and a system of professional training. The necessary ICT infrastructure is provided and developed in accordance with the adopted Information concept of the CZSO.

4. Commitment to Quality

The CZSO actively seeks to ensure the required attributes of the institutional environment and processes for the production of statistical outputs in accordance with the principles of the European Statistics Code of Practice. These requirements are comprehensively taken into account within the framework of the published Quality Commitment, this Quality Policy, the Strategic Plan of the CZSO and its subsequent annual work programs. They are implemented within the system of internal regulations, methodologies, and other documents available to employees (and in relevant cases to the public) in accordance with the CZSO's communication policy.

The top management of the CZSO initiates and supports the implementation of the principles of quality management, including user focus, support for quality activities by middle and lower management, employee commitment and motivation, implementation of a process approach, risk management, continuous improvement and innovation, support for evidence-based decision-making, management and development of the relationships with suppliers, users and other producers of official statistics. The quality commitment is an integral part of all processes. It is ensured by the existence of a centralised statistical information system, adequate documentation and an established organisational structure for quality management coordinated by the Quality Committee and comprising the relevant statistical and support departments, including those responsible for the principles of the European Statistics Code of Practice.

The key parameters of quality of the CZSO processes and outputs are set in accordance with the requirements of external as well as internal users. Key performance indicators are set, measured, and evaluated at the strategic level, and measurable goals are set at the operational level. The CZSO has in place formalised processes and tools for collecting, evaluating, and publishing quality data and reports in accordance with the specifics of individual statistics and based on the requirements of relevant legal regulations. The process of planning, collecting, producing, and disseminating statistical outputs corresponds to the stages of the standard PDCA² cycle, including the identification of improvement measures.

5. Statistical Confidentiality

The Security Policy of the CZSO sets strict standards for the protection of confidential statistical and personal data. The CZSO has a system of methodological documentation and an appropriate organisational structure, including designated asset guarantors, to ensure the security and integrity of confidential data. Data handling processes are secured by physical protection tools, computer technology, the use of progressive encryption methods and devices, logical protection systems and sound logistic data administration procedures. Data protection methods are continuously reviewed and constantly improved.

The process of publishing statistical information, which was created by aggregating individual data, is methodically managed in such a way that, by combining data for several legal or natural persons, it is not possible to determine or find out who this information relates to. When deciding on the publication of potentially confidential data, protection of the confidentiality of the data provided always takes precedence over the publication itself. Similar standards are used in assessing the justification and subsequent provision of data for scientific research purposes.

Confidential statistical data may not be used for other than statistical purposes³. The CZSO has a strong legal mandate to refuse to provide such data to third parties, which it also actively implements and communicates to the public. All employees of the CZSO and, if applicable, external suppliers are required to maintain the confidentiality of confidential statistical data they become aware of. The obligation of confidentiality continues even after the termination of employment or conclusion of the relevant work. The field of data protection is an integral part of the CZSO education system.

6. Impartiality and Objectivity

In accordance with legal regulations and other standards in the field of official statistics, the Quality Commitment, the Strategic Plan, the Dissemination Policy, and the Ethical Code of Employees of the Czech Statistical Office, the CZSO consistently and rigorously observes the principles of independence, impartiality, professionalism, objectivity, transparency, equal treatment and non-discrimination, including in its interactions with partners, suppliers and respondents. In developing methodologies for collecting, processing, and publishing statistical outputs, the CZSO uses the most up-to-date knowledge of statistical science, best practices in applied statistics and the results of surveys of user requirements. Methodological procedures are documented, strictly followed, and also reviewed annually as part of the creation of the work program, taking into account the needs of users and potential opportunities for improvement.

The CZSO announces the publication dates for the next year's statistical outputs well in advance, always regardless of the political or social situation at the time of their publication. Compliance with these deadlines is continuously monitored. Data audits are planned and implemented in accordance with the Data Revision Policy, which is a publicly available document. All users have equal and free access to the standard CZSO data, with a preference for the Internet as a generally available communication channel. Data publication procedures are automated.

Produced statistics are subject to an independent expert assessment, analysis, and benchmarking before their publication. Socially significant and sensitive outputs are discussed across the CZSO's departments. Relevant information on quality is part of the relevant reports and methodological explanations. The CZSO actively communicates statistical outputs and implements activities in the area of increasing statistical

² Plan-do-check-act.

³ A very limited range of exceptions is provided for in Section 17 of Act No. 89/1995 Coll., on the State Statistical Service.

literacy, while the principles of communication are documented and are part of employee training. The CZSO has set up processes for monitoring the use of published data and the method of reaction in case of detection of their misleading interpretation.

STATISTICAL PROCESSES

7. Sound Methodology

The framework for the creation of sound methodology consists of the Quality Commitment, this Quality Policy, and the Change Management Policy. The CZSO has established an appropriate organisational structure and a system of processes to ensure the creation, development, and implementation of appropriate methodologies within statistical processes. The methodological system, including classifications and code lists, is based on international standards, regulations, and manuals, and implemented in the national environment. The CZSO is actively involved in international and national structures focused on the development, standardisation, and harmonisation of common methodologies and tools.

The CZSO has a system of internal and public methodological documentation. An integral part of it are the issued national methodological guidelines in the areas of organisation of the State Statistical Service, the process of taking the oath of confidentiality, cooperation, management of the administrative burden, use of administrative data sources, management of classifications and codebooks, seasonal cleaning, protection of individual and personal data, provision of data and implementation of professional training. The application of a suitable methodology is facilitated through the architecture of the Statistical Information System, in which most statistical tasks are processed centrally. An integral part is the system of current statistical registers. The necessary metadata and work manuals are available for users of the Statistical Information System.

The process of creating the statistical task methodology is documented and is always solved by a team of experts from the fields of all relevant stages of the production process, who participate in the creation of the resulting technical project. Within the CZSO, there are processes of regular review of the methodology of preparation, collection, processing, and dissemination of statistical data. The outputs are continuously evaluated and subsequently cross-checked with alternative data sources. The top management of the CZSO actively supports the implementation of external methodical audits, including the involvement of users in these activities.

The development of the competences of CZSO employees is perceived as a key prerequisite for the quality of outputs and continuous improvement. The educational system is flexible and makes it possible to respond in a suitable way to specific needs of statistical units. The quality of the training is monitored and evaluated. In accordance with the Internal Communication Policy, employees are involved in knowledge sharing processes. In the area of development and innovation, cooperation processes are set up with relevant institutions, including the academia and research community.

8. Appropriate Statistical Procedures

The CZSO has an organisational structure, processes, and documentation system in place to ensure the initial development of the methodology, its documentation and the subsequent implementation of the preparation, collection, and processing of statistical data. The architecture of the CZSO's Statistical Information System corresponds to the standard statistical process model (GSBPM⁴). An integral part of the Statistical Information System is the meta-information system, which covers the entire process from data collection to dissemination. The methodology is systematically reviewed and improved as part of the preparation of work programs with the aim of optimising the use of data sources, reducing the administrative burden, and achieving the required quality characteristics of outputs in accordance with user requirements. The processes also include an assessment of available quality indicators for the previous period.

The CZSO actively involves representatives of major respondent groups, internal and external experts and, where relevant, interviewers in the preparation of statistical surveys within the framework of the

⁴ Generic Statistical Business Process Model

established cognitive laboratory. Drafts of new reports and questionnaires are subject to a pilot verification procedure on a limited sample of respondents. The necessary methodological documentation is available to the respondents during the statistical surveys implementation. Respondents are also given the necessary methodological support by means of a wide spectrum of available communication channels when the surveys are carried out. This respondent support is provided by trained CZSO employees.

The CZSO has established processes for proactive search, acquisition, and adaptation of administrative data sources for the purpose of statistics creation. These processes operate in a priority mode and are supported by the top management. New data sources are generally introduced after a thorough analysis of their quality. There are set processes, internally developed techniques and rules for this. The method of data transfer and basic quality requirements are formalised in cooperation agreements with data owners.

The processing of administrative data is separated from the processing of statistical inputs. The CZSO follows standardised as well as individual administrative source-specific validation and quality control procedures. Most procedures are automated. Integrated variables from administrative data tasks enter the production process only after their validation and processing for statistical purposes. Relevant procedures and practices are documented.

9. Non-excessive Burden on Respondents

The CZSO systematically implements activities in the field of monitoring and optimising the administrative response burden. An appropriate organisational structure has been created within the CZSO and relevant processes implemented. The reduction of the administrative burden on respondents, including the elimination of duplicate data collection, is a long-term priority in accordance with the Strategic Plan of the CZSO and the policy of reducing the administrative burden at the government level.

The annual preparation of the work programme is related to the repeated review of the need to collect specific data, monitoring the emergence of alternative data sources, and assessing the possibilities of their application. Therefore, the CZSO has implemented a process of proactive search, analysis and acquisition of administrative data sources including relevant documentation. The draft program is also subjected to public opposition and comments at various stages of the legislative process.

In addition, in order to reduce the administrative burden, the CZSO uses mainly smaller and medium-sized respondents, modern methods of practical statistics including, for example, the creation and reduction of samples, rotation of respondents, cross-sectional coordination of surveys and analysis of possible duplications. The CZSO top management supports processes of standardisation, computerisation, and maximum sharing and use of available data. Those data that are available from other sources are not duplicated. The CZSO is actively involved in building a connected database at the national level. Furthermore, the activities of integrating data collection directly into corporate information systems or implementing electronic and web forms with respect for strict confidentiality requirements are supported.

Respondents have access to the relevant web portal containing the necessary methodology and further information on how to obtain methodological support. The CZSO actively collects feedback from respondents, which is evaluated and used to improve the processes of survey preparation and the production and dissemination of statistics. The CZSO also provides feedback to respondents through appropriate external communication tools.

10. Cost Effectiveness

The processes of using available resources are set up in accordance with the requirements of efficiency, economy, and effectiveness as stipulated in the relevant legal regulations. The efficiency of the use of resources is continuously assessed in accordance with the users' requirements for the quality of outputs and with regard to the burden on the data providers. The allocation of resources, especially for development activities, is based on priority tasks that form part of the work programme. The senior management actively supports resource efficiency review processes. These processes result in proposals for optimisation and

cost-saving measures, including activities in the area of standardisation and computerisation and the introduction of process management. The above activities concern both core, management, and support processed of the Office.

The cost-effectiveness of the use of funds, representing the pursuit of the best possible ratio between the resources used and the results achieved, is regularly assessed internally and externally through the financial planning and budgeting processes, monitoring of the use of funds and subsequent internal and external reporting, including the preparation of the Final Account of the State. An integral part of these processes are also the procedures of ex-ante, interim, and ex-post management control, assessment of the accounts, review by internal audit and subsequent public scrutiny by the competent authorities.

Human resources optimisation processes are related to the management and analysis of costs, qualifications, and turnover through the HR information system, including internal reporting. An integral part is the employee performance review, including the evaluation of the adaptation process. The way to increase efficiency in this area is to constantly increase and deepen the necessary competences within the education process.

The quality of internal IT services is evaluated internally through the operational data of the information systems, including the help desk, and is regularly evaluated externally through the IT quality index. Based on the evaluation, the use of resources is optimised and developed in accordance with the adopted Information Concept, the computerisation strategy (the Ten Principles of the Statistical Information System), the adopted technological standards and the expert activities of the Board of Architects. The CZSO is actively involved in the projects of eGovernment development in the Czech Republic.

STATISTICAL OUTPUTS

11. Relevance

The CZSO Strategic Plan and the CZSO Change Management Policy support the implementation of projects aimed at increasing the relevance of the CZSO's outputs. The CZSO strives to fulfil the users' requirements as best as possible, and is open to their feedback, suggestions, and comments. The CZSO has created an organisational structure and processes for identifying existing and potential user needs.

These take place mainly within the framework of the European and national legislative process, the interdepartmental comment procedure, the implementation of methodical audits and an ongoing active and passive communication with users.

The CZSO has defined key user groups and uses a wide range of methods of communication with them. It regularly implements a user satisfaction survey. The information thus obtained is analysed, presented at various levels of management, and used within the continuous improvement processes. Contracts are concluded with key users for the provision of data, including their quality parameters.

User requirements are taken into account in the annual preparation of the work program. The work program contains priority development tasks that have priority in the allocation of financial and staff resources. The Programme of Statistical Surveys, as an integral part of the work program, is discussed both with advisory bodies, including the Czech Statistical Council, as well as a wide range of defined groups, mainly institutional users.

12. Accuracy and Reliability

When collecting data and processing and evaluating statistical information, the CZSO strives for the most accurate picture of reality, and proceeds in such a way as to avoid any distortion. Using the professional competences of employees and all suitable input data, it ensures the setting of the statistical production process with the required level of accuracy and reliability, taking into account the available resources and the need to maintain a reasonable administrative burden.

As part of the CZSO production process, input data validation procedures are set up, to which significant effort is devoted. Particular attention is paid to the completeness of the data of statistically significant

units. Processes of non-response analysis are introduced, the outputs of which are used in the following work program planning cycles. The continuous outputs of the individual steps of the production process are also subject to validation. Both sampling and non-sampling errors are measured and procedures to reduce errors are documented. Output benchmarking tools are used based on administrative data sources, previous outputs, and shared key variables. Expert evaluations and discussions of published data are carried out at different levels of management and between departments.

Methodological aspects of statistics production are assessed both internally and externally. Qualitative aspects of statistics are continuously monitored and analysed within the processes of data preparation, collection, processing, and publication. They are used for the purposes of creating reports and managing the statistical process. Important quality aspects are communicated to users both in response to the requirements of existing standards and in the interest of securing the necessary user features. The CZSO also has a Data Revision Policy in place. Revisions are analysed and the outputs of these analyses are used to set production processes, resources, and the revisions calendar.

13. Timeliness and Punctuality

The CZSO fully and unconditionally respects the requirements for timeliness and punctuality of statistical outputs contained in supranational and national legislation and standards. The optimal dates for the publication of statistics are always determined within the framework of a broader discussion and a comprehensive analysis of the stakeholder needs. In general, data are published as soon as possible after the end of the reference period, but always after reaching qualitative parameters in accordance with the needs of key users.

The CZSO has an approved and published Dissemination Policy in place. The publication of statistical outputs takes place at standard fixed times. The CZSO uses processes for planning and monitoring compliance with the deadlines for publication of outputs through the Product Catalogue, including a calendar that is monitored in real time. Punctuality is part of the key performance indicators at the level of the Strategic Plan of the CZSO. Possibilities to shorten and modify release dates and times are regularly analysed as part of a continuous improvement process. Changes to the calendar are exceptional, they are always announced and explained. The causes of deviations in publication dates are analysed.

The CZSO publishes the Data Revision Policy, which ensures the transparency of the processes of publication of preliminary data and their subsequent updates. The dates and also the reasons for important extraordinary revisions are always announced in advance.

14. Coherence and Comparability

The CZSO systematically strives for mutual comparability of statistical information. Doing so, the Office takes into account the increasing requirements for internal, time, and space consistency and comparability of data across the State Statistical Service of the Czech Republic and the European Statistical System. To this end, it actively supports the participation of CZSO experts in relevant activities of international organisations, including Eurostat.

As part of the processes of preparing the collection, processing, production and dissemination of statistical outputs, procedures are set to ensure the comparability of data in the respective period of time. Coherence is also ensured by the fact that all steps of the production process of related statistics are implemented within the Statistical Information System, including the corresponding documentation. Where possible, common standards are applied, including statistical data processing methods. Administrative data are described and recorded in the Statistical Information System. Processes of continuous and subsequent validation, benchmarking, and discussion of outputs are set up. The CZSO uses common validation tools and logical checks across tasks. A common system of statistical registers is used to define the statistical population. Expert groups are created to increase the coherence of outputs within individual statistical domains.

Methodological changes are documented in the meta-information system and communicated to users. Experimental statistics are labelled accordingly.

15. Accessibility and Clarity

In accordance with the Strategic Plan, the CZSO emphasises standardisation, computerisation, and the use of modern and universally accessible communication channels, especially websites, as part of its dissemination processes. Tools for creating user-defined tabular, graphic, and cartographic outputs have been introduced. Methods of information presentation, including methodological explanations, comments and analyses, are continuously improved to make the outputs understandable to the widest possible range of potential data users. The CZSO complies with all required data publication standards, including open formats supporting further sharing and machine readability.

The CZSO provides information on the methodology appropriate to the needs of the target user groups. Metadata are documented in standardised metadata systems and correspond to the standards and requirements of the European Statistical System. The CZSO has processes in place to keep them up to date, as well as processes to assess the accessibility, clarity and user-friendliness of the outputs. Results of these evaluations are analysed, discussed at different management levels, and used within the continuous improvement process. Published outputs including metadata are archived. Revisions are marked accordingly.

The Dissemination Policy clearly supports the dissemination of statistical outputs under the predetermined conditions. The CZSO actively cooperates with the media and regularly analyses the media impact of its communication activities. Innovative communication tools, including social media, are set up and developed. Users have access to a network of information service offices, including regional ones. Projects aimed at popularising official statistics are supported at the top management level. The CZSO provides services for the creation of customised outputs in accordance with the published pricing policy. Moreover, it has established a process for the provision of data for scientific and research purposes.