



Conseil national de l'information statistique

Identifying new needs



As its volume grows, economic and social information is becoming ever more important in our societies. It is therefore essential to identify new information-related needs—particularly in a forward-looking approach—and organize constructive discussion on the issues that generate debate in this field. Those are two of the missions of France’s National Council for Statistical Information (Conseil National de l’Information Statistique: CNIS), a forum for producers and users of official statistics.

The Council plays a key role in preparing the five-year and annual programs of statistical projects and surveys. Each new survey conducted by producers of official statistics must obtain a “public interest and statistical quality” seal of approval from CNIS. The Council is also responsible for informing citizens through its many publications and on its website www.cnis.fr.

The Economic Modernization Act of August 4, 2008, reformed the governance of official statistics by establishing a three-part organization. Alongside CNIS, which examines programs prior to their launch, and the official statistical service, the Act set up the Official Statistical Authority, in charge of overseeing compliance with the principles of the EU Statistics Code of Practice.





The three institutions of French official statistics

The institutional framework of French official statistics was reshaped by the Economic Modernization Act of August 4, 2008, and two implementation decrees in 2009. There are now three players: the official statistical service (Service Statistique Public: SSP), the National Council for Statistical Information (Conseil National de l'Information Statistique: CNIS), and the Official Statistical Authority (Autorité de la Statistique Publique).

■ The **National Council for Statistical Information** acts as a forum for consultations between producers and users of official statistics, ranging from identification of areas to be covered to evaluation of surveys performed. The CNIS annual report provides a detailed follow-up of the opinions issued in the previous year and assessments of the annual and medium-term work programs carried out by statistics producers.

■ The **Official Statistical Service** comprises INSEE and ministerial statistical offices (Services Statistiques Ministériels: SSMs). The law defines official statistics as information gathered in statistical surveys whose list is published every year in the *Journal Officiel*, the government paper of record. Official statistics also include material obtained by the processing, for general information purposes, of data collected for other purposes by government units, public entities, and private entities acting in the public interest.

■ The **Official Statistical Authority**, the most recently established player, is tasked with guaranteeing the independence of official statisticians affirmed by law, along the lines of existing practices in several European countries. The Authority's mission is to ensure compliance with the principles of the EU Statistics Code of Practice promulgated in 2005. In particular, it oversees the application of the principles of professional independence, objectivity, relevance, and quality at each stage in the design, production, and dissemination of official statistics.



National Council for Statistical Information (CNIS)

Organizes consultations between producers and users of official statistics.



Official Statistical Service (SSP)

Produces and disseminates statistical information.



Official Statistical Authority

Ensures application of principles governing EU statistics.



CNIS missions

The Council's main mission is to **organize dialogue** between producers and users of official statistics.

The first step is to identify new information needs and user concerns. Does a labor union want a more refined measurement of comparative changes in income? Is an employers' organization seeking to reduce the survey response burden for businesses? CNIS offers a **forum** for engaging the official statistical service on the issue of potential gaps in the observation of economic and social phenomena, suggesting new avenues of investigation, or asking for a reappraisal of a particular guideline or procedure.

CNIS is also a place where **controversial issues can be discussed in a dispassionate setting**. For instance, it initiated an in-depth review of the measurement of the unemployment rate and of changes in purchasing power—two issues that had sparked bitter controversy at the time. In the same spirit, the Council has launched investigations that have produced major advances regarding inequality indicators, the measurement of precariousness, the effects of economic globalization, and sustainable-development indicators.

Every five years, CNIS conducts a **forward-looking analysis** of medium-term needs and desirable changes in the information system within that time frame. The exercise yields recommendations on guidelines for the five-year **programming** of statistical work and surveys. On an annual basis, CNIS activities contribute to the preparation of the official-statistics program for the following year.

The Council is committed to closely tracking the components of official statistics at a sustained pace. The goal is to obtain an overall view, which requires **examining every new proposal**, whether a survey, census, register, panel, or intended use of administrative databases. The discussion focuses on the project's purpose, its place in the information system, and its priority level. It is important to make sure that each operation satisfies a public-interest need and does not duplicate existing information sources—in short, to determine its usefulness.

CNIS also **provides information on French official statistics and their preparation**. Its output includes reports, minutes of meetings, and a bulletin entitled *Chroniques du CNIS*. These publications cover a wide variety of subjects and fields, and are all available on www.cnis.fr. The website contains proposals for work programs, including surveys, and the text of the basic legislation and regulations on official statistics. An e-newsletter provides regular updates on all Council activities.

Since 2009, CNIS has been issuing **assessment reports** on the work programs of official statistical services and on the implementation of the Council's own recommendations.





How CNIS works

Continuing exchanges between producers and users take place in the seven **Task Forces**. At their behest, or on the Executive Committee's initiative, **Working Groups** are set up to examine particular topics in detail. The process yields reports and recommendations. During the year, the Task Forces submit opinions for approval by the Council and monitor the application of opinions issued the previous year. Task forces specialize in areas relevant to major economic and social debates.

The **Council** meets at least once a year in a **plenary session**, which ratifies the opinions submitted by the Task Forces and the list of surveys proposed for the following year. The Council is composed of about forty members, and its make-up guarantees a broad, balanced representation of economic and social sectors: the three constitutional assemblies (National Assembly, Senate, and Economic, Social, and Environmental Council), labor unions, trade organizations, chambers of commerce, local government, researchers, non-profit groups, journalists, INSEE, the Bank of France, and the National Institute of Demographic Studies (INED).

The CNIS **Executive Committee** comprises seventeen Council members. It prepares the agenda for the plenary session and approves the reports prepared by the Task Forces and Working Groups. The CNIS **Chairman** is appointed by the Economy Minister from among the members of, and after consultation with, the Executive Committee.

As one of the missions of INSEE (the National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies) is to coordinate the official statistical service, the CNIS **General Secretariat** operates in liaison with INSEE's Director of Statistical Coordination and International Relations. It organizes the work of the Task Forces, and prepares and implements the Council's decisions.


Online at www.cnis.fr



CNIS publishes a **newsletter** reporting its activities. All CNIS information is available online at www.cnis.fr, including minutes of meetings, Working Group reports, and Council opinions. Visitors can also register for open meetings.

CNIS publications are downloadable from the site. Paper copies can be ordered free of charge. The **Chroniques** series cover topics of current interest such as "Living standards and social inequality" (no. 7), "Employment, unemployment, and precariousness" (no. 8), and "Purchasing power: from perception to measurement" (no. 4). Each issue is between four and eight pages long. CNIS **Rapports** (Reports) describe the work of each Working Group.

All **surveys** of the official statistical service that have received the "public interest and statistical quality" label are accessible online. Individual and corporate respondents can verify that the survey is indeed being conducted by the official statistical service and that the responses are protected by statistical confidentiality rules. Survey managers will find all the information they need to submit their surveys to CNIS for approval.



CNIS review process for a statistical-survey proposal

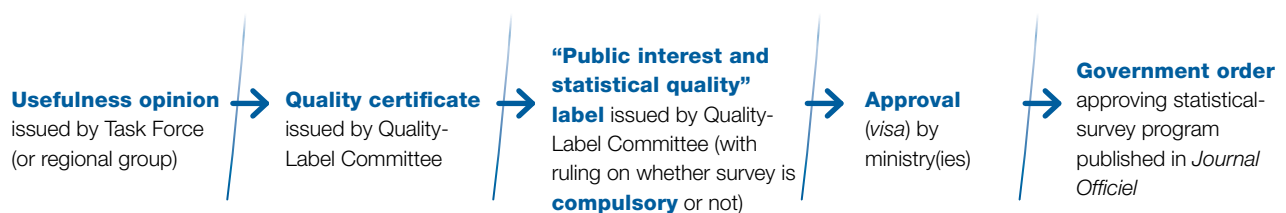
To prepare the program of official statistical surveys, each producer entity submits its survey plans to CNIS.

For a **national survey** to be included in the annual program proposed by CNIS and be covered by legal provisions on statistical confidentiality, it must receive CNIS approval in two stages:

■ First, the relevant Task Force meets to assess the project’s usefulness. If the discussion yields an agreement, the Task Force chairman issues a **usefulness opinion (*avis d’opportunité*)**. Statistical surveys proposed **at regional level** are examined by a consultative group comprising the main governmental, economic, and social players concerned in the region. The group may consist of the Regional Committee for Economic and Social Information (Comité Régional pour l’Information Économique et Sociale: CRIES)—if one exists—or an ad hoc commission convened by the Director of the INSEE Regional Office. The commission’s membership may vary according to the survey topic. Surveys planned by law do not need to obtain this “usefulness opinion.”

■ Second, the **Quality-Label Committee** assesses the proposal’s quality. The Committee evaluates the implementation procedures envisaged by the surveying entity. In particular, it reviews such aspects as the proper application of sampling rules, the response burden, procedures for disseminating results, and explanations provided to individual respondents. It also ensures that the proposal complies with the terms of the “usefulness opinion.” If the Committee’s findings are positive, it issues a **“public interest and statistical quality”** label, also called **quality certificate (*avis de conformité*)**. If the surveying entity so requests, the Committee may rule on whether or not the survey should be compulsory.

CNIS approval procedure for survey proposals



Quality-Label Committee

The Quality-Label Committee is divided into four sections: **enterprises**, **households**, **agriculture**, and **local government**.

Each section is composed of seven to ten members representing the organizations or government bodies most directly concerned. To reach a decision, the Committee may call on experts.

If the producer entity so requests, the Committee also rules on whether the survey should be compulsory or not.



CNIS organization and units

CNIS Chairman: Jean-Pierre Duport

Executive Committee

Administers and coordinates CNIS activities and sets guidelines for discussions.

Council

Issues opinions on statistical needs to be addressed.
Validates annual program of operations of official statistical service.

General Secretariat

Prepares CNIS work program.
Implements Council guidelines.

Task Forces (Commissions Thématiques)

Discuss statistical programs and issue “usefulness opinions” on surveys in the following areas:

- Demography and social issues
- Employment, skills, and earned income
- Businesses and market strategies
- Environment and sustainable development
- Public services and services to the public
- Financial system and financing of the economy
- Territorial units

Working Groups

Conduct fuller examinations of specific topics at request of a Task Force or the Executive Committee.

National Population Census Assessment Commission

Assesses data-collection procedures in population census

Quality-Label Committee

Examines proposed surveys and statistical uses of administrative databases.
Issues “public interest and statistical quality” label for these proposals.

Litigation Committee for Compulsory Statistical Surveys

Examines refusals to respond to compulsory surveys

National Commission on Economic and Social Classifications

Keeps official economic and social classifications up to date

Statistical Confidentiality Committee

Issues opinions on all matters relating to statistical confidentiality, particularly requests for access to confidential data.

European statistical governance

Governance of French official statistics is **comparable to arrangements at European Union level**.

The Statistical Office of the European Communities (Eurostat) is one of the Directorates-General of the European Commission. The “**European Statistical System (ESS)**” comprises Eurostat, the national statistical institutes (NSIs) of the 27 Member States, and other national producers of statistics.

The **European Statistical Governance Advisory Board (ESGAB)** performs missions similar to those of the French Official Statistical Authority. Operating since March 2009, it is the body in charge of supervising the implementation of the EU Statistics Code of Practice.

The **European Statistical Advisory Committee (ESAC)** serves as a public forum for EU statistics, as CNIS does for France. Established in 2009, it aims to represent users of official statistics and survey respondents.