

3. Considerations

Statistical agencies must take into account a number of key elements in publishing statistical stories.

First, the public must feel that it can rely on its national statistical office, and the information it publishes. Statistical stories and the data they contain must be informative and initiate discussion, but never themselves be open to discussion. In other words, the information must be accurate and the agency's integrity should never come into question.

Statistical agencies should always be independent and unbiased in everything they publish. Stories must be based on high-quality data which are suitable to describe the issues they address. Changes in statistical values over time, for example, should be discussed only if they are determined by statisticians to be statistically significant.

Agencies should always guarantee the confidentiality of data on individual persons or businesses. Indeed, statistical stories may not identify, or in any way reveal, data on individuals or businesses.

In their statistical storytelling, agencies must take into account the position and feelings of certain vulnerable groups in society. Information on these groups should be made available, but the goal should always be to inform the public. Agencies should never seek publicity for themselves at the expense of these particular target groups.

The authors of this guide suggest that statistical agencies should, for the benefit of the citizens they serve, formulate a policy that explains how their practices protect the privacy and confidentiality of personal information. This policy should be given a prominent position on the agency's website.