



Governance and Innovation in Official Statistics: Insights from the Norwegian Model

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Abstract

This paper examines how frameworks like the Norwegian statistical system can facilitate innovation in methods, production processes, and new statistical products. Under the Norwegian Statistics Act, a multiyear National Programme for Official Statistics defines which statistical domains must be covered and which public authorities are responsible for producing them. Statistics Norway (SSB) is mandated to prepare the programme proposal for each period, in consultation with the Committee for Official Statistics. The programme process offers a structured opportunity to adopt a forward-looking perspective, identify emerging user needs, and prioritise new development areas.

As society evolves rapidly, users' expectations are expanding, creating pressure for statistical producers to meet new and emerging information needs. Innovation may also arise on the organisational side—for example, in how SSB performs its coordinating role, and how producers collaborate and shape a shared innovation culture.

The paper also reflects on whether formal structures may constrain innovation. Official statistics must balance continuity over time with the need to capture new societal phenomena. Does a multiyear programme limit responsiveness, or can it help resolve these dilemmas by creating predictability, common priorities, and space for planned innovation?

The paper presents examples and insights from the Norwegian experience since the current system was introduced in 2021. The available information gives some indications on the effects for innovation. These experiences may be relevant for other Nordic countries, which operate similar—though not identical—statistical systems.

Keywords: official statistics, innovation, statistical system governance, national statistics programme



1. Introduction

The Norwegian Statistics Act (SSB, 2019) put more emphasis on the national statistics system than the previous act. The new act gives a distinct definition of official statistics, and a clear framework for coordination and collaboration within the system. The purpose of such statistics is to support public knowledge, enable analysis and research, and informed decision-making and democratic debate.

At the same time, the need for modernising statistics has increased due to rapid changes in society and in technology. Users' expectations are expanding, creating pressure on statistical producers to meet new and emerging information needs. An interesting question is how legal and institutional frameworks that govern national statistical systems effect innovation. Do they promote and stimulate significant development in products and processes, or may there be conditions that hinder innovation?

The paper presents examples and insights from the current statistical system in Norway. They are based on experiences from the perspective of national coordination in Statistics Norway.

Section 2 introduces the definition of innovation, and discusses the main drivers, in the context of official statistics. Section 3 presents the Norwegian statistical system and the elements that point to needs and opportunities for innovation. Section 4 shows the key findings and discusses the results. Section 5 summarises the main findings.

2. Innovation in official statistics

Innovation requires that ideas and inventions are implemented in practice and that they result in change. The definition of innovation from the OECD and Eurostat is “a new or improved product or process (or combination thereof) that differs significantly from the unit's previous products or processes and that has been made available to potential users (product) or brought into use by the unit (process)” (OECD/Eurostat, 2018). This definition is intended to be general across sectors, including the public sector, and it is relevant in the context of official statistics. Materials from the UNECE High-Level Group for the Modernisation of Official Statistics (HLG-MOS) describes innovation as the introduction of new



ideas, methods, products, or services that create value in the organisation (UNECE HLG-MOS, 2026).

Official statistics are normally based on a legal mandate, and innovation must be carried out in accordance with the national and international frameworks, like the UN Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics (UN, 2014). The aim is to increase relevance, quality, efficiency, timeliness, accessibility, and trust. The Norwegian statistical system is based on the quality requirements in the European Statistics Code of Practice (ES CoP) (Eurostat, 2017).

Innovation in the statistical system occurs both in statistical outputs, statistical processes and institutional environment. There may be new statistics and areas covered, more detailed breakdowns, or new analytical products, and the innovation may include improved dissemination formats and design, and data services. Improved processes include the use of new data sources, improved methods, and modern technology and infrastructure. Use of AI tools in the statistical value chain is a new element where the potential for innovation is great. New ways of organising the national statistical system and collaboration across institutions within the system can also be innovative. Development of shared solutions is important to reduce duplication of efforts and to build solid tools and methods.

Innovation in official statistics differs from business innovation. The aim is to ensure public value, not market success – although the producers face a stronger competition for statistics users due to the massive increase in available data and the use of AI in the society. Innovation in official statistics operates within distinct conditions in the form of legal mandates, credibility requirements, production stability, and public trust.

3. The development of the statistical system

This paper analyses the experiences within the Norwegian statistical system over the last seven years. Norway has a multi-year programme for official statistics (SSB, 2024) with an explicit purpose of strengthening public knowledge and supporting research, analysis, and democratic decision-making. A proposal for a



programme shall be drawn up by Statistics Norway, in consultation with the Committee for Official Statistics¹.

The statistics programme provides a framework for the Norwegian statistical system and encompasses economic, demographic, social and environmental statistics. It defines domains to be covered by official statistics and identifies the public authorities responsible for the statistics under each domain. Official statistics are limited to statistics included in the programme.

Norway is through the EEA-agreement obliged to comply with the EU-regulations on statistics. The national programme therefore serves not solely national statistical needs but also ensures compliance with European obligations including harmonised standards and methodological consistency.

The development of the first programme can be described as establishing status quo. The process was aimed at outlining the statistical domains and sorting already established official statistics into the domains. The programme had to be kept within the existing budgets of the producers of statistics. A strategic choice was made to keep the programme on a thematic area level rather than a detailed level, to ensure possibility for development of new or improved statistics within the domains during the programme period. From the start of the second process, it was clear that it had to build on the experiences gained from the first cycle. There was an increased focus on the users' perspective, missing themes and new developments in specific areas. The user dialogue is still important in the programme processes. Development measures must be described thoroughly, especially those with needs for additional funding. Getting additional funding to develop new or improved official statistics has so far proven to be a challenge.

The current statistical programme is divided into 21 main thematic domains. These domains are divided further 91 into sub-domains. Most domains also contain elements identified as needing further development. Many of the development measures seem unlikely to be completed by the end of the current programme period.

¹ The committee is appointed by the Ministry of Finance among public authorities, to take part in the development of the programme and official statistics. It has 32 members.



Outlining a programme for official statistics takes time. The process lasts close to two years from the start to the final approval of the programme by the King in council, i.e. the Government. Both the public consultation and the ministerial hearing resulted in changes in the programme.

The process for the third multi-annual programme is ongoing, again by building on experiences from the previous cycles, but at the same time adjusting to new emerging user needs and new phenomena in society. It is important to think ahead of time for indications of important trends. An example of this is the rapid development of AI and its increasing significance in society.

The programme has contributed to an increased awareness of the need for an efficient system that develops through reuse of common solutions. There have been improvements in standardised metadata, and tools and solutions for dissemination of statistics are under development.

4. Discussion of the results

The multi-year statistics programme is meant to be forward-looking to cover future user needs and policy demands. As these needs change over time, the programme should be a driver for innovation. A main finding is that the implementation of the new system has raised the consciousness on statistical needs among users. Many and diverse suggestions for new or improved statistics are put forward by various user groups. The preparation of programme proposals identifies important needs for official statistics. The adopted programme provides the framework for official statistics, but there is flexibility for development within the domains.

There are some challenges in developing statistics that satisfy the users' needs. One challenge is to produce new statistics as quickly as the users expect.

Development of new statistics or large improvements in existing statistics takes time. In many cases, limitations or quality aspects of available data must first be addressed. In other areas, new and large amounts of data require innovative solutions, e.g. for collaboration with data providers and methods to produce statistics. An example is the planned use of transaction data from banks and grocery retailers to improve the quality of official statistics on consumption and diet. Innovative methods have been developed. The data collection and processing will include sequential and delayed reporting, pseudonymisation, and



sampling involving deletion of at least 90 per cent of the transactions, to ensure the requirements for privacy and information security. Statistics Norway is preparing a regulation under the Statistics Act that enables the use of these data and the innovative methods (SSB, 2026). This case shows that innovation in statistics can include new solutions in the legal and institutional field. This development process has taken a long time, and it started independently of the programme process. Our experience is that the statistics programme itself does not create innovation in terms of new solutions for the use of data and methods, but it helps to give more weight to some development initiatives. Developing common solutions for selected production and dissemination processes requires clear priorities and strong collaboration between the producers, which takes time to establish.

The users' expectations for more granular statistics rise with the amount of data and technological developments. There may be limitations for innovation due to confidentiality requirements.

Questions often arise about resources. The needs for statistics increase, and few needs are decreasing or disappearing. Even with efficiency measures and strict prioritisation, the producers of official statistics need additional budget funds to carry out large development measures. It has proven difficult to get sufficient financial resources for several measures which are included in the programme. The lack of resources may limit the pace of innovation in official statistics. On the other side, demands to be more efficient can trigger innovative solutions.

Automated processes are widely used in statistics production. The use of AI offers potential for further innovation. For many statistics this is still at an early stage.

Some user needs are supported by extra financing. The support often comes from ministries or directorates with strong interests in that specific field. It allows for development activities and may promote innovation in these domains. An example is the project on ecosystem accounts, where Statistics Norway cooperates with the Norwegian Environment Agency and other institutions. This project also illustrates the innovative effect of international processes, in this case the adoption of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD, 2026) and the SEEA Ecosystem Accounting (UN SEEA EA, 2024). Based on the common standard, new statistics



are developed from national data, and several elements require innovation in methods.

Our case study covers one country over a limited period of time. The available information is not sufficient to conclude whether the current statistical system in Norway promote innovation to a higher degree than the old statistics act. The implementation of the statistics that fulfil user needs emerging through the programme process seems to be as challenging as before. The discussions on the statistics programme and the needs for development may trigger more innovation activities, but it may also be a result of the rapid changes in society in general. We are registering some challenges in the system, e.g. financing, that may affect innovation, but we do not have enough information yet. The analysis can only give some indications on the effects for innovation.

5. Conclusion

The implementation of the new system has raised the consciousness on statistical needs among users. This may be a driver for innovation, but there are also some challenges that may hinder innovation. Our experience is that the statistics programme itself does not create innovation in terms of new solutions for the use of data and methods, but it helps to give more weight to some development initiatives.

The experiences from the Norwegian statistical system do not show clear results on the pace of innovation in national official statistics. There is a need for more information on the implementation of new products and processes to conclude whether the statistical system itself promotes innovation in official statistics.

We think that such analyses are relevant for other Nordic countries, which operate similar—though not identical—statistical systems. As we acquire more knowledge, it would be interesting to study this topic further, also in a Nordic perspective.



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