



Safeguarding Trust: Responding to Misinformation and Disinformation

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Abstract.

The misuse of official statistics, whether intentional or unintentional, is a growing challenge for national statistical offices (NSOs). Such misuse can distort public debate and erode trust in statistical information. While Statistics Norway has not established a formal strategy for handling these cases, recent experiences offer valuable insights into practical approaches that can be relevant for other NSOs.

This paper presents some cases where official statistics were misinterpreted or miscommunicated. Each example demonstrates how the appropriate response depends on the platform, the audience, and the potential for successful clarification. In practice, our responses have ranged from publishing explanatory content on ssb.no and contributing to op-eds in mainstream media, to providing background data for independent fact-checking organisations.

Beyond reactive measures, the paper outlines proactive efforts to promote the correct use of statistics.

There is no "one-size-fits-all" solution to prevent the misuse of statistics. However, by combining transparent methodology and clear communication with strategic support for journalists and fact-checkers, NSOs can mitigate the risk of misinterpretation. The paper argues that NSOs can best safeguard their role as trusted providers of official statistics by balancing preventive work with a nuanced, tactical response to misuse when it arises.

1. Facts under pressure

The Global Risks Report 2026 (World Economic Forum, 2026) identifies disinformation and misinformation among the most pressing global risks, linking them to declining trust, increasing political polarization, and instability in democratic



systems. These developments reflect broader structural changes in how information is produced, distributed, and consumed.

Disinformation refers to deliberately false or misleading information intended to influence the recipient, while misinformation is incorrect information shared unintentionally (European Commission, 2018). Although the distinction is analytically clear, both forms can have similar effects in practice by shaping public perceptions and influencing public debate.

Facts under pressure are not confined to specific regions or countries. While the scale and intensity may vary, no national context is immune. Even in high-trust societies, changes in media consumption and the growing role of social media create new vulnerabilities.

Norway is often characterized by high levels of trust in public institutions and traditional media. However, this trust cannot be taken for granted. Media consumption patterns are changing, social media is becoming an increasingly important source of news, while traditional platforms are losing ground.

For national statistical offices (NSOs), these developments raise fundamental questions about their role in an evolving information landscape. Official statistics are intended to provide a common factual basis for public debate. When statistics are misinterpreted, taken out of context, or deliberately misused, this function is weakened.

2. Statistics Norway – “the leading supplier of facts about the Norwegian society”

Statistics Norway does not conduct its own trust surveys; however, national reputation studies consistently place us among the public institutions that the population both recognizes and trusts. We maintain a strong media presence and well-established relationships with journalists who both use and seek to understand official statistics. In other words, Statistics Norway is well positioned to remain “the leading supplier of facts about Norwegian society,” as stated in our strategy (Statistics Norway, 2024). This position, however, cannot be taken for granted.

We present three examples of the misuse of statistics, each of which sparked discussion and led to different approaches for resolution. Together, they highlight



the kinds of assessments national statistical offices must make when deciding whether, how, and where to respond.

3. Examples of misuse

1) When We Didn't Respond

Espen Teigen is a Norwegian journalist and former politician representing the Progress Party. He writes for the online newspaper Document.no, which has a clear national-conservative ideology and positions itself on the far right of the political spectrum.

In December 2024, Statistics Norway published new figures on indictments by country of origin. Teigen wrote an article claiming: "For every 1,000 Somali men (aged 15–24) in Oslo, there are 483 indictments for violence or abuse." This is not correct. If a crime is committed by two or more people together, each person is counted as an indictment in the statistics. In cases where many people commit crimes together against several victims, this can generate many indictments and significantly affect the statistics for individual countries.

Teigen posted a graph from the article on X. The graph was later reposted by Elon Musk with his millions of followers.

Engaging in discussions on Document.no or X is unlikely to change opinions or reach new audiences. Responding to the comments just boosts the post's reach and doesn't give us much room to get our points across. Statistics Norway published clarifying information on ssb.no, and our statisticians spent considerable time explaining the data to journalists who covered the issue more broadly.

Key lessons

Avoid direct engagement when correction is unlikely to change perceptions and may amplify the original message; instead, prioritize making correct information available through trusted channels.

2) When We Responded



Anders Magnus is a Norwegian journalist and commentator who has played a visible role in Norway's media landscape for several decades. In an opinion piece in the online newspaper Nettavisen in September 2025 he stated:

"In Norwegian prisons, 27 per cent of inmates are foreign citizens. Most of these come from Eastern Europe. However, we do not know what share of the prison population consists of immigrants or descendants of immigrants. Statistics Norway is not permitted to map this." (my translation). (Magnus, 2025).

This claim contains misinformation about which statistics Statistics Norway have and does not have. In addition, Magnus added that Statistics Norway is being controlled regarding which statistics we are allowed to produce.

The claim that Statistics Norway is politically controlled and therefore not permitted to publish statistics on crime among immigrants comes up at regular intervals.

Anders Magnus is a prominent commentator with high credibility and many followers on social media. The post was published in a newspaper with many readers across Norway. Our assessment was that Magnus is a person who wishes to appear correct and credible, and that what he wrote was based on a lack of background research and sufficient knowledge. For this reason, Statistics Norway published a response in which we explained what statistics we have on immigrants in Norwegian prisons and clarified the independence Statistics Norway has regarding which statistics we produce and disseminate. We cannot know whether we succeeded in reaching readers or changing their understanding, but for us it was equally important to provide Magnus with accurate information.

Key lessons

Respond to misinformation from credible voices in high-reach editorial media, where correction can influence public understanding and uphold institutional credibility.

When misinterpretation occurs in mainstream media, respond in the same channel to reach the same audience and provide context, nuance, and correction.

3) Response through cooperation with fact-checkers



Sindre Wiig Nordby is a Norwegian influencer who grew from zero followers in early 2023 to nearly 200,000 one year later, receiving approximately 110 million views. His niche is politics, electricity prices, and government waste.

In July 2024, Nordby posted on X:

“In 2005, Norway’s national budget was smaller than Sweden’s. In 2012, Norway’s national budget surpassed Sweden’s. Why did Norway suddenly need a larger national budget than a country with twice as many inhabitants?”

Nordby used incorrect population figures for both Norway and Sweden and refused to disclose his data source. Moreover, Sweden excludes major social security schemes from its national budget, while Norway includes them.

In this case, Faktisk.no, a Norwegian fact-checking website owned by major media outlets provided clarification. Their article, based on input from Statistics Norway’s Head of National Accounts, reached a broad audience. Nordby did not want to respond to faktisk.no but his post was removed.

Key lessons

Use trusted intermediaries such as fact-checkers to reach audiences that are otherwise difficult to influence directly.

Assist fact checkers and other journalists with background, explanations, and fact-checking. This requires considerable investment of expert time, but it ensures accurate reporting and builds trust.

Taken together, the cases show that effective responses depend less on the content of the misinformation and more on the context in which it appears, particularly the platform, the sender’s credibility, and the likelihood of reaching the relevant audience. Although these examples are drawn from Statistics Norway, the underlying dynamics are not country specific. National statistical offices operate in similar information environments, where the same trade-offs between visibility, credibility, and reach are likely to apply.

4. Prevention and Awareness to combat mis- and disinformation



Statistics Norway cannot combat the misuse of statistics or disinformation spreading through social media or other platforms. Instead, we take a long-term approach, focusing on prevention and awareness, both external and internal.

1) External initiative: Statistical literacy

Misuse of statistics will happen, both unintentionally and deliberately. A key tool to counter this is statistical literacy. Misinterpretations often stem from a lack of understanding. If the ability to reason with numbers declines, so does the ability to interpret statistics.

Although Norway performs well in OECD's Survey of Adult Skills (OECD 2024), literacy and numeracy cannot be taken for granted. Building statistical literacy is therefore a long-term investment. Statistics Norway works with schools and teachers to strengthen these skills. Learning from Nordic and European NSOs is also important and valuable to us.

2) Internal awareness

We do not know the full scale of misinformation based on our statistics. But with 800 employees, we can raise awareness internally to strengthen our ability to recognize and respond when misuse occurs. We also strive to explain statistics in ways that minimize the risk of misinterpretation. Misinformation often arises from nuances or from different statistics being used to describe the same phenomenon. We must be clear about what the statistics describe, and what they do not. The demand for high-quality metadata, clear and comprehensible descriptions of methods, and overall accessibility will only continue to grow.

The Communication Department is making a continuous effort to enhance employees' understanding of disinformation and to sustain informed discussions on how to address and handle specific situations.

3) Cooperation

We need allies. In Norway, 20 institutions produce official statistics, and collaboration with them will grow in importance. We do not, and should not, have formal partnerships with fact-checkers or media outlets. However, we must be



available to provide training in how to use statistics and to support fact-checking. We also aim to strengthen cooperation with the Norwegian Media Authority, which has been given an expanded mandate under the government's strategy against disinformation. An even stronger Nordic cooperation and sharing of knowledge would also be of importance.

5. Conclusions

The cases discussed in this paper illustrate that the misuse of official statistics is a recurring challenge that takes different forms depending on the context, platform, and the actors involved. While the examples are drawn from Statistics Norway's experience, the underlying dynamics may be relevant across the Nordic national statistical offices. High levels of institutional trust, a strong media sector, and widespread access to official data do not eliminate the risk of misinterpretation or misuse.

A central lesson from the cases is that responses to misuse cannot be fully standardized. Decisions about whether and how to intervene must be grounded in situational judgement, considering the credibility of the source, the size and composition of the audience, and the likelihood that the clarification will reach the audience. In all cases, a good relationship and discussions between the communication department and the statistical units were essential.

This reinforces the need for flexibility rather than rigid protocols. At the same time, the absence of a formal strategy does not imply the absence of principles. Across cases, choices were guided by concern for maintaining neutrality, avoiding unnecessary amplification, and preserving trust in official statistics.

There is no definitive solution that can prevent the misuse of official statistics. For NSOs, the task is not to eliminate misunderstandings, that will be impossible, but to manage it in ways that protect institutional credibility and support informed public debate. By sharing experiences, reflecting on response strategies, and acknowledging both possibilities and limitations of intervention, Nordic statistical offices can collectively strengthen their role as trusted providers of official statistics.



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