

General revisions policy

INSEE General revisions policy – Overview

Revisions are amendments to published data that do not correct errors in production

Revisions are generally defined as any change in the value of a statistic that is already published. These may include regular or one-off changes to items of data related to certain statistical processes (e.g. indices, national accounts, etc.). Revisions are necessary where amendments or additions to input data occur after their initial release, or due to changes in concepts, classification or methodology that may be brought about for a variety of reasons. Restructuring actions can an opportunity to add multiple underlying sources of revisions at the same time (e.g. changes in methodology, base period, etc.). Revisions do not include corrections to errors in production, which are addressed specifically according to the nature and scale of the correction.

INSEE revisions policy

INSEE makes revisions to its statistical output in order to most closely reflect the underlying reality and ensure that data remain relevant and reliable. We use well-defined, standardised and planned procedures in accordance with international standards. Revisions may be announced alongside or in advance of their release, using an appropriate procedure for the source and scale of revisions, as well as the level of sensitivity of the statistical release. All changes to statistical sources published on Insee.fr are accompanied by explanatory notes that facilitate their understanding.

The revisions policy aims to improve the quality of statistical output.

The general revisions policy promotes active communication with users through announcements, as well as ensuring that revisions are transparent in terms of methodology and easy to understand. It helps to underpin the credibility of statistical output and of the organisations that produce it. Our revisions policy complies with the European Statistics Code of Practice. In particular, it is based on the following indicators and principles:

- Indicator 6.6: Advance notice is given on major revisions or changes in methodologies. (*Principle 6 – Impartiality and Objectivity*)
- Indicator 8.5: Revisions follow standard, well-established and transparent procedures. (*Principe 8 – Appropriate Statistical Procedures*)
- Indicator 12.3: Revisions are regularly analysed in order to improve source data, statistical processes and outputs. (*Principle 12 – Accuracy and Reliability*)
- Principle 15 – Accessibility and clarity: European Statistics are presented in a clear and understandable form, released in a suitable and convenient manner, available and accessible on an impartial basis with supporting metadata and guidance.

Revisions are part of a ongoing trade-off between different quality criteria, in particular timeliness and accuracy.

The main purpose of revising statistics is to improve the accuracy, reliability and relevance of the published information while also releasing data as early as possible. Revisions help to build trust in the value and quality of statistical output among its users. Through regular analyses, the extent of changes can also be minimised, thus improving the quality of source data, statistical processes and output.

However, revisions often involve striking a balance between various quality criteria:

- Statistics may be produced and released even though some data are not yet available, in order to meet requests from users of early statistical releases. Revisions enable source data to be incorporated within existing statistical releases at a later date.
- Statistical output may also be revised in response to conceptual or methodological changes. Revisions therefore aim to improve the relevance of statistical output. However, they limit the comparability of time-series data by introducing breaks to the series. If there are too many breaks, or the breaks are not well understood, they may discourage users and undermine their trust in statistics and in the organisations that publish them.

1 Types of Revisions

The way in which INSEE's general revisions policy is implemented depends on whether a revision is routine or involves a restructuring.

1. Routine revisions

Routine revisions are associated with the process of periodical statistics production. These occur regularly at set intervals and are usually the result of changes to input data. Annual and sub-annual data are both subject to routine revisions.

Routine revisions occur when:

- more comprehensive and/or more recent information becomes available for inclusion (e.g. replacing estimates with source data, inclusion of late responses, changes to a respondents' answers, updates to a respondent's occupational code (APE), etc.)
- adjusting for seasonality and working days in revised data, or when an additional value is added to a time series;
- sub-annual data are inserted into annual time series data;
- changes in methodology occur (e.g. recurring calculations of model coefficients used in estimation, changes in sampling, updates to the distribution formula, etc.)
- annual changes in geographic coverage come about (e.g. minor changes to study areas, departmental boundaries, etc.) due to the merger of municipalities or boundary changes for public agencies for inter-municipal cooperation (EPCIs).

2. Restructuring

Restructuring involves substantial changes to the statistical output and often requires comprehensive reviewing of earlier observations in order to avoid breaks in time series. Restructuring occurs less often than routine revisions, typically every five to ten years.

Restructuring may consist of:

- methodological revisions, including: changes in the base period and/or base year, changes in the methodology for calculating statistics, expansions of the sampling frame, significant expansions of data coverage (including geographic coverage), new samples, new methods for handling missing data, changes in the structure of survey questionnaires, significant changes to the data measurement system, etc.;
- using new data sources (e.g. governmental incl. tax authority, private, etc.) or the discontinuation of old sources, such as through changes to data providers, expansion of source data coverage, use of new census data, etc.;
- incorporating major changes to input data sources within the production process, including changes emanating directly from providers or indirectly from intermediaries engaged in the information supply chain (e.g. changes to the collection mode, etc.);
- incorporating new distribution formulae due to significant and exceptional changes to data sources upstream from the statistical process;
- changes in classification, including: major changes in territorial classification (e.g. revision of study areas, merger of regions, etc.), geographical grid changes, inclusion of new geographic systems of reference, updates to the combined nomenclature of goods, etc.;
- changes in concepts and definitions.

Restructuring may be required due to regulatory changes.

2 General Guidelines for Implementing Revisions

1. General Guidelines Applicable to All Revisions

All revisions, regardless of the underlying reason, are based on the following guidelines:

- Statistics are revised in order to improve their relevance, accuracy and/or reliability;
- Statistics are revised in accordance with national and international regulatory provisions applicable to the production of the statistics in question;
- The appropriateness of revisions is assessed based on the anticipated use of the statistics (e.g. price indexes used for indexation in contracts should not be revised.)
- Statistics are revised to maintain overall consistency with other statistics (e.g. the base period for national accounts is changed to ensure coherence with revised balance of payments data);
- The schedules for revisions are coordinated with the release schedules for each area of statistics and, where applicable, with international schedules;
- Users are notified of revisions before or at the time of their release;
- The procedures and reasons for revisions must be documented and communicated to users to ensure transparency in processing of data and to strengthen the trust of users;
- Revisions are analysed to ensure and improve the quality of data, methods of production or dissemination and revision procedures; the findings from these analyses are included in quality reports; to conduct these analyses, both pre- and post-revision data must have been archived beforehand.

As well as these general guidelines, specific rules apply to different types of revision.

2. Guidelines Specific to Routine Revisions

Routine revisions must adhere to the following guidelines:

- Data are revised until the value provided is deemed sufficiently reliable and robust;
- Revision schedules are set in such a way as to ensure the release of both a useful provisional indication and a revised indication that is significantly more appropriate, accurate and reliable than the indicator initially issued;
- Routine revisions are released according to pre-defined and up-to-date schedules; revision schedules may be included in the Institute's standard publication release schedules; users receive advance notice of revisions concerning statistics of interest to them; users receive advance notice of any changes to these schedules and are notified of the reasons for the changes;
- The date and frequency of routine revisions must be aligned for the same field of statistics and synchronised when deemed appropriate; this form of coordination is likely to improve the comparability of data and facilitate their interpretation by users;
- Data provided to users are identified based on their particular status:

| Status of Data | |
|-------------------------------|-----------|
| this value is provisional | P |
| this value is semi-definitive | SD |
| this value is definitive | Not shown |
| | |
| this value is revised | R |

Statistics producers assess the circumstances in which it may be appropriate to indicate the status of their data. Where appropriate, they use the codes above, which are based on the SDMX standard.

Where “provisional” and “semi-definitive” statuses do not apply, statistics that have been revised since the previous release are indicated by (R).

The definition of codes used is included in statistical releases on Insee.fr.

Note: Where data in a whole panel or for a whole period are provisional, this is indicated in a table footnote. For example, in the regional economic outlook, performance indicators will state that “figures for the last quarter shown are provisional”.

3. *Guidelines Specific to Restructuring*

Restructuring adheres to the following revision guidelines:

- statistics are revised in order to maintain the trust of users: wherever possible, revisions must not be too frequent, and must result in a significant improvement in the quality of statistics (i.e. relevance, accuracy and/or reliability);
- restructuring due to new methodologies or concepts must take place as quickly as possible so that statistical output remains relevant; however, in some cases, external constraints must be taken into account: restructuring due to new methodologies or concepts may need to be synchronised with other restructuring actions, for example where they relate to changes in EU or international regulations;
- restructuring involving multiple countries must be synchronised in terms of scheduling and coordinated to apply similar changes in methodology or concepts within the field of statistics in question;
- to ensure that users can take restructuring actions into account, the number of restructuring actions should wherever possible be kept to a minimum, even if this means incorporating multiple causes of revision into one action;
- where possible, restructuring must be announced to the general public before the revised statistics are released; announcements should give an outline of the main reasons for the revision, the release date for the revised statistics, the scope of the statistics to which the restructuring applies and the period for which the data are revised;
- restructuring must be accompanied by a methodological note to allow users to assess and interpret the new values. This note should indicate the reasons for the revisions, analyse their impact on the data and explain for any breaks in time series.

3 Transparency for Users

To ensure continued trust among users, revision procedures must remain transparent in accordance with Principle 8 (“Appropriate Statistical Procedures”), Indicator 8.5 of the European Statistics Code of Practice, which states that “Revisions follow standard, well-established, and transparent procedures”.

Documentation made available to users online should facilitate proper understanding and interpretation of statistics released pre- and post-revision.

Revision methodologies are set out in the relevant quality headings for the statistical sources and indicators. These headings comply with the international SIMS (Single Integrated Metadata Structure) format for describing statistical operations, adopted by national statistics institutes in EU member states in 2015. This format makes it possible to account for the quality of each source. Regarding revisions, it aims to provide users with information regarding:

- the Institute’s general revisions policy;
- revisions made to the source; a schedule of revisions is provided; the reason and type of revision are set out; the average magnitude of, and directional change in, revisions are assessed qualitatively using historic data; where revisions are analysed, a description of the revisions and their impact on statistical output is provided.

- the extent of revisions, evaluated quantitatively either by calculating the mean revision for a value over time, or by calculating the mean revisions of values between two publications.

Producers fill in the quality headings into the statistical metadata framework (RMÉS), which automatically updates to the INSEE website. Users therefore have fully transparent access to information on revisions to sources.

To further ensure transparency for users, previous data releases continue to be made available to users for a period of time on Insee.fr:

- systematically, where data relate to price indexes used for the purposes of indexation in contracts;
- in accordance with best practice and EU recommendations, where data relates to broad economic aggregates;
- where deemed appropriate, in the case of other data.

Dissemination tools apply the procedures for displaying data, allowing users to clearly view the most recent data and, in the case of old data, the version or framework to which they relate. Published provisional statistics are denoted by a (P) and semi-definitive statistics, by (SD); definitive statistics are not assigned a status, which is a baseline situation. Where “provisional” and “semi-definitive” do not apply, statistics that have been revised since the previous release are indicated by (R).

4 Revision Announcements

4.1 *Accounting the Characteristics of Revisions*

In accordance with the Impartiality and Objectivity principle in the European Statistics Code of Practice,¹ INSEE announces revisions to its statistics alongside of their release or in advance for “major revisions or changes in methodologies”. These announcements and their procedures for publication are distinguished by four criteria:

- **The Type of Revisions** to which the revisions belong (see paragraph 1 above) ;
- **The Sensitivity of the Revised Statistics**: this depends on their level of coverage in the media, on social media or in social or political debates on the theme to which the statistics relate; this also varies according to the legal status and value of statistics to users as well as the number of users; statistics are sensitive where the image of INSEE may be impacted; for short-term economic indicators, sensitivity depends on the category to which they belong, within short-term indicators, there are principal economic indicators that are considered “sensitive” (sensitive PEIs), other principal economic indicators (PEIs) and other short-term indicators;
- **The Scale of Revisions**: the scale of revisions is measured according to the type of revision:
 - for routine revisions, the scale of revisions is measured against a typical revision;
 - for restructuring, the scale of revisions is measured against the value of the revised statistic.
- **The Cause of Revisions**: factors in revisions to statistics are distinguished according to whether they relate to collection (e.g. changes in the collection mode, changes in variables in the questionnaire, etc.), metadata (e.g. changes to classifications, concepts, modalities of variables, etc.), processing methodologies (e.g. introduction of a new methodology, etc.) or data (e.g. use of new data sources, changes in input data sources used for the statistical process, etc.).

4.2 *Protocol for Announcing Revisions*

Producers are responsible for announcing revisions relating to their statistics. They establish the arrangements for revision announcements and assess these on a case-by-case basis, based on the characteristics of the revisions (see paragraph 4.1 above); announcements may take one of the following forms:

1 Indicator 6.6: Advance notice is given on major revisions or changes in methodologies.

- *Express updates*² (informations rapides) which at INSEE are used as press releases; these contain a commentary on how the revisions have changed the dataset in comparison to the previous statistical release; most *Express Updates* contain a dedicated paragraph at the bottom of the text, outlining the extent of the revision along with a short explanation; this paragraph may take the form of a table of revisions, supplemented by a detailed reading note; *Express Updates* are communicated to press agencies on the date of the release of the publications;
- a methodological publication dedicated to the revision (e.g. working document, INSEE méthode, etc.), inserted in the relevant quality headings for the statistical release;
- notifications within publications featuring the revised statistics;
- notifications published on the revised statistical releases page on Insee.fr;
- notifications published on the indexes and time-series information pages on Insee.fr;
- in exceptional cases, in stand-alone press releases, separate from the publication medium;
- a press conference.

For major changes or revisions to methodologies, public announcements are made in the month preceding the release of the revised statistics.