

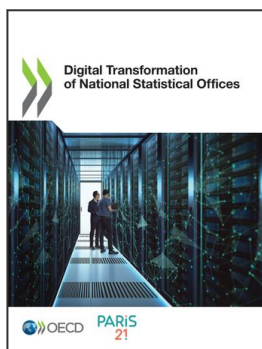
Foreword

The Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century (PARIS21) promotes the better use and production of statistics throughout the developing world. Since its establishment in 1999, PARIS21 has successfully developed a worldwide network of statisticians, policy makers, analysts, and development practitioners committed to evidence-based decision making. With the main objective to achieve national and international development goals and reduce poverty in low and middle-income countries, PARIS21 facilitates statistical capacity development, advocates for the integration of reliable data in decision making, and co-ordinates donor support to statistics.

Governments, businesses, and societies are going through a rapid pace of digitalisation, fundamentally changing traditional roles. This situation presents new and multiple challenges, especially for national statistical offices (NSOs) in low and middle-income countries. Official statistics must adapt to the digitalised world, meet the growing expectations of data users, strengthen operational processes, develop digital capabilities in NSOs and support the emerging data ecosystem. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the acute relevance of digital transformation for NSOs and accelerated the need for adaptation. Demand for data increased even as lockdowns and containment measures made it more difficult for national statistical systems (NSSs) to supply data. Alternative data sources that could be used when traditional survey-based data production is interrupted — such as mobile networks, traffic tolls and satellite data — raise ethical issues regarding data sensitivity, privacy and anonymisation, for which proper regulatory frameworks may be lacking. The often limited statistical capacity and weak administrative data systems of low and middle-income countries made it even harder for NSOs to ensure an inclusive response to the pandemic.

NSOs have often been amongst the first national institutions to systematically harness digital approaches and data flows, as is exemplified by the integration of administrative data by the French National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies (INSEE) or by the extensive usage of digital aerial imagery and photogrammetry software by the Swiss OFS, both since the early 2000s. Digitalisation has already delivered enormous benefits for NSOs in low and middle-income countries worldwide, with more benefits still on offer. A digital transformation of NSOs is a crucial component for the public sector to adapt to the digital age. However, this task is challenging for many countries, given the limited resources and insufficient exposure to this process.

The report sheds light on selected countries in this process. It brings the topic closer to the context of other countries and elucidates the drivers and barriers in this process. It is the right and crucial time to provide insights to governments and the statistical community on these factors and identify actions to help them integrate digital technology into their operations.



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