

Foreword

The aim of this book is to help the reader to better understand how to use economic statistics in general and OECD statistics in particular. It introduces the main concepts used by statisticians and economists to measure economic phenomena and provides tables and charts with relevant data. Moreover, the book describes how the production of international statistics is organised, who are the main data producers, what are the main databases available over the Internet and how can the quality of statistics be assessed. Thanks to this book, the users will better understand where to find and how to use OECD statistics on gross domestic product, government's public deficit and debt, short-term economic indicators, different sectors of economic activity, globalisation, innovation, labour market, etc. Special attention is paid to indicators used to assess both macroeconomic and structural policies. In each section, references to sources and suggestions for further reading are provided.

Why this book? As Jean-Claude Trichet, President of the European Central Bank, said at the 2004 OECD Forum on "Statistics, Knowledge and Policy", nowadays we are bombarded by statistics, the volume of which often creates confusion, rather than information. The challenge to find the most appropriate figures for a particular phenomenon becomes even harder when international comparisons are needed. The number of sources increased dramatically over the last decade and the use of search engines on Internet sometimes help in finding the best source, but often they list websites that contain conflicting data or do not provide appropriate metadata to assess their quality.

The OECD is recognised worldwide as a formidable source of statistical information on economic, social and environmental topics and this book aims to help students and researchers better understand the world in which they live and find appropriate evidence to carry out their work. It also aims to help journalists and analysts evaluate economic trends and assess the effectiveness of policies. Finally, it is designed to help policy advisors compile meaningful statistical reports to compare economic performances and provide evidence-based advice to decision makers.

Some chapters in the book (chapters 1, 2, 3 and 5) are adapted from my earlier work "Le statistiche economiche", published by Il Mulino in 2006. The chapter focusing on OECD statistics, (chapter 4), is the result of a collective effort by several OECD statisticians and I would like to collectively thank them for their contribution, not only to the book, but especially for their invaluable effort in continuously providing innovative and high-quality statistics to the whole world, with professionalism and ethical integrity. In doing so, we provide our contribution to better decisions, better policies and finally to a better world. I would also like to thank the colleagues working in the Publishing and Communications Directorate who contributed to the publication of this book.



Enrico Giovannini,
OECD Chief Statistician