



DATI ALLA MANO

I PODCAST

EVERYONE IS CRAZY FOR STATISTICS

A contact centre, a revamped institutional website, a very extensive database and specialised information systems. And then social media. Istat provides different channels for various user categories. And what do users look for, and how?

I am Cristiana Conti, and this is Dati alla mano (Data at Hand), a podcast by Istat, the National Institute of Statistics, where I work in the Directorate for Communication, Information and Services to Citizens and Users. This initiative is part of a public communication project. In this episode we address the relationship between Istat and citizens, what products they look for and what channels are provided to them by official statistics.

Institutional website, contact centre, social media, databases – the official statistical information offer is multi-channel. But what do more or less specialised users look for, what data are citizens interested in and what is their relationship with the National Institute of Statistics?

Let's start with the contact centre. It is a system aimed at different user categories: those who need help in finding data, including European data; those who require customised data processing or historical data research, or clarifications on published data. Finally – but this service is reserved for researchers only - it is available for those who request anonymised microdata files. The service is online at contact.istat.it, it has been active since 2008 and was completely renewed in 2022. But how does it work, what are the user types accessing it and what are the most frequent requests? Roberta Roncati, who is the head of the contact centre, answers us.

Cristiana. Hello Roberta.

Roberta. Hello everyone.

C. You have a 360-degree view of Istat's users because all requests come through the Contact Centre. How many do you receive each year and what are the requests of those who contact you?

R. I'll answer you with our 2024 data: we received 8412 requests and over a half of them asked for assistance in data research.

C. That is, people who asked for help in finding the data they were looking for. And regarding which topics?

R. In pole position – always referring to 2024 – we find data on inflation and data on the structure and characteristics of companies, followed by data on population and data on employment.

C. Can you give us an example of a request?

R. People often ask us for territorial details: for example, the number of companies and employees per district, buildings per census section, but also demographic projections for local labour systems.

C. Wait, what are local labour systems?

R. they are district sets linked by the phenomenon of commuting for work.

C. I understand, these are areas where people move to go to work, perhaps moving towards a nearby district.

R. Yes, and obviously for those who need to organise services in the area, it is important to understand what the demographic situation is and how it will evolve.

C. Well, I would say that this is an example of practical data use.

R. Do you want another example of practical use?

C. Yes, tell me!

R. Here it is: we are contacted by Courts, Financial Police, Carabinieri, anti-mafia authorities who, carrying out tax assessments on individuals under investigation, need to know the average consumption expenditure depending on the family type and place of residence.

C. Right, it's an important piece of data for the judicial authority. But I wanted to ask you, are you always able to meet requests?

R. Yes, unless we are asked for data that does not exist.

C. Does that happen too?

R. Sometimes it does.

C. For example?

R. The number of bookings for specific diagnostic tests: Istat does not have this data, so if they ask us for it, we cannot provide exact data.

C. Tell me, who contacts the contact centre? I mean, ordinary citizens, scholars or what?

R. Well, our typical user is the researcher, so yes, a scholar, but many companies and freelance professionals also contact us.

C. Therefore, the main users come from universities and research institutions and from private companies.

R. Yes, but also from local public administration: municipalities, regions, chambers of commerce.

C. Can you tell us something about the type of interaction? Who are the most 'difficult' users?

R. The somewhat superficial ones, those who perhaps haven't even tried searching our website or database and expect to receive tables packaged exactly as they want them, those who attach a long list of variables they need without having explored which are available. But this service doesn't work like that.

C. And how does it work?

R. All the data that Istat produces are already available to users. The contact centre should only be used for real difficulties, in case an explanation is needed or a specific secondary study is required.

C. How long does it take you to respond to a request?

R. It depends on the request. According to our service charter, handling should occur within two working days. In practice the average handling time is less than an hour. However, processing times can have great variation, especially if it involves customised processing.

Q. How many people work at the contact centre?

A. Five personnel units if we consider full-time; there are actually more people involved, because no one works exclusively at the contact centre.

Q. You are also responsible for an annual user satisfaction survey, aren't you?

A. Yes, we try to understand if and how much users appreciate the content they find on the institutional website, I mean www.istat.it. I should start by saying that the sample is not a representative because participation in the survey is always on a voluntary basis.

Q. So only those who want to do so answer. In any case, what do the latest collected data tell us?

A. In 2024, 1 in 4 respondents stated they visited the site looking for information of personal interest. This becomes 1 in 3 if we add those who use the site to update rent fees and maintenance allowances. Many look it up to carry out research activities or for training and educational purposes; 1 in 5 landed on istat.it to answer a statistical primary survey, but this is because when we proposed the questionnaire the population census was underway.

Q. Speaking of satisfaction, which were the most successful products?

A. Regarding products containing data, we found a lot of satisfaction with visualisations, for example, infographics and charts, and also for statistical tables. For products containing metadata, the top spot however goes to the statistical glossary.

Q. How important is it to carry out this annual survey?

A. Apart from the fact that surveying user satisfaction is requested by the Digital Administration Code, listening to those who use our products is fundamental to further improve them.

Q. Thank you very much, Roberta, for this chat.

A Thank you and see you next time.

We have talked about satisfaction with the website's content, but which are the most clicked pages and the topics of greatest interest? To find out, I invited Michela Troia, who is in charge of managing the Istat institutional website. She is usually sitting in front of a screen, but this time we brought her in front of a microphone. Hello Michela.

Michela. Hello everyone.

C. I'll ask you just off the cuff, how many people consult the Istat website?

M. To give you an idea, in the first three months of 2025, the website received almost two million visits from over one million two hundred thousand visitors.

C. Well, significant numbers.

M. Yes, and since July 2024 - that is, since the new version of the website went online - there have been more than 3 million 870 thousand visitors, almost 23 thousand per day, and, in general, we had 2 million requests for content downloads.

C. Right, since a few months the website changed its look.

M. Not just the look.... certainly the graphic design, but we also changed the organisation of the content – where necessary – to improve our users' experience. And now we have a search engine...

C. You're right, to say new look is not fair.

M. The main characteristic of our website is to meet the needs of a very diverse audience, ranging from the citizen, who perhaps looks for the index to revalue the rent, up to the data scientist who looks for elementary data to perform their analyses. Between these two poles, we have public administrations, public decision-makers, journalists, students, companies, and professionals who look for different content. To meet the needs of all these types of users, we offer two types of navigation: by topic – for example, population, economy, environment and territory, and so on – or by content type – press releases, publications, statistical tables, parliamentary hearings, data banks and much more.

C. Interesting. And what are the most clicked content items?

M. Since the launch of the new website, the pages that recorded the highest number of clicks have been those addressing the classification of economic activities, the consumer price index, and the

section addressing the permanent population census, particularly the page with the link to the online questionnaire.

C. I'd say all useful information, for daily life or work.

M. True, but among the next most clicked is also the name counter.

C. What is this name counter, can you tell us about it?

M. It's an online system that allows you to view the ten most popular names used by parents for newborns in a given year, starting from 1999.

C. Cute.

M. Or you can monitor the trend in the use of a specific name - male or female, always starting since 1999. For example, my name is Michela, and I know that in 1999 this name was chosen for over 1,800 girls born that year, whereas in 2023 only 244 girls were named Michela.

C. Very nice.

M. It's one of our calculators. This one is playful, if you like, but we also have very serious ones.

C. For example?

M. For example, the one for calculating currency revaluations.

C. How does it work?

M. You enter a value referring to a specific year and month, and the system allows you to view the revalued amount for the latest available month or even for a different period. All of this is available from 1947 and calculated in both euros and old lire.

C. Let me understand, can I find out how much the amount I used to buy ice cream as a child would be worth today?

M. Certainly.

C. Where can I find the calculators on the website?

M. Under the 'data' item in the main menu, at the top of the home page-

C. Listen, you mentioned a search engine earlier, but what are the most searched words?

M. I have the list with me, here it is: inflation, ATECO (which is the classification of economic activities), questionnaire, tourism, FOI (which is the consumer price index useful for revaluations), consumer prices, census, population, and GDP (which is gross domestic product).

C. You and your team also publish a newsletter, if I remember correctly.

M. Yes, since June 2022 we send it every Monday.

C. How many subscribers receive it?

M. To date they exceed 37,500, with 8,300 new subscribers in the last year.

C. Well, you can't say that data doesn't have an audience.

M. And our aim is to have an ever wider audience. Also for this reason, every page of the site allows the visitor to leave feedback; we, the editorial team, read all of them and are always committed to improving the pages. Indeed, I take this opportunity to thank all the editorial colleagues for the passion they put into their daily work.

C. Thank you, Michela, and good luck with your work.

M. Goodbye to all.

Before concluding, I must remind you that the website provides access to Istat's general database as well - it is called IstatData - and I asked Carlo Boselli, who manages it, how many queries users make, and he replied that by April 2025, IstatData had received over 100,000 queries. And then there are social media, and our social media manager – Giovanni Prattichizzo – tells me that in the first quarter

of 2025, over 767 posts were published and the total number of followers exceeds 230,000 and audio and video content is most appreciated.

CONCLUSIONS

We have seen that the statistical information offered by Istat is a vast sea. And you can navigate it with different vessels, suitable for all types of sailors. So, everyone, have a good journey through our numbers.

I am Cristiana Conti and this was Dati alla mano (Data at Hand), a podcast from the National Institute of Statistics.

This episode was produced with the support of Storielibere.fm.

Continue to follow us on the Dati alla mano (Data at Hand) section of Istat.it and on your favourite listening app.

Are there topics you would like to explore further? Write to me at datiallamano@istat.it.

Roberta Roncati, Michela Troia, Sara Maulo, Carlo Boselli and Giovanni Prattichizzo worked on this episode.