

Why open data re-use in the public sector matters

Insights from the data.europa academy webinar on data demand and re-use in the public sector

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Since the COVID-19 pandemic struck, it has become obvious that data are a core asset needed to manage the crisis by public institutions at all levels. Governments have relied on up-to-date data such as infection rates, hospital occupancies and death tolls to make decisions to navigate through the crisis. **Open data** have proven to be of crucial importance for public institutions to carry out their activities in an efficient way, while at the same time enabling public scrutiny of the information on which key government decisions were based.

However, the opportunity for open data re-use within the public sector is not fully seized, because the traditional focus sees the public sector as the data provider, and the private sector as the re-user. The tacit assumptions behind this are that it is mainly the private sector that can create value out of data, and that data flows freely between different parts of the public sector. These assumptions are flat out wrong.

Consequently, it is time to focus on fostering data re-use by public institutions and measuring data demand by this specific group of users, to understand their needs and to support them in achieving their goals. To support a better exploitation of open data within the public sector, data.europa.eu launched a [discussion paper](#) on the topic and organised the [Data Demand and Re-Use in the Public Sector](#) webinar showcasing inspiring re-use examples and bringing together the key stakeholders.

Open data for crisis management and beyond

Drawing on the [OECD Working Paper on a Data-Driven Public Sector](#), the data.europa paper [Measuring Data Demand Within the Public Sector](#) discusses three areas in which data-re-use can enhance the effectiveness of policymakers and public officials across policy areas and government levels:

- 1) **anticipatory governance**, where data are used to predict trends and patterns in order to mitigate emerging risks and respond to developing crises;
- 2) **design and delivery**, where data provide important ways of understanding problems, engaging the public and providing access to insights for improving public services that meet user needs, while creating the conditions for robust, evidence-based policy making;
- 3) **performance management**, where data are leveraged for greater public sector productivity, more efficient use of resources and better evaluation of policies and impact.

The French use case from the “[Centre-Val de Loire](#)” region, which re-uses data from the National Public Health Agency to create a visualisation of the state and evolution of COVID-19 in vaccinations in France is an apt example of anticipatory governance.

Moreover, other data are needed to lead societies out of the crisis and data re-use is an immense resource for the public sector. For instance, Eurostat has created the interactive [European Statistical Recovery Dashboard](#), bringing together monthly and quarterly indicators from a number of statistical areas relevant for tracking the economic and social recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. Above all, it has become evident, especially for public authorities, that the need to have easy and fast access to data stored across several databases and silos was essential to cope with the crisis.

Another interesting example of open data re-use in the public sector comes from the regional level in Spain, and more precisely the energy [data hub](#) of the Junta de Castilla y León. By publishing information on its energy supplies, the hub promotes energy savings and efficiency in its facilities and has in this way already saved more than 12 million euros in fixed electricity costs. Additionally, in Norway, public institutions work to facilitate data sharing and the re-use between public sector bodies to provide seamless services linked to different life events, an approach increasingly employed by more and more public authorities. In this respect, [The Norwegian Resource Centre for Sharing of Data](#) was established in 2020 to facilitate the use and re-use of data sharing to create better services.

Highlights from the *Data Demand and Re-Use in the Public Sector* webinar

Government-to-government open data re-use is not only important in times of crisis. During the [Data Demand and Re-Use in the Public Sector](#) webinar, hosted on 29 March 2022 by the [data.europa academy](#), several examples from European countries were presented, alongside an in-depth analysis of the status quo on open data re-use in the public sector. **Frederika Welle Donker**, researcher at the Knowledge Centre Open Data of Delft University of Technology, The Netherlands, and **Antonin Garrone**, product owner at Etalab, the French task force for data policy, shared their insights on data demand and re-use by public sector organisations. **Charlotte van Ooijen**, associate director of digital government and data at the Brussels-based think-tank the Lisbon Council moderated the discussion and presented the highlights of the recently launched data.europa academy discussion paper [Measuring Data Demand Within the Public Sector](#), together with the results of a **brief survey** filled out by 108 participants ahead of the webinar, which considered the awareness on open data re-use within the public sector, examples from practice and approaches to measure public institutions’ data demand.

The speakers presented several best examples of data re-use, which were complemented by insightful comments by the participants.

Mr Garrone discussed the [National Address Database](#) used in many private and public applications in France and raised the need to complement quantitative with qualitative methods to assess and measure open data re-use. The expert from France mentioned the issue of using wrong metrics, including vanity metrics, to measure the

success of open data initiatives. In order to establish indicators on open data re-use and impact, much effort must be dedicated to the question “How do we measure usage?”, and several questions need to be asked in order to understand who the users are and what their needs are. Mr. Garrone also tackled the issue of public bodies often not identifying themselves as data re-users.

Dr Welle Donker illustrated through several examples the shift from open data as a goal to a means. A first example of this relates to the Dutch government’s National Data Portal data.overheid.nl, which assists government organisations in opening all available data, while supporting data re-users in finding specific datasets. Furthermore, in her overview of the research carried out in 2019 for the Dutch Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations into open data re-users, the open data researcher highlighted data availability and findability, the level of data fragmentation, and data formats as the most common and frequent barriers to the re-use of open data.

The challenge of measuring data demand within the public sector

The goal of the [Data Demand and Re-Use in the Public Sector](#) webinar was to explore similar types of open data re-use in more detail and how to ensure a greater data availability and support for those public servants who wish to innovate public services. The topic is more relevant than ever: **the potential value for the public sector is enormous and this is still an underutilised potential**, because more attention has gone out to other users of open data, such as data-driven businesses and civil society organisations.

This is also confirmed by the high-level experts from practice and academia engaged in the discussion. The insights are clear: there is feeble evidence in academic and policy literature of existing approaches and indicators developed by supranational and national institutions to assess public institutions’ open data demand. Where evidence is available, it turns out that data re-users are treated as a homogeneous group, and public sector re-users are not evaluated separately.

The discussion revealed several **issues** when it comes to measuring the data demand by public institutions and fostering open data re-use within the public sector:

- There is the need to consider public institutions as data re-users from the outset of the data publication process;
- Available evidence suggests that there are more mechanisms in place to foster than to measure data demand;
- Such mechanisms are aimed at open data re-users in general, and not public institutions specifically.

Further insights can also be found from the answers collected through the **survey distributed in advance** of the webinar.

- The level of awareness on data re-use in the public sector is quite high, especially in the government organisations both at central and local levels.

- The extent to which participants already made efforts to measure the data demand, when provided, is mainly done by analysing portal user statistics.
- When analysing whether organisations ever acted as open data re-users, only governmental organisations either at central or federal level along with EU institutions, agencies and bodies answered positively. The picture changes significantly in the context of regional and local organisations, showing that there is a gap between different institutional levels.

However, having fast and easy access to data is not sufficient for public institutions to create public value. What is required is ensuring that public institutions find the data they need, which are relevant for their purposes. This refers particularly to demand-driven data publication and the need to be aware of data's potential to improve public services. There is more open data re-use in the public sector than is known and more than the actual re-users are aware of, as they often don't realise it is open data that they are using. When detecting and sharing these cases, the data re-use by public institutions can be further inspired and promoted. The re-use of open data seems under-documented and is not common practice for European data providers or ecosystem facilitators to measure public institutions' data demand.

Share, inspire and help advance data re-use in the public sector!

The webinar has made clear that it is necessary to advance government-to-government open data re-use by sharing knowledge and collaborating. Please join the conversation and share your experiences and suggestions on the following topics directly with the data.europa.eu team by using the "[share your feedback](#)" button at the bottom of the page:

- *What is your organisation's profile? For example, are you a representative of a (supra)national/regional/local government organisation, a business entity, NGO or perhaps a data journalist?*
- *How does your organisation reach out to public servants to re-use your open data and know what their needs are?*
- *What indicators, if any, does your organisation have in place to measure open data demand?*
- *How does your organisation re-use open data?*
- *How do other public institutions re-use the open data produced by your organisation?*

Collaboration and mutual inspiration are essential to strengthen the understanding of a demand-driven approach to data publication and to gain more and more insights on data re-use within the public sector. Please share your best practice(s)!

For more information on the webinar, please find here:

- [The recording of the session](#)
- [The slides of the session](#)