

## **Istat during the Covid-19 emergency**

**A first short focus on Communication activities implemented from the beginning of Italian lockdown**



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## 1. Introduction

Due to the coronavirus epidemic and following the measures adopted by the Italian Government to contain it, Istat has implemented a series of actions to ensure the continuity and quality of statistical production even in the emergency situation.

The Institute has reorganized data collection by sustainable acquisition techniques, innovative methodologies and use of data sources in order to be able to provide the Country with the data that in this specific period it asks for. Above all, those on deaths in the first months of the current year (normally released not in such real time). The Institute also provided most appropriate solutions to support statistical production processes, in full protection of workers' health.

Official statistics are fundamental for measuring the evolution of economy and society. Their production and dissemination at the service of institutions, policy-makers, families and businesses, therefore, cannot be stopped, but they need to be rethought to be ready to provide the Country with all necessary answers, and above all to support and monitor the future Country's recovery. Istat has long invested in dematerialisation and can therefore ensure full operation of its databases and accessible online services.

In this context, it was necessary to quickly plan an emergency Communication strategy aimed at giving visibility and explaining all these measures that the Institute has been carrying out to ensure continuity and quality of statistical production even in this situation.

Specifically, we planned and realized a coordinated campaign for the various channels and communication tools whose claim is: #IstatperilPaese.

The underlying message #IstatperilPaese (Istat for the Country) means that even in this difficult moment for the Country, the Institute continues its work with respect for its role and mission, making itself available to the community even more than ever, despite the emergency.

Since the beginning of the restrictions, the entire Communication team has been asked to operate through the various institutional channels to give visibility to the efforts made by the Institute, but also to promote a message of responsibility for the contribution that everyone is required to give in order to 'help Istat to help the Country'.

Therefore, we started with the creation of a web section (online since March 21) dedicated to the Covid-19 emergency theme. The contents gradually available here are punctually disseminated also through our main accounts on social channels with products specifically designed for the target platforms.

At the same time great attention was paid to the care of users through direct communication channels (mainly virtual relationships with users by email and Customer Relationship Management for data provision).

## 1. Website [www.istat.it](http://www.istat.it)

The basic strategy is to use the site as a collector both of any information that may be of users' interest during the health emergency and all data and studies that Istat can produce ad hoc to provide support to public decision-makers and citizens in general.

Therefore, on our website we realized a new area specifically dedicated to 'Istat during the Covid-19 emergency' (both in Italian and in English).

The Italian one consists of more pages than the English version because much of the information is mainly referred to the national public. This web section is constantly updated and it hosts all the extraordinary measures and temporary provisions implemented by Istat, together with clarifications regarding the continuation of the surveys and news on data releases about the topic in question.

Among the various contents of this area users can currently find:

- Contributions by Istat regarding some scenarios on the demographic effects of Covid-19 and cognitive contributions on measures to strengthen the National Health Service as well as the economic support for families, workers and businesses connected to the epidemiological emergency from COVID-19.
- Istat Management interviews on emergency-related issues.
- Release of several reports to evaluate the economic impact on specific production sectors (ex: tourism, publishing industry, air transport).
- Release of several reports to evaluate the social impact (Public health sector employees, Social Protection in Italy and Europe, Violence against women during COVID-19 lock-down: how much the help requests from women victims of violence increased in this period).
- Release of further data on deaths of the first quarter of 2020 in Italy were released, now updated to April 15. The data covered 87% of Italian municipalities. On the basis of these data, Istat - jointly with the Italian Institute of Health - issued a report on 'Mortality of the resident population'. This analysis aims to provide an integrated reading of the epidemiological data of the spread of the Covid-19 epidemic and of the total mortality data currently collected and validated by Istat.
- New initiatives for schools, such as a recently implemented platform collecting contents, videos and interactive contributions to encourage study and insights from home; it also aims to incite students at the use of official statistics in their daily lives.
- Launch of new surveys related to the Coronavirus emergency:
  1. May 11, 2020 - Serological survey on Covid-19 conducted by the Ministry of Health and Istat

2. May 8, 2020 - Survey on the impact of the Covid-19 emergency on Italian companies
  3. April 6, 2020 - Diary of the day and activities in the time of the coronavirus.
- In addition, continuous release of news and detailed information on the existing surveys.
  - Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ).
  - Several pages with data or classifications produced by Istat ad hoc for the Covid-19 emergency.

The whole section is designed with a dynamic and versatile structure, so to be continuously enriched with statistical or communication contents as soon as they are available (infographics, interactive graphics). In fact, a page hosts an interactive graphics system, that allows to see the deaths trend in those municipalities of which data Istat has already disseminated for the period 1 January-15 April 2020. It is possible as well to see the trend in the same months and municipalities for the years 2015-2019 compared to that of 2020.

This web section can be reached directly from the home page of the site. It is also positioned in evidence so that it always has great visibility. To make each page of the area in which one navigates recognizable as part of the #IstatperilPaese section, we inserted a banner at the top and a navigation column in the right sidebar. In the last one we also inserted some external useful links to other Italian and foreign institutions on Covid-19 theme. In the Italian version (which consists of more pages than the English one), the base page of #IstatperilPaese has been structured to make it accessible to different audiences. The principle is to help those who visit the section to orient themselves according to the reason why they are browsing it: if looking for data (health and demography, economy, territorial statistical information) or whether they are called to participate in a statistical survey.

In addition, to make it easier for users to navigate, there is the tag 'covid-19' inserted on all pages of the section as on all those that contain data or information relating to the health emergency, so users can find all these documents by a query: <https://www.istat.it/it/archivio/covid-19>.

As for the English version of the web section dedicated to the emergency from covid-19, in addition to containing the tables with data on deaths by municipalities and data on deaths by underlying cause and region of occurrence, it has been enriched with infographics that give the measure of some phenomena during covid-19 (tourism, social protection, public health sector, people aged 75 and older in Italy).

The analytics platform used Matomo.

## **1. Social media**

The main Istat social accounts (Twitter - double version Italian/English), LinkedIn, Instagram) have been used to amplify the communication of all actions concerning #IstatperilPaese and to relaunch the various contents published on the institutional website and disseminated by the Press Office.

Through social channels, we also decided to implement a strategy of interaction with users to ensure the protection of Istat reputation by means of transmitting correct and transparent messages.

We measured this interaction rate generated by the proposed contents.

The analysis showed that the interaction was very low in the first days of the emergency while it had an important growth since the publication of the updated data on deaths.

It has also been very appreciated by our followers the increasing use of various infographics realized and published together with the relative data sources and aiming to simply explain how to read the already released data. Moreover, considering the particular lock-down moment, some ad hoc cards were realized and posted on some specific channels (such as Instagram). Their aim: to entertain followers with numbers related to the habits preferred by Italians when at home.

The analytics platform used is Talkwalker.

## **2. Relationships with users through direct communication channels**

With regard to the front office with users, we have two communication channels which are active to respond promptly to anybody thanks to continuous listening and interaction.

They are our Customer Relationship Management platform 'Contact center' and [comunica@istat.it](mailto:comunica@istat.it), an email address for citizens who prefer to contact us for general information requests via direct messages.

Data requests strictly related to the emergency in progress began to arrive through the Contact center system (mainly updated data on deaths).

At the same time, many users preferred to contact Istat via e-mail, for immediate feedback on issues about a set of topics only partially related to the data recently released on deaths.

We have been receiving a lot of questions for interpretative clarification of these mortality data, especially given the deluge of numbers that currently invades the network on the subject. Moreover, users would like to compare these data with those from previous years, but at the

moment we do not yet have data for the entire national territory, so it is necessary to explain them which data are comparable and how.

In addition, many people - especially via social networks - are spreading fake news on these numbers, confusing users. Even some important newspapers have fallen into the trap and it was necessary to intervene on several fronts to rectify the information so wrongly disseminated.

The perception obtained downstream of the period considered is that users appreciate our timeliness in providing them with answers to the questions expressed.

Sideways, there were many other requests relating to problems inevitably consequent to what the emergency is causing, such as respondents of our surveys on the territory who ask if the methods of participation have changed and if any delays in submitting the completed questionnaires may be subject to a penalty.

With regard to the ongoing emergency we have also been officially contacted by some international statistical organizations for a discussion on the management of the activity of our respective institutions.