



An
Phríomh-Oifig
Staidrimh

Central
Statistics
Office

CENTRAL STATISTICS OFFICE

DATA STRATEGY

2026 – 2028



FOREWORD



As Ireland’s National Statistical Office, the Central Statistics Office (CSO) holds a unique and trusted role in providing independent, high-quality Official Statistics that describe our society, economy, and environment. Through this work, the CSO supports evidence-informed decision-making, strengthens public accountability, and fosters trust in the use of data for the public good. The publication of this Data Strategy marks a significant milestone for the CSO, setting out a clear and shared vision for how Official Statistics will continue to serve the public good and reaffirms CSO’s leadership role in shaping Ireland’s data ecosystem.

In a data landscape that is evolving rapidly, together with a changing legislative environment both at a European and national level, the foundation of Official Statistics continues to rest on the collection and analysis of robust primary data. Surveys and censuses remain essential to ensure completeness, representativeness, and accuracy. However, the use of administrative and secondary data sources, combined with advanced analytical capabilities, is reshaping how statistical value is created. The CSO will continue to champion the integration of these data sources while safeguarding the values of statistical confidentiality, integrity and the quality of Official Statistics.

At the heart of this transformation are our people. Their expertise, commitment and adaptability are widely recognised and central to the achievement of this strategy. The CSO is committed to continue enhancing the capabilities of our teams and to sharing our skills and expertise to support the wider data ecosystem.

Data standards and interoperability as well as consistent metadata, classifications, and quality frameworks will ensure that Ireland’s data ecosystem remains connected, efficient, and fit for purpose in a digital era. Emerging technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) present significant opportunities to enhance the way data are processed, analysed, and disseminated. At the same

time, its responsible use must be guided by strong governance, standards, transparency, and ethical principles – areas where the CSO will continue to provide leadership together with our mandate to advise on data issues more generally.

The CSO remains committed to reducing the burden on data providers. The strengthening of the CSO’s secondary data first principle will be necessary to achieve this goal. By applying smarter collection methods, and expanding our data engineering capabilities, we can deliver richer insights while minimising duplication and reporting demands on citizens and businesses alike.

This data strategy has been developed in conjunction with our new Statement of Strategy which sets out the aims, priorities, and strategic direction for the CSO over the next three years. Our data strategy will also provide direction to our Technology and People (Le Cheile) strategies which are currently under development.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Jennifer Banim".

Jennifer Banim
*Director General,
Central Statistics Office.*

OVERVIEW

We describe Ireland and its place in the world. We use international standards to produce key, trustworthy data and insights about our society, our economy, and our environment, for use by households, communities, businesses, decision makers, public services and researchers.

The CSO operates at the centre of a broader national data ecosystem that depends on effective governance, data access, and use of data to inform decisions and deliver public value. CSO's leadership role in this ecosystem, outlined in national and European legislation, will strengthen the scale and range of production Official Statistics through the developments supported by this Data Strategy.

This data strategy sets out how the CSO will continue to evolve as a trusted leader in Ireland's data system while ensuring that Official Statistics remain independent, relevant, and capable of meeting the data needs of a rapidly changing world. It has been developed based on an assessment of internal and external trends and details a new National Data Model designed to support a more effective and transparent national data infrastructure which harnesses data as a national resource. The approach to achieve this is based on CSO core values and principles and sets out the key actions required to deliver this across the Civil and Public Service.



Data is now recognised as a key element of national infrastructure, underpinning economic resilience, democratic accountability, and public sector innovation. Realising its full potential requires increased coordination, technical expertise, ethical oversight, and public trust.

This strategy responds to both external and internal drivers. Growing demand from users requires the CSO to provide timely, integrated, and multidimensional insights. The CSO increasingly draws on diverse data sources when developing Official Statistics, including administrative and privately-held data. By working to ensure coherence, quality, and consistency of all data sources, we can maximise the value of this richer data landscape.

The strategy sets out how the CSO will lead the development of a trusted, connected, and responsible national data system, while strengthening its own capacity and capabilities, and the range of statistical outputs and services we deliver. It focuses on improving accessibility, enhancing analytical skills, and supporting innovation through clear standards, methodological frameworks, and robust governance.

These opportunities can only be fully realised through our highly skilled and dedicated workforce, whose expertise enables the organisation to innovate and deliver insights of the highest quality. This strategy also paves the way for our National Statistical Service

(NSS) to enhance its strategic importance in the Civil and Public Service (CPS), strengthening its influence and impacting the success of this strategy.

The National Data Infrastructure (NDI) provides a solid foundation for this work. Through the NDI, the CSO is embedding standards, skills, and services that enable secure and ethical data management. Initiatives and services such as the Quality Management Framework, the NSS, and Virtual Data Rooms (VDR) are reshaping how data is managed, integrated, and used to deliver public value.

The Data Strategy strengthens collaboration, while establishing clear roles and boundaries, thus positioning the CSO as a trusted data leader. The strategy sets out how CSO will work with partners to co-develop and deliver greater insight, while upholding statutory independence, protecting confidentiality, and preserving the integrity of Official Statistics. To address growing demand and the increasing complexity of user requests, the CSO is committed to modernising its internal systems, capabilities, and governance, ensuring it remains relevant, resilient, and prepared for emerging challenges. Therefore, this strategy is both inward- and outward-looking, strengthening organisational capacity while reinforcing CSO's leadership within Ireland's evolving national data ecosystem.

This strategy upholds the CSO vision of “Independent Insight for All” and advances this goal through its mission:

“To lead the development of Ireland’s national data ecosystem by harnessing data as a strategic resource - trusted, accessible, and impactful.”

In pursuing this mission, the CSO will support better public services, inform policy decisions, and champion greater transparency by delivering high-quality Official Statistics. It will provide a range of data services, set robust standards, and guide the responsible use of data across government.

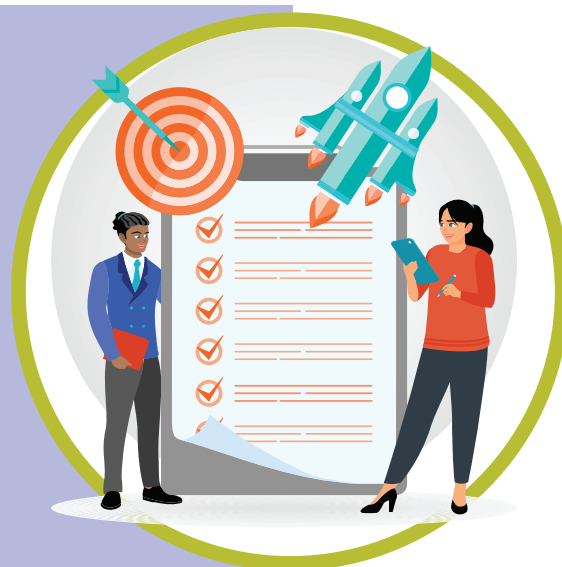
Through this strategy, the CSO will enhance the management, integration, and use of data while promoting the highest standards of quality, integrity, and reliability in the production of Official Statistics. By combining technical excellence, ethical governance, and professional expertise, this strategy reinforces the CSO’s principles of independence and authority, maximising the value of data for the public.



GUIDING VALUES AND PRINCIPLES

CSO values, lived by our people, are central to how we deliver this strategy:

The CSO's values underpin the Data Strategy, informing the guiding principles that define our approach to data leadership. These principles operate within an environment of increasing demand for data, Official Statistics and statistical expertise, as outlined in Section VII, and provide the basis for the strategy's actions and deliverables.



Independence

We are objective, impartial and always act with integrity.

Trustworthiness

We are honest and transparent. We comply with international statistical standards and we deliver high quality products and services in an ethical manner.

Excellence in Public Service

We use our expertise to deliver an efficient, value for money, quality public service.

Leading Change

We are ambitious, innovative, adaptive and work in a collaborative manner to Improve processes and products. We are engaged with our stakeholders and help others to serve the public.

Confidentiality

We apply the highest standards of confidentiality and respect for data privacy.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF DATA STRATEGY

1. Independence and authority

- This strategy reinforces our independence. The CSO remains the authority on Official Statistics under the Statistics Act 1993.
- Our leadership in the data ecosystem is about guiding responsible use. We continue to set the standards for statistical quality and data integrity.

2. Alignment with CSO Values

- The CSO stands for trust, rigour, and impartiality. This strategy leverages the evolution of the CSO's work across the broader CPS strengthening these attributes.

3. Empowering staff

- This strategy will enable our teams to work smarter, with better tools, clearer structures, and more support.
- Thematic-focused divisions and Data Services Coordinators will help reduce duplication, improve collaboration, and allow staff to focus on high-value analysis and innovation to deliver increased insight for all users of Official Statistics.

4. Collaboration with respect to boundaries

- We will continue to collaborate with other CPS bodies to support improved data access and use, but always within a framework that protects CSO's statutory role and the confidentiality of our data.
- Partnerships will continue to be governed by clear agreements that define roles, responsibilities, and boundaries.

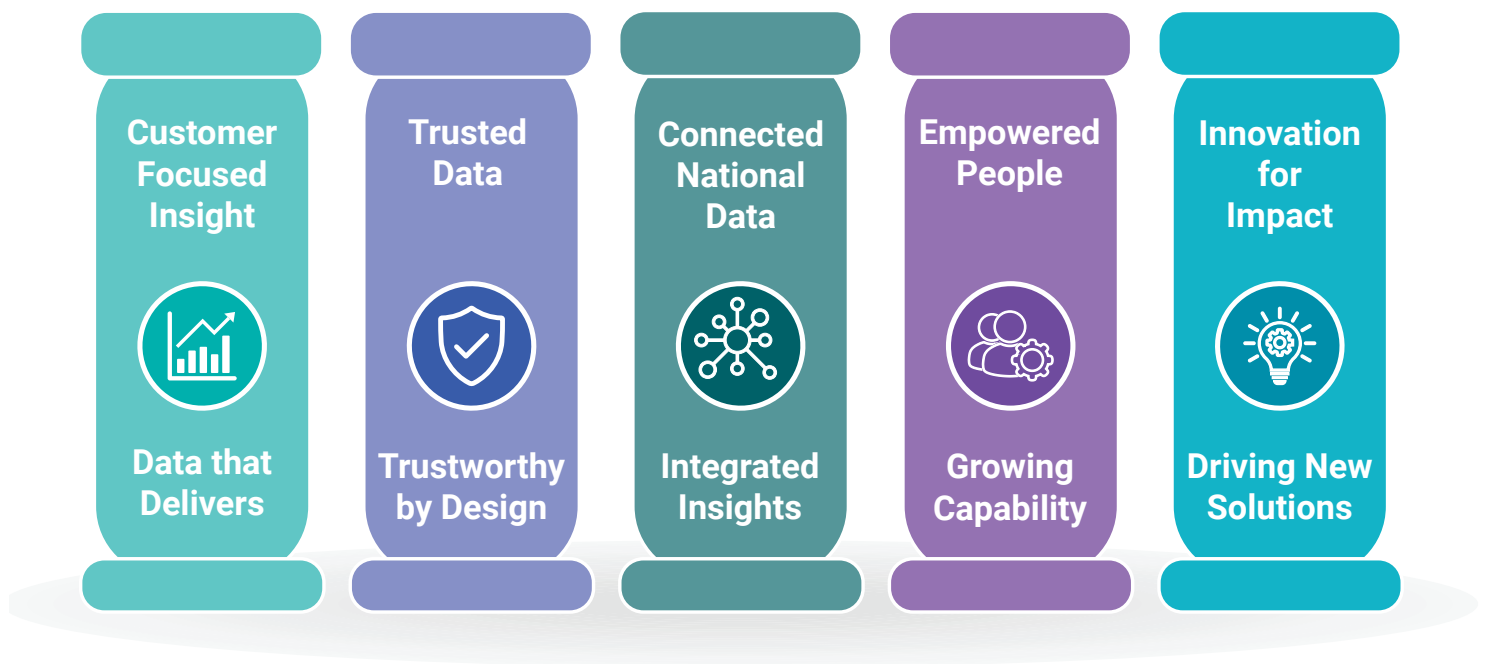
5. Preparing CSO for the future

- The volume and complexity of data demands a modern, responsive approach. By building on our strengths, this strategy prepares the CSO for the future, ensuring we remain relevant, resilient, and ready to meet new challenges in the evolving work of Official Statistics and the data that underpins CSO's outputs and services.
- The strategy also enhances the value of primary data collection by focussing on topics where it can add the most value and reducing respondent burden through a targeted approach.



CSO DATA STRATEGY PILLARS

To translate our mission and values into action, we have structured the key deliverable actions around five strategic pillars which are informed by the environment in which we operate. These pillars focus our efforts, drive results, and provide a clear framework for delivering a trusted, effective, and forward-looking national data system:



ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS

This strategy is informed by an environmental analysis which is our understanding of the external landscape that identifies key opportunities and challenges. This approach is grounded in the core values that underpin the CSO's work. Together, these elements enable the CSO to set out a comprehensive and adaptable strategy capable of responding to an ever-changing external environment.



Key themes are summarised below:

Key Trend No 1:

Environmental Analysis

Enhanced Complexity

Interdependent societal challenges that require multidimensional statistics, long-term approaches, with solutions in one area often generating challenges elsewhere.

CSO's Strategic Response

Multidimensional by default

Queries raised by National users are now more likely to reflect the complexities of Irish society since policies no longer exist in individual silos. These needs cannot be met by adding more questions to our surveys, so we need to ensure that each division of CSO has the capability to report multi-dimensionally.

Internally aligned services

In collaboration with the CPS, CSO has had great success in advancing the NDI, but feedback from service users is that they appreciate sector-specific knowledge in response to their queries for data and services. This is also the preferred model for our new thematic-based divisions. We need to ensure that the service we provide is as domain specific as possible, while aligning the support services of CSO to ensure that the service is delivered in a co-ordinated approach.



Key Trend No 2:

Environmental Analysis

Trust & Governance

Citizens' expectations around transparency, ethical practices, and cultural integrity as foundations of legitimacy.

CSO's Strategic Response

Support the public interest

We have an essential skillset and valuable data resources in a public sector that is seeking to improve outcomes for its customers. While always living our values, we are in a position to support others who are closer to decision making while respecting CSO values of independence, trustworthiness, and confidentiality.



Key Trend No 3:

Environmental Analysis

Digital Transformation

Key trends include Digitalisation and Datafication with the expansion of real-time data capture and integration of National Data Identifiers. Increased focus on AI Standards and Ethics with increased AI adoption. Growth of technical specialist roles such as data engineering and analytics.

CSO's Strategic Response

Customer (not product) centric

Our international obligations have resulted in a strong focus on statistical products since the means of production is usually laid down in law as well as the information required. Our national users are primarily focused on the most accurate answers to their needs regardless of the underlying data source. In many cases, customers also need help in formulating their demands in the context of the available data.



Key Trend No 4:

Environmental Analysis

Operational Efficiency

Reducing duplication and obstacles to increase efficiency, improve citizen experience, and support competitiveness.

Supporting public services to deliver strong outcomes supporting value for money

CSO's Strategic Response

Secondary data first

The CSO will adopt a secondary data first principle when planning new statistical outputs based on our experience of using administrative and secondary data to deliver innovative products and reduce respondent burden. There will continue to be requests where new surveys are the only viable option (e.g. for qualitative information or harmonised European statistics).

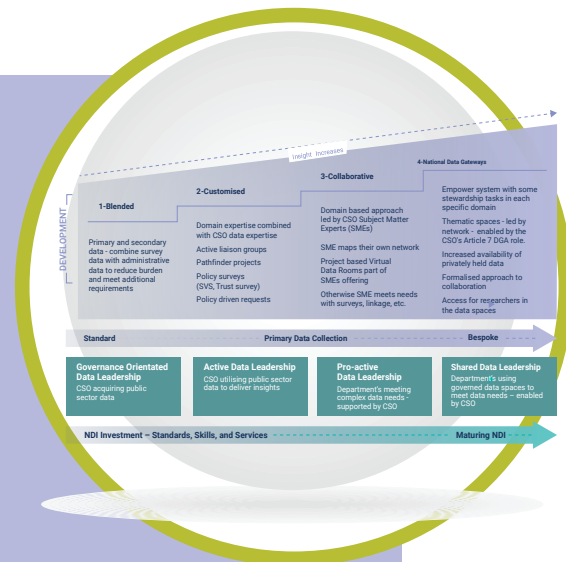
Empowered staff

Investing in our people to strengthen their professional development and empower them to effectively manage and utilise data supported by strong systems, architecture, and skill sets.



NATIONAL DATA STAGES MODEL

The National Data Stages model will be the basis for measuring progress in the Data Strategy. Objective metrics will be set out for each Data Stage in the implementation plan so that progress is visible towards the full delivery of the strategy. The key actions under the 5 strategic pillars will also be aligned to the Data Stages so that CSO staff can see how they are supported from stage to stage.



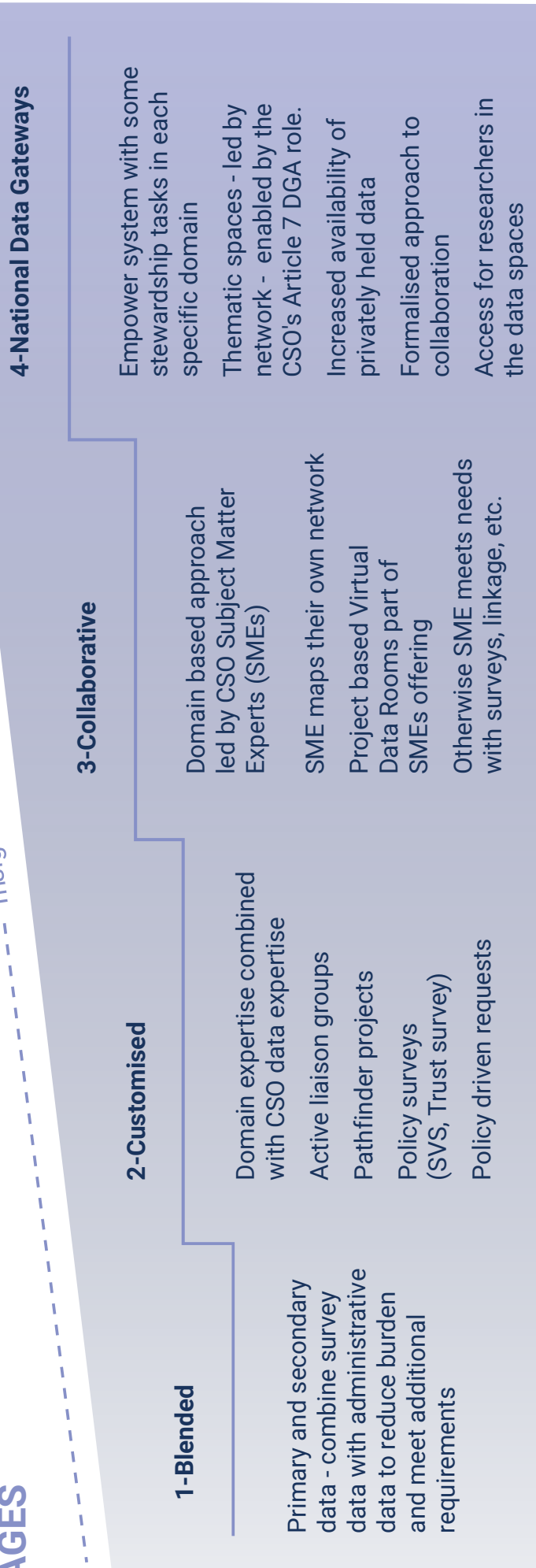
The model illustrates how data capability develops across the system, evolving from isolated datasets to a fully integrated, collaborative ecosystem capable of delivering national-level insights and value. This model forms the foundation of our strategy, linking the Data Strategy pillars to the opportunities and challenges identified. It specifically aligns:

- Customer-focused Insight - Data that Delivers: Supporting informed outcomes by ensuring data generates actionable, meaningful insights.
- Trusted Data - Trustworthy by Design: Strengthening trust through robust governance and reliability.
- Connected National Data - Integrated Insights: Enabling greater use of national data by connecting datasets across the system for a comprehensive view.
- Empowered People - Growing Capability: Building capacity by developing the skills and expertise needed to manage, leverage and communicate data and Official Statistics effectively.
- Innovation for Impact - Driving New Solutions: Fostering innovation by translating data insights into practical, transformative solutions.

Together with the National Data Development Stages model, these strategic pillars provide a clear roadmap for a connected, data-driven public sector, where high-quality, responsibly managed data underpins evidence-based decision-making, drives innovation, and maximises the value of data for public good. The model is outlined below:

NATIONAL DATA DEVELOPMENT STAGES

Insight Increases



DEVELOPMENT

Standard

Governance Orientated Data Leadership
CSO acquiring public sector data

Primary Data Collection

Active Data Leadership
CSO utilising public sector data to deliver insights

Bespoke

Pro-active Data Leadership
Department's meeting complex data needs - supported by CSO

Shared Data Leadership
Department's using governed data spaces to meet data needs - enabled by CSO

NDI Investment – Standards, Skills, and Services

Maturing NDI

The model focuses on four key stages with supporting foundations:

1. Blended – Fulfilling Our Core Mandate

At the blended stage, data from multiple sources, typically survey and administrative data, are combined for analytical purposes that are specified either by CSO to meet national needs or by international regulations. Local management of data supports focused analysis and innovation within domains, forming a foundation for greater integration and alignment in subsequent stages.

Strategic significance: This phase builds foundational capacity for data integration to perform CSO’s role of producing Official Statistics and managing response burden, while highlighting the need for greater coherence and interoperability. It also allows for the incorporation of new data sources, including our expanded use and future potential of privately held data.

2. Customised - Unlocking Value Through Secondary Data

Progressing to customised data marks a shift toward broader access to secondary data from multiple sources, enabling more tailored and thematic statistical outputs to meet needs specified by national stakeholders to be produced by CSO.

Strategic significance: Demonstrates growing system capability to reuse existing data for national purposes, while reducing duplication and enhancing efficiency.

3. Collaborative - Working Across Boundaries

The collaborative stage is achieved when departments, agencies, and the CSO actively share data and expertise on a sectoral basis. This is supported by robust governance, evolving data leadership, increased skills, and the use of statistical methods such as statistical disclosure control. Stakeholders are supported to produce their own statistics during this stage through VDRs and advice from CSO experts, though co-development opportunities are limited by separate data ‘silos’.

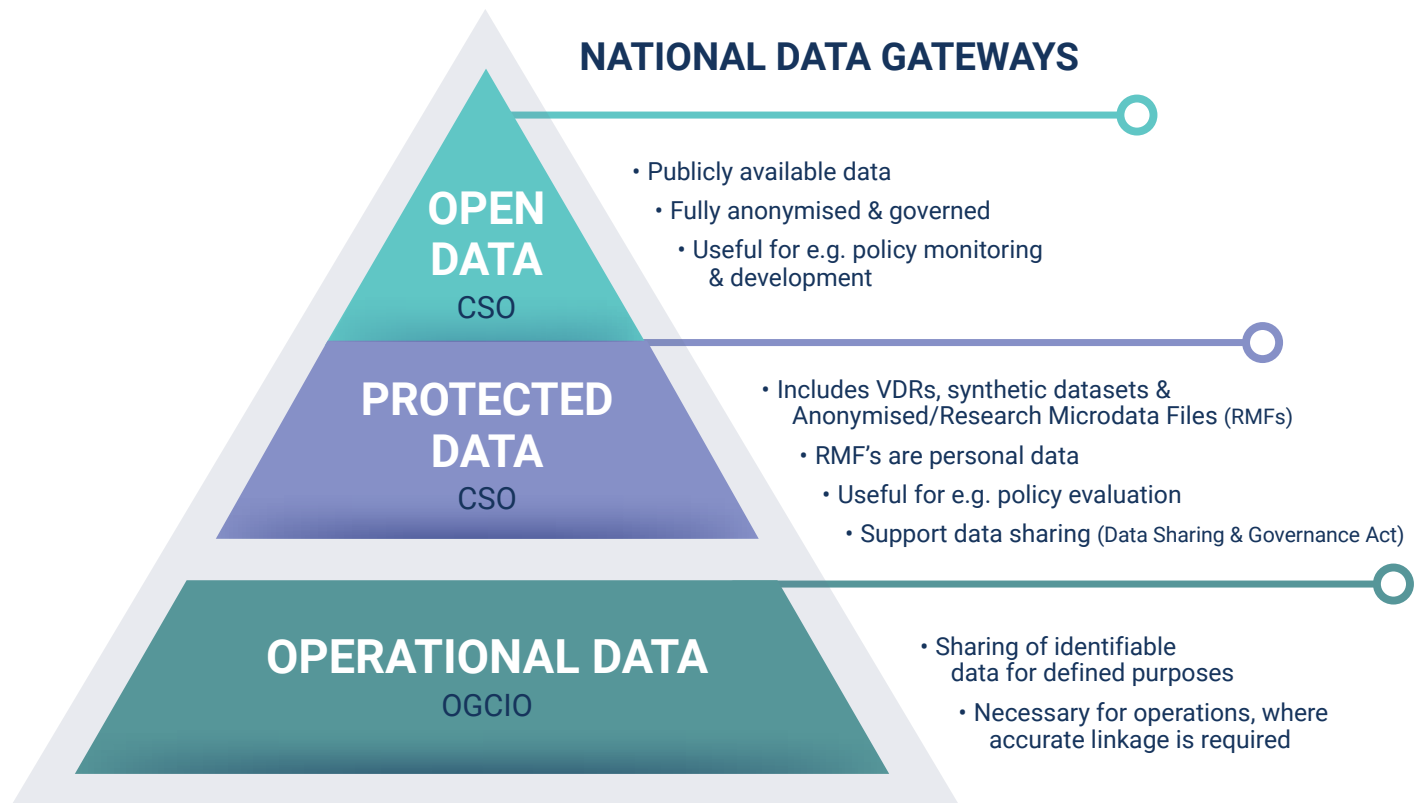
Strategic significance: Marks a cultural and operational shift from compliance-based data management to collaboration and joint innovation.

4. National Data Gateways - Realising the Full Potential of Data

The National Data Gateways represent the highest level of maturity, where survey, secondary, and privately held data are brought together into thematic domains (e.g., Health, Housing, Economy). These gateways are co-developed and jointly led by CSO experts and system partners, ensuring that both national standards and domain-specific expertise shape their design and operation, all supported by the CSO's robust governance framework. Official Statistics and information for public service use will be built on the same strong foundations. The NSS serves as a pivotal resource here, acting as a strategic network that strengthens collaboration, ensures consistency across the system, and maximises the value and impact of data partnerships.

Strategic significance: The gateways are the cornerstone of the CSO's data vision, enabling coordinated, secure, and responsible access to primary, secondary, privately held and publicly available data sources. They embody a "whole-of-system" approach to data use to deliver cohesive, national insights.

In collaboration with system stakeholders, the National Data Gateways will enable governed access to the three layers of data outlined in the model below, supporting integrated, trusted, and actionable insights. CSO is directly involved in the first two layers and supports activity in the third layer through the NDI standards, skills, and services.



To drive this transformation, we are launching a network of CSO Data Service Coordinators. These leaders will be essential in promoting integration across different thematic areas, ensuring consistency in data delivery, and enhancing collaboration within the public sector. They will work strategically with NSS sectoral counterparts and others to align efforts, share expertise, and reinforce national standards in data management. The coordinators will also play a crucial role in advancing the delivery of more customer focused insights.

Supporting Foundations of the model

The success of the National Data Development Stages is underpinned by three core foundations: Primary Data, the NDI, and Evolving Data Leadership.

- **Primary Data collection** becomes more targeted and strategic as the model progresses, guided by a “secondary data first” approach. The CSO begins to focus survey efforts where new insights cannot be derived from existing data, ensuring maximum value and efficiency. The strategy provides a range of additional supports for primary data collection, including data engineering and respondent contact supports. It also supports a deeper engagement with stakeholders on a sectoral level.
- **The National Data Infrastructure** provides the structural backbone of the data system, enabling data to flow efficiently from collection to insight. Built on the pillars of Standards, Skills, and Services, it promotes quality, builds capacity, and delivers trusted, accessible data.
- **Evolving Data Leadership** develops from compliance-focused governance toward a shared culture of accountability and innovation. As responsibility is delegated, data management becomes embedded within everyday practice, empowering departments and agencies to use data confidently and responsibly.

Together, these foundations ensure that Ireland’s data ecosystem remains cohesive, trusted, and future-ready, enabling the CSO to lead and deliver value through evidence-based insight.

KEY STRATEGIC ACTIONS

Building on the National Data Development Stages, this strategy provides a framework for how data will be managed, shared, and used to deliver better outcomes for society. It recognises data as a national resource to be harnessed responsibly, securely, and innovatively, in collaboration with stakeholders across the system.

Centred on the five strategic pillars, the strategy guides a set of targeted initiatives that translate ambition into action, strengthening governance, enabling access, building skills, and driving innovation to ensure Ireland's data ecosystem continues to evolve and deliver value.



Key strategic actions to deliver this strategy are summarised by strategy pillar below:

Customer
Focused
Insight



Data that
Delivers

- » **National Data Gateways** – Establish a coordinated framework with domain-specific gateways that provide governed, secure access to high-value datasets across the public sector, ensuring data is integrated, trusted, and actionable for national decision-making.
- » **Supporting Data Services** – Deliver comprehensive data services, methodological guidance, and analytical tools that enable public sector organisations to access, integrate, and use data efficiently and effectively, building capability across the system.
- » **Domain-Specific Products** – Implement targeted initiatives in priority areas (e.g., Housing, Health, Children) where integrated data is actively used by subject matter experts to support evidence-based decisions, inform policy, and deliver measurable societal outcomes.
- » **Secondary Data First Principle** – continue to expand our use of secondary data and collect new primary data only after fully assessing and exhausting all relevant secondary sources.

- » **Trust & Ethics Framework** – Establish and extend trust structures and ethical principles, demonstrating responsible data practices through transparent, real-world use cases across the public service.
- » **Data Governance** – Strengthen governance frameworks, refine data management processes, and ensure compliance with existing regulatory and organisational policies. This includes the development and updating of CSO policies in the areas of AI use, Administrative Data, Data Management, Researcher Access, and Virtual Data Rooms, to maintain consistency, security, and trust across all data activities.
- » **Process Transparency** – Publish clear, accessible information on methodologies, technologies, metadata, and data quality measures to enable users to understand, replicate, and trust public sector data.
- » **Data Management Lifecycle** – Implement policies for archiving, curating, and deleting data, safeguarding information throughout its entire life cycle.
- » **Trusted Data Access Supports** – Provide controlled access mechanisms that balance openness with protection of sensitive data.



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- » **NDAN** (National Data and Analytics Network) – Develop cross-sectoral collaboration, innovation, and data use through the NDAN network.
 - » **Communications Strategy** – Create a strategy to support the data strategy, including use cases and guidelines on stakeholder engagement.
 - » **Data Literacy & Awareness** – Contribute to a skills framework to help non-technical public sector staff understand and work with data, which will drive broader data leadership.
 - » **Skills Centre of Excellence** – Establish a hub to provide training, best practice, and knowledge exchange across the national data system.
 - » **Communities of Practice (CoPs)** – Expand collaborative groups to share knowledge, address technical challenges, and develop emerging skills.
 - » **National Statistical Service** – Leverage the NSS as a strategic enabler by continuing the secondment of CSO technical staff to build skills, share expertise, and foster collaboration, advancing the NDI and strengthening system-wide data capability.





- » **Virtual Data Rooms** – Provide secure, governed digital spaces for collaborative analysis of sensitive or restricted data.
- » **CSO Data Service Coordinators** – Deploy dedicated coordinators to connect expertise, establish consistency across the system, and strengthen the CSO’s leadership and coordination role in national data initiatives.
- » **Metadata Catalogue** – Catalogue key CSO datasets to enhance discoverability, transparency, and reuse, supporting VDRs.
- » **Data & Metadata Standards** – Promote consistent standards and FAIR principles to improve interoperability and comparability.
- » **Hosted Open Data** – Enable public sector organisations to publish data via CSO’s PxStat, fostering transparency, innovation, and engagement.
- » **Data Quality** – Establish and support standards, tools, and guidance to ensure accurate, reliable, and high-quality data across the National Statistical System.



- » **Data Innovation** – Encourage experimentation with new methods, tools, and pilots to demonstrate data’s potential in addressing real-world challenges.
- » **Data Engineering** – Establish a new CSO Data Engineering division to support data integration and VDR’s.
- » **Privately Held Data** – Develop a framework for the responsible access and utilisation of privately-held data sources to generate valuable social and economic insights. Utilise established practices and adhere to EU guidelines to effectively accomplish this objective.
- » **New Technologies** – Leverage AI, machine learning, and advanced analytics to generate deeper insights, enhance services, and identify opportunities for public good.
- » **CSO Data Model** – Review and update the data model to reflect new data sources, technologies, and analytical approaches.

IMPLEMENTATION

Delivering on this strategy will require strong collaboration across CSO, government, public bodies, and external stakeholders. Clear governance, shared investment, and a commitment to ethical and responsible data use will underpin its success. By working together to implement the five strategic pillars, CSO can continue to meet its mandate on Official Statistics, strengthen the national data infrastructure, maintain public trust, and unlock the full potential of data to improve lives, shape policy, and drive sustainable innovation for the future.



The successful delivery of this strategy will be guided by a detailed, metrics driven implementation plan that translates each pillar into concrete actions, timelines, and responsibilities. This plan will identify key milestones, critical success factors, assign responsibilities and supporting resources and set out performance measures to monitor progress. The plan will also align the metrics and strategic actions with the National Data Development Stages so that progress through the Stages is clearly visible. Implementation will be guided by a programme board with leadership from CSO business areas to ensure that the strategy is aligned with business needs and our mandate to produce cost-effective and sustainable Official Statistics. The upcoming CSO Technology and 'Le Cheile' People strategies will support the data strategy implementation plan, ensuring that all the resources of CSO are focused on delivering value to our customers.

Implementation will also require investment in infrastructure, human resources, and data governance, managed within the CSO's existing governance structures to ensure transparency, accountability, and efficient use of resources. Funding for implementation will be distributed across all the business and service divisions involved in implementation. Detailed plans for costs and resource requirements will be developed, documented and tracked in the implementation plan, ensuring effective oversight and informed decision-making.

There are a number of actions that are already committed to that will support the rapid implementation of the strategy in 2026 including:

- » The establishment of a full-time Virtual Data rooms service which aims to commence 22 VDR projects
- » The updating of the CSO data model to take account of new data sources, technologies, and analytical approaches
- » The development and launch of a metadata catalogue which will document key CSO data assets to support data transparency and discoverability
- » The establishment of a new Data Engineering division to support the implementation of the CSO Data stages model.

By combining a clear strategic vision with a structured implementation approach, this strategy will ensure that the planned, ambitious strategic initiatives are turned into measurable outcomes at CSO Directorate and Divisional levels. This strategy will play a key role in the delivery of the overarching CSO Statement of Strategy which reaffirms our mission to describe Ireland, its people, society, economy, and environment through trusted, independent, and insightful data. It will also enable the ongoing development of CSO's data leadership role in building a trusted, innovative, and effective national data ecosystem that maximises the value of data for all.

