

Updated and extended European dataset of daily climate observations

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Abstract

The European Climate Assessment (ECA) dataset of daily observations, which has been widely used for studies on climate extremes, has been updated and extended. It now contains observational series of 2191 stations located in Europe and the Mediterranean (average inter-station distance: ~75km). About 1200 precipitation series and 750 temperature series cover the period 1960 to 2000. For a small number of stations (< 15%) air pressure, cloud cover, sunshine duration, snow depth and relative humidity series exist. All series are quality controlled and the homogeneity of the precipitation and temperature series is assessed. About 50% of the daily series is publicly available for climate studies through the website <http://eca.knmi.nl>. The main potential of the ECA dataset follows from its daily resolution, enabling studies of impact relevant climate extremes and variability. To guide these studies, climate indices calculated from the ECA series are presented on the website too. In the near future, gridded versions of the daily ECA data will be available for easy comparison with climate model simulations. A trend analysis for the diurnal temperature range (DTR) demonstrates the dataset. Seasonal and annual DTR trends were calculated for 333 homogeneous temperature series in ECA and a Europe average trend was estimated. In spring and summer, the DTR increased from 1979 to 2005, whereas in autumn and winter the DTR generally decreased. The European average trend in annual DTR was $0.09 \text{ }^{\circ}\text{C decade}^{-1}$.

Key words: daily climate series, dataset, climate extremes, climate indices, Europe, Mediterranean, diurnal temperature range, observations

1. Introduction

The European Climate Assessment (ECA) dataset contains long series of daily station observations such as air temperature and precipitation. Since its presentation (Klein Tank et al., 2002), this dataset has been effectively used for climate extremes studies on a regional scale (Della Marta et al., 2007; Fischer et al., 2007; Haylock and Goodess, 2004; Klein Tank et al., 2005; Moberg and Jones, 2005; Moberg et al., 2006; Norrant and Douguédroit, 2003; Zolina et al., 2005) and global scale (Alexander et al., 2006; Frich et al., 2002). Its success is the compilation of a large number of quality-controlled daily series from all European countries, as well as its public accessibility through the Internet (<http://eca.knmi.nl>).

Monitoring and analyzing climate variability and extremes, such as wet spells and heat waves, is very important because of the large impacts of climate extremes on society and environment. Consequently, climate extremes were given much attention in the latest IPCC report (Trenberth et al., 2007). It was concluded from observations that the number of warm extremes and the duration of heat waves have increased for all regions with data and the number of daily cold extremes has reduced. The daily resolution of the ECA dataset supports this type of climate studies. For this purpose, an internationally agreed set of indices for weather and climate extremes (Peterson, 2005) is calculated for each station, year and season. Both the derived indices series and the trends in these series are presented on the ECA website.

The ECA dataset has been updated and extended rigorously over the past years. The number of stations is at present 2191 (Figure 1), a tenfold increase over the number in 2002. With an average distance between the stations of 75 km, the spatial resolution is high enough for gridding and comparison to RCM simulations, which is done as part of the EU-ENSEMBLES project (Hewitt and Griggs, 2004; Malcolm et al., in prep.). This short communication presents the new version of the dataset. The climate series and data providers are described in Section 2. The quality control and homogeneity testing procedures are presented in Section 3. An illustration of the dataset, a study on trends in the diurnal temperature range, is given in Section 4 and an outlook concludes this short communication.

2. Daily climate series

The new ECA dataset includes station series for nine daily climate variables: minimum, mean and maximum temperature, precipitation amount, sea level air pressure, snow depth, sunshine duration, relative humidity, and cloud cover. The total number of series in the dataset is highest for temperature and precipitation. For the other variables the total number is relatively low (Table I), since their gathering has only just started. The dataset exists of daily time series provided by the National Meteorological Services of all countries in the region, augmented with data from other institutes and from earlier research projects. Appendix 1 presents the full list of data sources.

All series in the ECA dataset are continuously being updated with SYNOP messages from the ECMWF MARS-archive (ECMWF, 2006) to enable near real time climate monitoring. Updating from this source is necessary, because updates from the data providers are usually received with some delay and the insertion of the series in the database takes time. The SYNOP messages are also used to fill gaps in the time series together with data from nearby stations, provided that they are within 25 km distance and 50 m height difference.

Despite WMO intentions of standardization, the time interval for observing and recording minimum and maximum temperatures or for accumulating 24-hour rainfall amounts sometimes differs between countries and even within countries between stations. For instance, precipitation observations made early in the morning are frequently recorded on the same day, whereas at other stations on the previous day. An additional complication is that observation rules sometimes change within a series over time. This leads to problems if for instance the relationship between daily temperature and daily rainfall is analyzed or if daily values are interpolated onto daily grids. Therefore, each single series in the database is identified with an element code as much as possible, providing information about the measurement procedure.

About 50% of all series in the dataset is currently publicly available (status August 2007; Table I) and can be downloaded from the ECA website. For the other half, only the derived indices series can be released due to data policy restrictions. Figure 2 shows the total number and the number of public series in the dataset for each variable and year. The plots illustrate that the totals for precipitation are greatest. The strong decline in the number of precipitation series over the last 15 years is mainly caused by series from the former Soviet Union, ending in the early nineties. In 1995, the number of temperature series abruptly increases, primarily due to a rise in series from Russia and Ukraine. For all variables, the data coverage is best between 1960 and 2000. About 1200 precipitation series and 750 temperature series cover this period. Unfortunately, data from the most recent years are often missing, even though SYNOP data have been considered to update the series.

3. Data quality and homogeneity

The data in all series are automatically quality checked and flagged accordingly as useful (i.e. the data value passes the test), suspect (i.e. the data value does not pass the test) or missing. Within the dataset no corrections or adjustments are made to the data values. If possible, data values that are flagged as suspect or missing are replaced by data from nearby stations or by SYNOP data (see Section 2).

All quality tests are absolute, implying that data are not compared with respect to neighbouring station series. The quality checks detect several types of errors: anomalous values (i.e. temperatures exceeding 60 °C, precipitation values exceeding 300 mm day⁻¹ or negative precipitation values), repetitive values (i.e. repetitive precipitation data over more than 10 days of non-zero values), outliers (i.e. temperatures that exceed a certain z-

score in the normal distribution for that calendar day) and inconsistencies (i.e. minimum temperatures that exceed the daily maximum). According to these checks, about 0.5% of all data values in the ECA dataset is currently considered suspect. In some cases, the automatically generated quality control flags have been overruled by manual intervention. This is for example necessary for extreme precipitation events exceeding 300 mm day^{-1} . Additional evidence has proven that such events occasionally occur in Locarno (Switzerland), Genoa (Italy) or Mont-Aigoual (France).

Long climatological time series often contain variations due to non-climatic factors, such as site-relocations, or changes in instrumentation and observing practices. This can lead to shifts in the mean or the variance and to spurious trends. As these inhomogeneities can distort or even hide the true climatic signal, homogeneity testing is a key issue for climate change studies. Within ECA, the homogeneity procedure of Wijngaard et al. (2003) is used to test the homogeneity of the precipitation and temperature series. This method classifies the series in three homogeneity classes: useful, doubtful, and suspect, depending on the number out of four statistical tests that reject the null hypothesis of no break in the series. Table II presents the homogeneity results of the precipitation and temperature series that are complete for the periods 1961-2006 and 1901-2006. The percentage of useful series (rejection of 0 or 1 test) is smaller for the latter period, since the number of detected breaks increases when the period of investigation is extended. The percentage of precipitation series classified as useful is much larger than the percentage of useful temperature series. This is partly due to the high variability of precipitation, which hampers the detection of breaks in series. With regard to the total number of precipitation (temperature) series in the dataset, 39% (25%) is homogenous (i.e. useful) over 1961 to 2006. Note that according to this strict test only 5 out of 107 temperature series covering the period 1901-2006 are useful.

Similar results for the number of homogeneous series were found using an alternative homogeneity testing method, which was recently applied to the same data set by Begert et al. (in prep.) This method involves an automated relative homogenization procedure to detect shift inhomogeneities in climatological time series. It combines VERAQC (Vienna Enhanced Resolution Analysis Quality Control; Steinacker et al. (2000)) output with Alexandersson's Standard Normal Homogeneity Test (Alexandersson, 1986). The results of this procedure show that 59% (20%) of all precipitation (temperature) series are classified as homogeneous over the period 1960-2004.

4. Demonstration of the dataset: changes in the diurnal temperature range

As an illustration of the ECA dataset, we describe in this section the European trends in the diurnal temperature range (DTR) as derived from the daily maximum and minimum temperature series in ECA. Globally, maximum and minimum temperatures have increased at similar rates between 1979 and 2005, with no trend in DTR (Vose et al., 2005; Trenberth et al., 2007). Using the ECA data, we estimated the contribution of Europe to this basically trendless global DTR and investigated the seasonal DTR trends in more detail.

Figure 3 shows the annual and seasonal DTR trends (using least squares regression) for 1979 to 2005 as derived from 333 homogeneous (useful) maximum and minimum temperature series in ECA. An overall DTR increase is evident in spring and summer, with more increasing than decreasing trends (Table III). Also annually, the number of series with an increasing DTR trend exceeds the number of series with a decreasing trend, and about 50% of the trends is significant at the 25% level (t test). For autumn and winter, the DTR generally decreased, but the pattern is less consistent with decreasing trends in southern Europe in autumn and in northern Europe in winter.

A Europe average DTR trend was calculated by first averaging all 333 DTR series and then doing the trend analysis. The trend in the Europe average DTR is positive for the year, spring and summer and negative for the autumn and winter (Table III). Although none of these average trends is statistically significant at the 5% level, the trends in the annual, summer and winter DTR are significant at the 10% level (and thus very likely in IPCC terms). Since for all seasons, minimum as well as maximum temperatures have increased from 1979 to 2005 (not shown), positive (negative) DTR trends are associated with maximum temperatures having increased at a larger (smaller) rate than minimum temperatures. The results indicate that Europe contributed to a positive trend in global annual DTR in recent decades that must have been compensated elsewhere (Vose et al., 2005; Trenberth et al., 2007). Whether this is related to regional specific changes in cloud cover, precipitation, or to variations in atmospheric circulation is a topic for future research.

5. Outlook

Besides the production of European high-resolution gridded daily datasets based on the series in ECA (Malcolm et al., in prep.), other prospects for the ECA dataset are a continuous improvement of the number and length of the series, especially for the new variables air pressure, snow depth, sunshine duration, cloud cover and relative humidity. The ultimate target would be to collect the daily series of a network comparable to all SYNOP stations in Europe (~3000). As the number of series of the new variables will grow, indices of climate extremes based on these variables will be analyzed and presented on the website (e.g. the number of snow days, heat wave indices taking into account air humidity, drought indices). We also started to collect more metadata of the station series (such as pictures of all stations and information on soil type and land use) to aid the interpretation of the homogeneity test results. At present, a minority of the series (roughly 30%) is identified as homogeneous. When new techniques (e.g. Vincent et al., 2002; Della Marta and Wanner, 2006) for homogenizing daily series become available, this figure may improve.

Acknowledgements

This work was supported by the European Climate Support Network ECSN, the Network of European Meteorological Services EUMETNET and the ENSEMBLES project (contract number GOCE-CT-2003-505539) of European Commission's 6th Framework Programme. Many thanks are due to all data providers listed in Appendix 1. We also thank our KNMI colleagues Janet Wijngaard, Maarten van der Hoeven, Job Verkaik, Aryan van Engelen and Gerard van der Schrier for their contribution to the ECA dataset.

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Appendix 1

List of data provide (abbreviations: *rr* – precipitation, *tx* – maximum temperature, *tn* – minimum temperature, *tm* – mean temperature, *pp* – sea level pressure, *rh* – relative humidity, *sd* – snow depth, *cc* – cloud cover, *ss* – sunshine duration).

ECA participants

Climate variables: rr, tx, tn, tm, pp, rh, sd, cc, ss; 989 stations

Hydrometeorological Institute

Office National de la Météorologie

Hydrometeorology and Environmental Agency

Central Institute for Meteorology and Geodynamics

Koninklijk Meteorologisch Instituut

Federal Meteorological Institute of Bosnia and Herzegovina

National Institute of Meteorology and Hydrology

Meteorological and Hydrological Service of Croatia

Meteorological Service of Cyprus

Czech Hydrometeorological Institute

Danish Meteorological Institute

Estonian Meteorological and Hydrological Institute

Finnish Meteorological Institute

Météo-France

Deutscher Wetterdienst

Hellenic National Meteorological Service

Hungarian Meteorological Service

Icelandic Meteorological Office

Met Éireann

National University of Ireland, Galway

Israel Meteorological Service

Università degli Studi di Milano

Servizio Meteorologico dell' Aeronautica

Latvian Hydrometeorological Agency

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Det Norsk Meteorologiske Institutt

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SLOVAKIA

SLOVENIA

SPAIN

SWEDEN

SWEDEN

SWITZERLAND

TURKEY

Central Geophysical Observatory
Met Office

EMULATE¹⁾ data providers

<http://www.cru.uea.ac.uk/cru/projects/emulate/>

Climate variables: rr, tx, tn, tm, pp; 197 stations

Central Institute for Meteorology and Geodynamics

Meteorological and Hydrological Service of Croatia

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Universitat Rovira I Virgili, Physical Geography

Swedish Meteorological and Hydrological Institute

Uppsala University, Department of Earth Sciences, Air and water
Science-Meteorology

MeteoSwiss

Met Office

Armagh Observatory

STARDEX²⁾ data providers

<http://www.cru.uea.ac.uk/cru/projects/stardex/>

*Climate variables: rr, tx, tn, tm; 248 stations; series cover the period
1958-2000 only*

Central Institute for Meteorology and Geodynamics

Czech Hydrometeorological Institute

Danish Meteorological Institute

Finnish Meteorological Institute

Meteo France

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Royal Netherlands Meteorological Institute

Det Norsk Meteorologiske Institutt

Istituto de Meteorologia

Russian Federal Service for Hydrometeorology and Environmental
Monitoring

Instituto Nacional de Meteorología

Swedish Meteorological and Hydrological Institute

MeteoSwiss

University of East Anglia, Climate Research Unit

MAP³⁾ data providers

<http://www.map.meteoswiss.ch/>

Climate variables: rr, tx, tn, tm; 108 stations; Italian series only

Ufficio Idrografico Provincia Autonoma di Trento

UKRAINE

UNITED KINGDOM

AUSTRIA

CROATIA

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SPAIN

SPAIN

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SWEDEN

SWITZERLAND

UNITED KINGDOM

UNITED KINGDOM

AUSTRIA

CZECH REPUBLIC

DENMARK

FINLAND

FRANCE

GERMANY

GREECE

HUNGARY

ITALY

NETHERLANDS

NORWAY

PORTUGAL

RUSSIAN FEDERATION

SPAIN

SWEDEN

SWITZERLAND

UNITED KINGDOM

ITALY

Servizio Meteorologico dell' Aeronautica GCOS Surface Network ⁴⁾ <i>http://www.wmo.ch/web/gcos/gcoshome.html</i> <i>Climate variables: rr, tx, tn, tm, pp; 47 stations</i>	ITALY
National Climate Data Center GHCND ⁵⁾ <i>http://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/oa/climate/research/ghcn/ghcn.html</i> <i>Climate variables: rr, tx, tn, tm; 642 stations; version DSI-9300</i>	USA
National Climate Data Center Mars-Stat Database ⁶⁾ <i>http://agrifish.jrc.it/marsstat/</i> <i>Climate variables: rr, tx, tn, tm; 263 stations</i>	USA
Joint Research Centre, Ispra University of Silesia <i>Climate variables: rr; 22 stations; Polish series only</i>	ITALY
University of Lodz <i>Climate variables: tx, tn, tm; 6 stations; Polish series only</i>	POLAND
SYNOP/CLIMAT <i>http://www.ecmwf.int/</i> <i>Climate variables: rr, tx, tn, tm, pp, rh, sd, cc, ss; 1291 stations</i>	POLAND
ECMWF	UNITED KINGDOM

1) EMULATE (European and North Atlantic daily to MULtidecadal climATE variability, Moberg and Jones, 2005; and Ansell, 2006) is a European 5th framework programme.

2) STARDEX (Statistical and Regional dynamical Downscaling of Extremes for European regions, Haylock and Goodness, 2004) is a European 5th framework programme.

3) The Mesoscale Alpine Programme (MAP) is a project that investigated the atmospheric and hydrological processes over the Alps (Bougeault et al., 2001).

4) GCOS is the Global Climate Observing System. The GCOS Surface Network (GSN) is a global surface reference climatological station network (Peterson et al., 1997).

5) The Global Historical Climatology Network – Daily (GHCND) is developed by the National Climatic Data Center (NCDC, 2004).

6) The Joint Research Centre in Ispra, Italy houses the MARS-STAT Database containing daily series to develop an interpolated 50-km meteorological European dataset for crop forecasting (Genovese, 2001).

Table I. For each climate variable, the number of series in the database and the percentage that is publicly available from the ECA&D website (status August 2007).

Climate variable	Number of series (and percentage publicly available)
Maximum temperature	1368 (48%)
Minimum temperature	1371 (48%)
Mean temperature	1233 (42%)
Precipitation	2052 (48%)
Air pressure	321 (53%)
Snow depth	187 (24%)
Relative humidity	189 (71%)
Cloud cover	128 (70%)
Sunshine duration	184 (59%)

Table II. Total number of precipitation and temperature series that covers the periods 1961-2006 and 1901-2006 and the number (percentage) classified as useful, doubtful and suspect following the homogeneity test of Wijngaard et al. (2003).

Period	Climate variable	Total number	Useful	Doubtful	Suspect
1961-2006	Precipitation	843	793 (94%)	21 (3%)	29 (3%)
	Temperature	642	345 (54%)	56 (9%)	241 (7%)
1901-2006	Precipitation	267	186 (70%)	26 (10%)	55 (20%)
	Temperature	107	5 (5%)	3 (3%)	99 (92%)

Table III. Number of series with increasing, decreasing and insignificant (*t* test) trends in annual and seasonal DTR for 1979-2005 at the 25% (5%) level. The last column presents the trend in the European average DTR with the 95% confidence interval in parentheses.

Season	increasing	decreasing	not significant	Average trend (°C decade ⁻¹)
Annual	125 (52)	41 (14)	167 (267)	0.09 (0.00-0.18)
Winter (DJF)	49 (15)	83 (43)	201 (275)	-0.11 (-0.21-0.00)
Spring (MAM)	146 (56)	18 (8)	169 (269)	0.15 (0.00-0.30)
Summer (JJA)	140 (52)	26 (5)	167 (276)	0.14 (-0.03-0.31)
Autumn (SON)	47 (11)	72 (29)	214 (293)	-0.01 (-0.14-0.11)

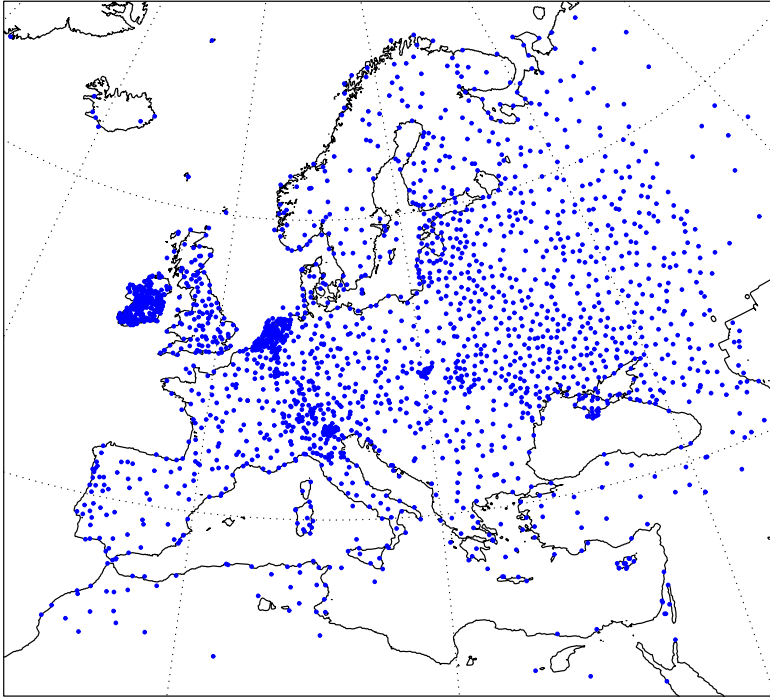


Figure 1. Station network of the dataset (status August 2007).

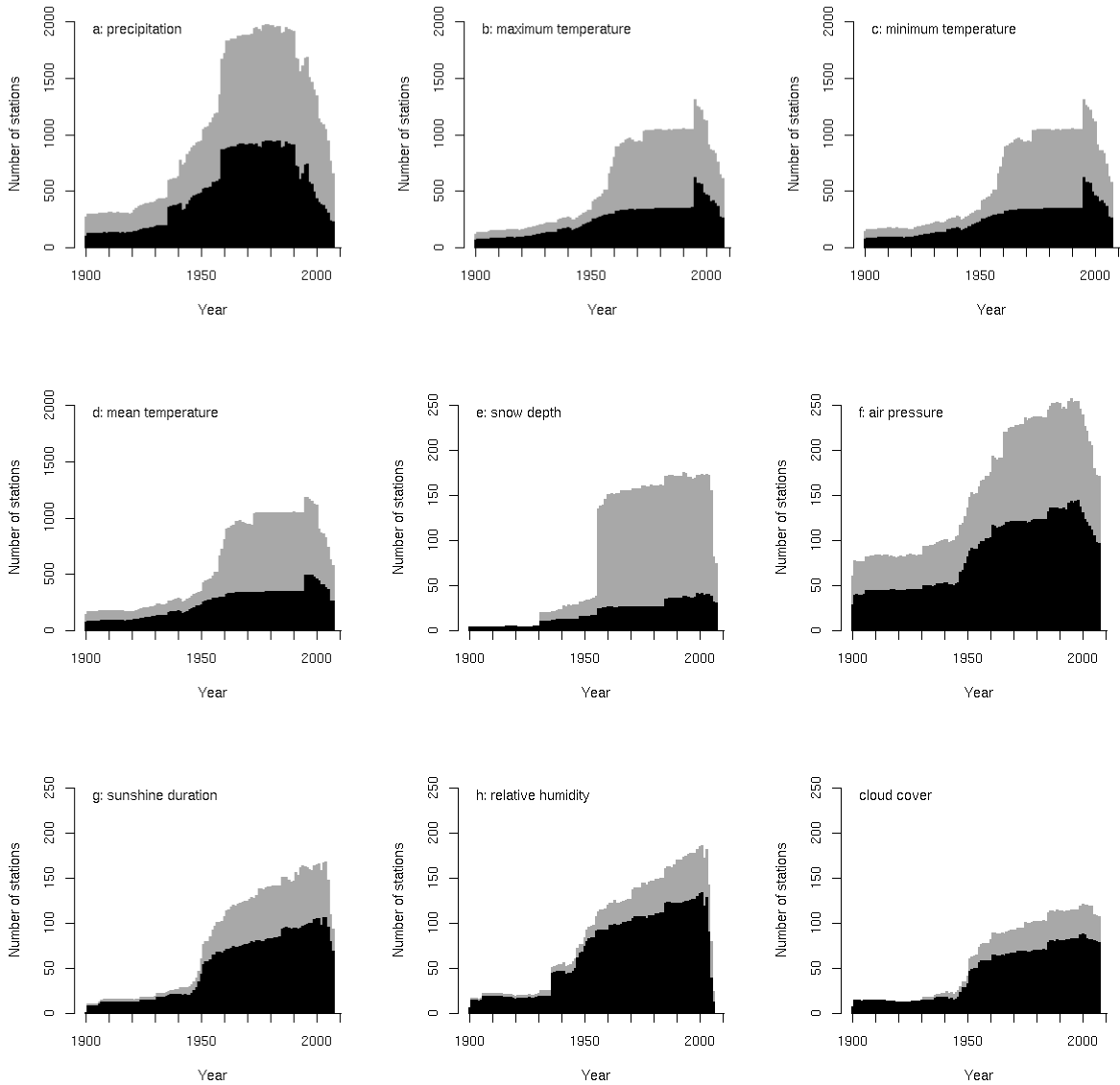


Figure 2. Number of series for each year for precipitation (a), maximum temperature (b), minimum temperature (c), mean temperature (d), snow depth (e), air pressure (f), relative humidity (g), cloud cover (h) and sunshine duration (i) (status August 2007). The grey bars indicates the total number of series, the black bars the number of publicly available series. Note the two different y-scales for plots a-d and e-i.

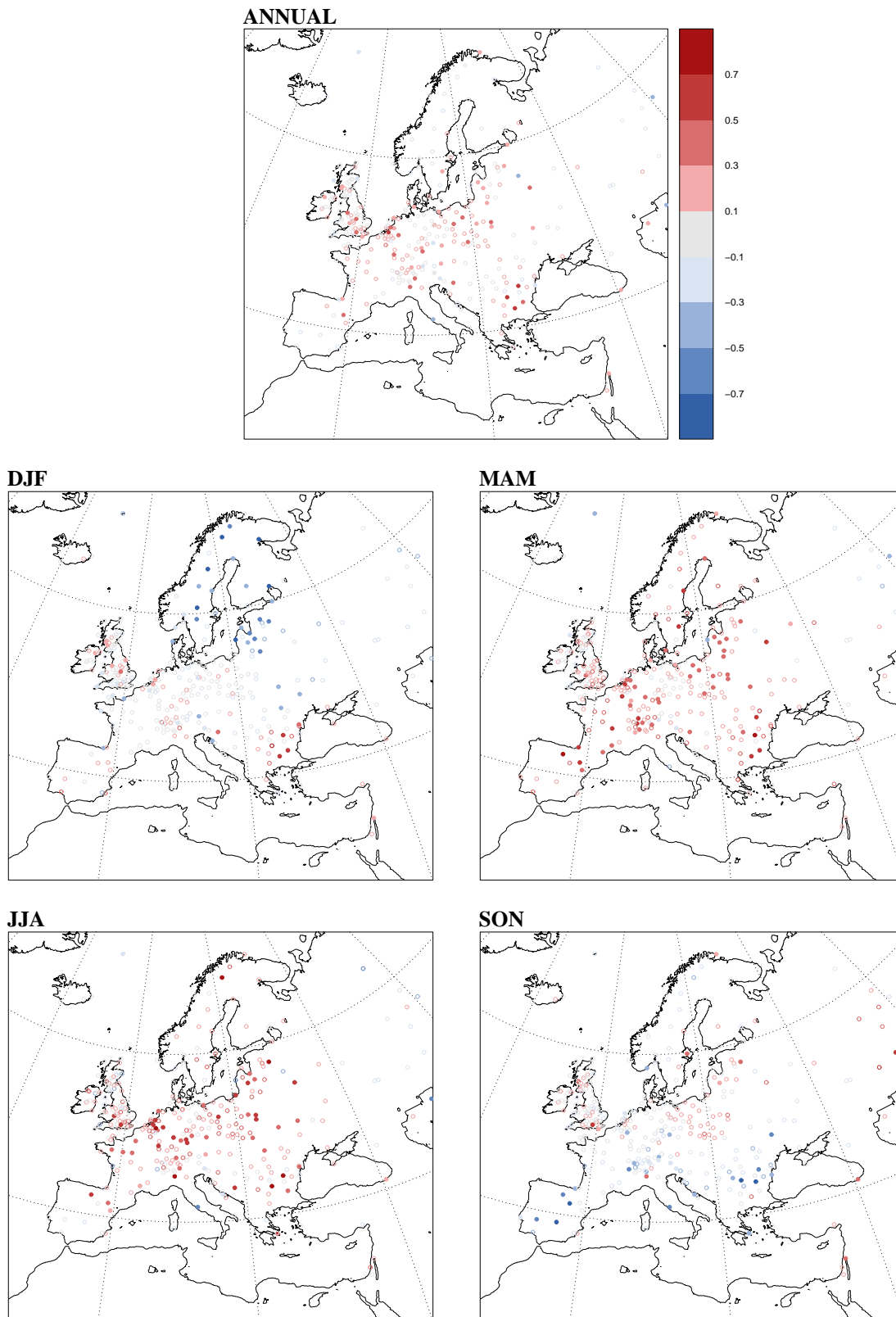


Figure 3. Linear trend in the annual and seasonal mean DTR for the period 1979 to 2005 ($^{\circ}\text{C decade}^{-1}$). Trends significant at the 5% level are indicated by solid dots, insignificant trends by open dots.