Peer reviewers' recommendations and *Statistical Office Of Montenegro* improvement actions in response to the recommendations

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Strengthen coordination within the National Statistical System

1. *The Statistical Office of Montenegro should elaborate a clear definition of "official statistics" to serve as a visible quality label certifying compliance with the European statistics Code of Practice and establish a mechanism, possibly a coordination committee attached to the Statistical Council, to assess which authorities produce "official statistics" and qualify as Other National Authority.*

Current situation:

The official statistical system of Montenegro is supported by a legal framework (of March 2012) that articulates the principles of official statistics (article 6) which are the fifteen principles of the CoP (though it does not attribute them explicitly). More generally it sets out the role of the 'competent body' and other official statistics producers, stipulates the professional independence of the Director of the Statistical Office, and provides for good confidentiality protection and an effective mandate for data collection. Article 7 of the Law on Official Statistics defines the National Statistical System with Monstat as the coordinating institution. Other National Authorities (ONAs) include the Central Bank of Montenegro, the Ministry of Finance and "other official statistics producers defined by the Official Statistics Programme". This Article in the Law defining producers of official statistics allows additional institutions to be authorised to produce official statistics in the statistical work programmes. The procedure for the Accession of Statistics Producers in the Official Statistics System of Montenegro (N° 1-293 of 9 February 2015) lists the following "other official statistics producers defined by the Official Statistics Programme 2014-2018": the Institute of Public Health, the Customs, the Tax Administration, Securities Office, the Health Insurance Fund and the Pension Fund and Insurance for Invalids. Furthermore, it contains criteria for assessing which authorities produce "official statistics". Thus, the procedure ensures that the list of ONAs doesn't contain institutions that only contribute to the production of official statistics, e.g. by collecting or giving access to raw data, or providing data processing services without being responsible for the overall production process and output quality (the so called 'contributors to European statistics' that are associated with the NSS, without being members thereof).

Improvement action 1.1: Establish a procedure containing assessment criteria and mechanism for "other official statistics producers defined by the Official Statistics Programme 2019-2023"

Monstat will undertake steps to establish a procedure containing assessment criteria and mechanism for "other official statistics producers defined by the Official Statistics Programme 2019-2023".

Timeline: 2020

Improvement action 1.2: Publish a text on the Official Statistics Portal (see recommendation 3) defining 'official statistics' and explaining the criteria to qualify as a producer of official statistics

To make users aware of the value of "official statistics" in Montenegro and the comparative advantages with other data, as well as on the role of the Official Statistical System, Monstat will publish a text on the Official Statistics Portal (see recommendation 3) defining 'official statistics' and explaining the criteria to qualify as a producer of official statistics.

Timeline: 2022

2. *The Statistical Office of Montenegro should support the Other National Authorities producing European statistics in implementing quality management to improve the overall quality of official statistics in Montenegro, providing further guidance and support in the form of technical assistance and training on implementing and monitoring quality in statistical processes and products. It should pay a particular attention to the timely accessibility of the Other National Authorities' quality reports and release them as soon as they are available.*

Current situation:

Monstat has established a good frame for coordinating the ONAs. Articles 20 to 24 of the Law on Official Statistics define the processes and content for establishing development strategies, multi-annual programmes and annual implementation plans and Article 26 defines the implementation reporting processes. The Law ensures that the relevant documents cover the entire statistical system and that ONAs are actively involved in the strategic development of the system. Furthermore, Monstat shares information about training opportunities and provides training to ONAs. It also compiles a statistical release calendar for official statistics of ONAs. Monstat publishes the quality reports of ONAs, but waits until all finalised reports are available.

Improvement action 2.1: Supporting ONAs in implementing quality management

Further technical assistance and regular training to ONAs on implementing quality management covering both statistical processes and products will be provided.

Timeline: 2020

Improvement action 2.2: Ensuring the release of the ONAs quality reports upon their availability

Finalised quality reports of ONAs will be published individually, as soon as available.

Timeline: 2020

3. *The Statistical Office of Montenegro should further strengthen its coordination role by publishing all official statistics via an Official Statistics Portal, according to a common release calendar and accompanied by standard metadata and quality reports. Such a portal could for example consist of a page on the Statistical Office's website with links to the official statistics on the ONA's websites and contain summary descriptions on the National Statistical System and the role and statistics of each of the ONAs.*

Current situation:

Currently, the ONAs publish their statistics on their own websites and Monstat's website contains no links to the ONAs' statistics. A website publishing all official statistics in the same place offers a good channel to promote the scope of the NSS and products published by ONAs.

Improvement action 3: Creating an Official Statistics Portal on Monstat's website, including links to the official statistics on the ONAs' websites

An official statistics portal on Monstat's website will be created with a special logo for official statistics and links to the official statistics on the ONAs' websites.
Timeline: 2022

Increase resources and cost-effectiveness

4. *In line with the Commitment on Confidence, the Montenegro national authorities should ensure adequate resources and premises to enable the National Statistical Office to fulfil its national and international obligations.*

Current situation:

The current number of employees is not sufficient to fulfil all obligations within the deadline of 2020 defined by the Government of Montenegro as the ultimate fulfilment of all obligations arising from the EU integration process. In addition, in several domains Monstat has only one employee for one or more areas covered by chapter 18, putting at risk the sustainability of the production of such statistics. Monstat's number of employees has been about the same for five years. The current regular staff increase of five employees per year is cancelled out by a similar turnover of staff who are not automatically replaced and this results in no real staff increase over time. The current premises of Monstat are inadequate. The building is old and shared with the Commercial Court, and does not offer the space needed for a National Statistics Institute. Access to the building is not restricted and the room to store questionnaires and archives is not adequate.

Improvement action 4: Ensuring adequate resources and premises for Monstat

Action to solve the premises' issue will be reinforced and the procedure to strengthen human resources will be improved.

Timeline: 2021

5. *The Statistical Office of Montenegro should streamline its programming process to articulate the mid-term strategy and the annual programme in a less time-consuming manner.*

Current situation:
Programming of statistical activities in the NSS is based on a three-tier procedure. At the first level, Monstat prepares a Development Strategy in cooperation with the ONAs for a period of at least three years as requested by article 20 of the Statistical Law. Currently, the strategic plan covers five years, 2014-2018. The Development Strategy of Official Statistics determines the long-term goals based on the current state of affairs, needs and future development. The second level is a five-year programme of official statistics, referring to the same five-year period of the Development Strategy as well as for the current one to the period for which the Government of Montenegro is preparing the Programme for the Accession of Montenegro to the EU. Monstat also prepares an annual plan of official statistics, which is the third level of programming. However, the process to elaborate the annual programme is quite lengthy and time consuming for the unit in charge. The process starts in March, and last year, three meetings were organised with the ONAs. A first draft of the annual plan is prepared in June, from the proposals coming from the units of Monstat and the ONAs. In the meantime, the release calendar is prepared. In September, a second draft is prepared after consultations with ONAs. The annual plan is then discussed in a meeting of the Steering Committee of Monstat. After approval by the Steering Committee, a third draft is finalised and sent to the Statistical Council for approval, and later to the Ministry of Finance for approval and further transmission to the Government Secretariat.

Improvement action 5: Streamlining the programming processes to make procedures for mid-term strategy and annual programming less time-consuming

Establish a WG of all producers of official statistics to elaborate ways of streamlining programming processes with a view to make them less time-consuming.

Timeline: 2019

6. *In order to increase cost-effectiveness, the Statistical Office of Montenegro should develop a light mechanism to monitor the use of human resources by main phases of each statistical operation, including training activities.*

Current situation:

Monstat has not introduced an accounting system that registers the working time of each staff member, classified to particular statistical activities. This prevents Monstat from analysing the time spent developing or implementing each statistical operation, comparing resource consumption and identifying potential productivity gains.

Improvement action 6: Creating an application to measure the working time spent by each staff member per activity

An application measuring the working time spent by each staff member per activity will be created.

Timeline: 2021

7. *The Statistical Office of Montenegro should engage in the use of quality management tools such as process analysis and the development of modules of the Generic Statistical Business Process Model (GSBPM) in order to increase the cost-effectiveness of the statistical processes and to enhance the quality of the statistical products.*

Current situation:

The quality management system is based on the principles of the Total Quality Management (TQM) and promotes the participation of employees with a process orientation approach. Processes will be analysed using the GSBPM as a framework to describe the components of statistical activities. In 2019, a working group is mapping the activities of five processes with the GSBPM framework, to serve as a pilot and to be further extended to all statistical processes.

Improvement action 7: Using process mapping with a focus on increasing cost-effectiveness and enhancing the quality of statistical products

Process mapping (using the GSBPM) will be used to improve Monstat's processes and focus on seeking productivity gains and enhancing the quality of statistical products.

Timeline: 2020

8. *The Statistical Office of Montenegro should continue developing modern data collection methods, such as Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI), Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI), and Computer Assisted Web Interview (CAWI)*

for business as well as household surveys in order to improve efficiency, increase data quality and reduce the response burden.

Current situation:

Monstat started electronic data collection in 2015 using the Computer Assisted Web Interview (CAWI) method for business surveys. A web portal allows businesses to access securely (each responding unit has its own account) and fill in the electronic questionnaire. Currently, Monstat uses the CAWI method for the data collection of four surveys. Monstat is also using the Computer Assisted Personal Interview (CAPI) method for other statistical operations, such as household surveys. The further development of electronic data collection will increase the cost-effectiveness of statistical operations and the production of higher quality statistics.

Improvement action 8: Increasing the use of the CAWI and CAPI data collection methods and introducing the CATI data collection method

The use of the CAWI and CAPI data collection methods will be increased and the CATI data collection method will be introduced.

Timeline: 2021

9. ***The Statistical Office of Montenegro should continue developing the use of administrative sources and work with the relevant national authorities to ensure that all legal barriers restricting the access to personal identifiers are removed, in particular to allow a full register-based census to be conducted for the 2021 round and thus reducing significantly the cost of the census as well as the response burden.***

Current situation: Monstat is already using administrative sources and has signed 20 memoranda of understanding with owners of administrative data to facilitate the use of administrative data for statistical purposes. Memoranda of understanding include joint agreements concerning security of the data, the provision of files with individual data and delivery deadlines and information about the statistical operations in which the data will be used. Monstat is in the process of changing the Statistical Law to have access to all registers with personal identifiers, whatever their specific regulations. Official support from the Government to the amendment was received in February 2018, and in March Monstat received confirmation from the EU Commission that the amendment was in line with the Regulation (EC) No 223/2009 on European statistics. In the meantime, Monstat conducts a series of consultations with other ministries, as they also must change some articles in their laws. In particular, the Law on Personal Data Protection will have to be changed: it is also currently under revision by the Agency for Personal Data Protection and Free Access to Information to harmonise with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Besides the population register, it is necessary to establish an address register. Currently, the population register includes for the address only a code for city, street and house number, but no geographical coordinates. The Address Register will be used to include the dwelling code in the Population Register. This will allow the identification of the members of the households (persons living in the same dwelling). The Cadastre is expected to use the Address Register to include information on dwellings (such as floor space, and number of rooms). The Address Register is expected to be completed by 2020.

Improvement action 9.1: Amending the Law of official statistics and the official statistical system to have access to all registers with personal identifiers

The Law on official statistics and official statistical system will be amended.

Timeline: 2019

Improvement action 9.2: Working with other national authorities that must also change their laws to ensure that all legal barriers restricting the access to personal identifiers are removed

Monstat will continue to work with national authorities that must also change their laws to ensure that all legal barriers restricting the access to personal identifiers are removed.

Timeline: 2019

Develop user orientation

10. *The Statistical Office of Montenegro should take steps to develop more proactive relationships with a wide range of users and potentials users of official statistics. As a first step, identify categories of users and plan appropriate engagement activities - formal and informal - to improve understanding of the decisions and actions made by such users, and how Montenegrin official statistics can support them.*

Current situation:

All aspects of the way in which statistics are compiled, processed and disseminated should reflect users' needs. This sounds straightforward but, in practice, it requires NSIs to develop and maintain relationships with institutions and individuals who have other priorities, and who might not be in a position to readily describe their needs. It also requires NSIs to prioritise their statistical activities, so that they are addressing the most important issues facing those who need to make decisions based on official statistics, or who wish to do so. The more limited the NSI's resources, the less it will be able to satisfy all users; hence there is an important need to have effective relationships so that users do not become dissatisfied with the NSI. In the case of Montenegro, where approximately 90 percent of statistical activity is focused on the EU acquis, there is limited scope to meet needs for additional data.

Monstat prepared a proposal for the Program of official statistics for the period from 2019 to 2023, which was available to all users of official statistics in the period from 31 July to 5 September 2018. During this period, users had the opportunity to submit their suggestions, changes, and proposals to include new surveys. MONSTAT included 78% of total number of suggestions and new surveys through Program of Official statistics 2019 -2023.

Improvement action 10: Identifying categories of users and planning appropriate engagement activities for each user category

Monstat will group users based on their needs indicated in user satisfaction survey (USS), organise fora of active users of statistical data in order to better identify their needs for statistical data and organise educational activities, such as public discussions, seminars, conferences, thematic workshops with interested users.

Timeline: 2021

11. *The Montenegro national authorities should review the composition of the Statistical Council with a view to ensuring that it provides more representation of users of official statistics working outside state institutions - including civil society, trade unions, the media, and local authorities. In the short-term, the Statistical Office of Montenegro should develop the existing*

Council page on its website so that it presents the Council as a distinct entity, and publish papers, minutes and formal opinions.

Current situation:

Articles 12-17 and article 19 of the Statistical Law establish the Council of the Statistical System, usually referred to as the Statistical Council. Article 14 outlines the composition and appointment of the Council – it has 17 members, drawn from specified institutions (such as Ministries) or sectors (such as business associations). Membership of the Council is voluntary, without reimbursement. The Council meets about four times a year and conducts other business via email. The Council does not have its own website; instead its internet presence is via a page on the website of Monstat. However, this web page does not provide links to material such as agendas and papers, or formal opinions.

Improvement action 11.1: Developing the existing Council page on Monstat's website so that it presents the Council as a distinct entity

Monstat will develop the existing Statistical Council page on its website and publish papers, minutes and formal opinions.

Timeline: 2019

Improvement action 11.2: Reviewing the composition of the Statistical Council

The composition of the Statistical Council will be reviewed by launching a new convocation of the members as defined in Article 14 of the Law of official statistics and the official statistical system.

Timeline: 2019

12. ***The Statistical Office of Montenegro should review statistical releases from a range of EU member states from the perspective of user-orientation, and implement a plan to enhance statistical releases across the statistical system. Such enhancements should place an emphasis on geographical comparability (across Montenegro, with other Western Balkan countries, and EU member states) and comparability over time, as well as improving visualisation and providing value-added analysis to help users understand the main messages**.

Current situation:

Monstat does not have a common approach to its statistical releases, so there is variation in the main dimensions of comparability (geographical, temporal, and demographic (such as gender and age) and variation in the use and format of tables and charts. when users request supplementary information, Monstat provides it. Monstat has comparable data with EU countries for many of its releases, but not for all.

Improvement action 12.1: Enhancing statistical releases by ensuring variation in the main dimensions of comparability (geographical, temporal and demographic such as gender and comparability over time, including age and sex) Based on examples from a range of EU Member States

Based on examples from a range of EU Member States, a new form for statistical releases will be developed to bring figures to life - trying to understand what user would like to have and ensure variation in the main dimensions of comparability (geographical, temporal and demographic such as gender and age).

Timeline: 2021

Improvement action 12.2: Training staff in writing releases

Staff will be trained in writing releases.

Timeline: 2021

Improvement action 12.3: Using infographics for the most commonly used statistical fields

Info-graphics will be used for the most commonly used statistical fields.

Timeline: 2021

13. *The Statistical Office of Montenegro should develop and implement a plan to engage effectively with the media, bringing dedicated specialist expertise to bear. Such a plan should be based on a recognition that the media play a vital role in statistical dissemination and in influencing public perceptions of official statistics.*

Current situation:

Monstat's relationship with the media is not very strong. There is no proactive engagement with the media, nor media training for staff. In December 2018, Monstat organised a meeting with the media.

Improvement action 13.1: Developing a social media strategy

A social media strategy will be developed.

Timeline: 2020

Improvement action 13.2: Training staff training in dealing with media

Staff will be trained in dealing with media.

Timeline: 2020

Improvement action 13.3: Organising quarterly meetings with the media

Quarterly meetings will be organised with the media.

Timeline: 2020

14. *The Statistical Office of Montenegro should prioritise the development of a modern website as the primary tool for disseminating official statistics, ensuring that it supports browsing from mobile phones and tablets and enables users to interact with it, for example in producing their own tables and charts. As a first step, create a Twitter account and use it to draw attention to the key*

messages in new statistical releases.

Current situation:

Current website requires significant improvement. There is no options such as accessibility using different types of devices, particularly mobile phones and tablets; improved graphics; interactive charts and tables, enabling the user to select data items (such as years, or geographic areas) to produce their own graphics; reference databases, etc. Monstat does not use social network as communication channel with users.

Improvement action 14: Developing a modern website, supporting browsing from mobile phones and tablets as well as interactive charts and tables and create a Twitter account

A modern website, supporting browsing from mobile phones and tablets as well as interactive charts and tables, will be developed and a Twitter account created and used to draw attention to the key messages in new statistical releases.

Timeline: 2021