



EUROPEAN
STATISTICAL
SYSTEM

PEER REVIEW REPORT

ON COMPLIANCE WITH THE EUROPEAN STATISTICS CODE OF
PRACTICE AND FURTHER IMPROVEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE
NATIONAL STATISTICAL SYSTEM

Slovakia

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Slovak statistical system has a strong legal framework for the development, production and dissemination of European and state statistics. According to Act No. 540/2001 on State Statistics, the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic is the central authority of the state administration in the field of state (official) statistics. Other central government authorities developing, producing and disseminating official statistics are part of the Slovak statistical system. The Act on State Statistics also defines the basic principles of state statistics, in line with the European statistics Code of Practice (professional independence, impartiality, objectivity, reliability, statistical confidentiality and cost-effectiveness) and quality criteria (relevance, accuracy, timeliness, punctuality, accessibility and comprehensibility, comparability and coherence), which the authorities that are part of the Slovak statistical system are obliged to observe.

The 2021 amendment to the Act on State Statistics strengthened the position of the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic as the coordinator of the Slovak statistical system and set up a Coordination Council for State Statistics. The Council coordinates, inter alia, the Programme of State Statistical Surveys and the quality framework of the Slovak statistical system. Communication in the Slovak statistical system is facilitated by a dedicated platform, which is part of the Unified Information System of State Statistics, a communication portal established to coordinate activities within the Slovak statistical system. In addition, a logo is used to identify official statistics produced by the Slovak statistical system.

The Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic is well considered, its independence is not questioned, and its products are regarded as objective and of high quality. Quality considerations are embedded in the working methods of the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic and implemented through regular quality audits and reviews, quality reports and staff training. Cooperation with the scientific community is strong and regular. The Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic has created a motivating working environment for its staff, offering a large range of training schemes, including an induction programme for newcomers. Training schemes are also offered to the Other National Authorities, helping to strengthen coordination and cooperation. Due to the relative scarcity of its resources, the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic practices strict activity-based costing and monitoring of the use of resources, which helps to better manage the available resources.

The Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic strives to reduce the response burden, for example by optimising the sample for small businesses and introducing partial pre-filling of electronic forms in business surveys. It also relies on the intensive use of administrative data and has concluded almost 50 agreements with data providers to guarantee secure access to their administrative data. In recent years, the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic has started using privately held data, such as retailer scanner data, and experimentation with toll and mobile network data is ongoing as well as with data from web scraping. The 2021 Population and Housing Census was conducted in a combined way, using nine administrative data sources to complement direct data collection.

The Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic takes confidentiality and security of data very seriously, having been certified for the ISO 27001 standard, and applying the IT security framework of the European Statistical System and national legislation on cyber security.

The Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic disseminates statistics via its website and the DATAcube portal, allowing users to select variables in tables. It has introduced the open data functionality (Representational State Transfer – Application Programming Interface) with the highest number of published open data sets within the Slovak state administration. Furthermore, it has started to use social networks, video tools and interactive graphs.

The Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic actively fosters statistical literacy, producing special online products for students called 'Statistics made easy'. As a result, the country received an award in the European statistics competition for secondary schools in 2022.

Overall, the peer review team considers that the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic and the Slovak statistical system demonstrate a high level of compliance with the European statistics Code of Practice and have made good progress since the last peer review. However, one compliance-relevant and twenty improvement-related recommendations were identified and grouped under four major headings as listed below.

RECOMMENDATIONS

I. Strengthening the Institutional Environment

According to the 2001 Act on State Statistics, the President of the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic is appointed and dismissed by the President of the Slovak Republic on the government's proposal. However, there are no regulations specifying how the government pre-selects candidates, the criteria used, what qualifications are required and how potential candidates are informed of the opening of the procedure so that they can express their interest in the post. Although the independence of the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic and its President has not been questioned to date, the lack of transparency of the procedures for appointing the President of the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic carries a risk of political interference.

To comply with the ES CoP, the peer review team recommends:

1. The relevant authorities should amend the legislation to make the procedure for the recruitment and appointment of the President of the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic more transparent and based on professional criteria. (Compliance-relevant: ES CoP, Indicator 1.8)

The Coordination Council for State Statistics coordinates tasks related to the planning and reporting of statistical work, the development of a methodological and quality framework, methodological guidance, monitoring of quality and compliance with the basic principles of state statistics, transmission and dissemination of statistical data, opinions on the provisions of the Act on State Statistics and related legislation, and other matters of state statistics. Its inaugural meeting took place in May 2021 and regular annual meetings were held in December 2021 and December 2022. At the time of the peer review, the Coordination Council had not yet discussed all the topics listed in its statute, mainly due to the lack of meetings. It is therefore recommended that the Coordination Council for State Statistics, under the leadership of the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, reviews its meeting schedule and work content in order to fulfil its mandate and improve the coordination of the Slovak statistical system.

To improve beyond compliance with the ES CoP, the peer review team recommends:

2. The Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic should further develop the work and functioning of the Coordination Council for State Statistics so that it systematically fulfils its mandate and is used as a dynamic tool for coordination in the Slovak statistical system. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicators 1bis.1 and 1bis.3)

Increasing digitalisation multiplies the volume of information that can potentially be used to produce official statistics. The use of privately held data is a way of decreasing the burden imposed on respondents by statistical surveys, producing more timely and granular statistics, and enriching or creating new statistics. Cooperation between the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic and private data holders in Slovakia is ongoing. Although there are good practices in the use of privately held data

in Slovakia, such as the use of scanner data and motorway toll data, the long-term, sustainable availability of such data and access to them are not legally formalised. It is, however, needed to maintain the stability of a statistical production process based on such data.

To improve beyond compliance with the ES CoP, the peer review team recommends:

3. The relevant government authorities should ensure that appropriate legal provisions are in place to grant the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic access to privately held data for the development, production and dissemination of official statistics. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicator 2.4)

The Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic provides certain news agencies with pre-release access to information, under embargo. While the website mentions this fact, there is no clear, publicly available policy setting out guidelines and rules for the advance provision of statistical information to specific individuals or groups, including the designation of recipients, duration of access, security measures, confidentiality and non-disclosure.

Much of the information published by National Statistical Institutes is very sensitive and useful for decision-making, so simultaneous access should be given to all external users. Furthermore, although no breach of confidentiality has ever been observed, the difficulty of controlling possible leaks of information must be considered. To address this risk, it is preferable to maintain equal and simultaneous access for all users.

To improve beyond compliance with the ES CoP, the peer review team recommends:

4. The Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic should provide equal access to all users. If pre-release practices are continued, the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic should ensure that pre-release access for external users is limited, well-justified, controlled and publicised on its website. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicator 6.7)

The Slovak statistical system comprises 13 Other National Authorities developing, producing and disseminating European statistics. However, most of them send very little data directly to Eurostat, which is one of the criteria to be considered as an Other National Authority. Among the three Other National Authorities reviewed, only two staff members in two of them work on statistics. It may therefore be more efficient for these authorities to act as providers of data and for the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic to process these data and produce the corresponding European statistics, following the principles of the ES CoP. In addition, the heads of the Other National Authorities designated by the relevant ministries are not always the persons responsible for producing statistics, instead they may be a line supervisor, potentially raising an issue as regards taking responsibility for the methodology as required by the ES CoP.

To improve beyond compliance with the ES CoP, the peer review team recommends:

5. The Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic should initiate a reflection on the set-up of the Slovak statistical system to define an efficient division of labour between the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic and the Other National Authorities developing, producing and disseminating European statistics. During this reflection, particular attention should be paid to the ES CoP requirement that the head of the Other National Authority has sole responsibility for deciding on statistical methods, standards and procedures. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicators 1.4 and 1bis.1)

II. Optimising the Use of Resources

Maintaining statistical production while investing in the production of new statistics, exploring the use of new sources of information to reduce the reporting burden, improving quality and striving to satisfy increasing user needs all require significant investment and additional resources in personnel and technology. They are also needed to enable the development of a competitive internal workforce and to retain experienced staff to meet current and new challenges. The relevant government authorities should ensure that adequate additional human and financial resources are available to the Slovak statistical system.

To improve beyond compliance with the ES CoP, the peer review team recommends:

6. The relevant government authorities should continuously ensure that adequate human and financial resources are available to the Slovak statistical system to meet current and new statistical needs, to cope with technology developments and to exploit the potential of new data sources for an improved service to users. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicator 3.1)

The Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic publishes a catalogue of training and other courses and has a continuous professional training plan for its employees. The use in practice of the acquired knowledge and skills is continuously and comprehensively evaluated by senior managers within the framework of the annual evaluation of staff members. In addition, employees' individual competency training plans take into account the competencies necessary for the performance of their tasks.

New methods of data collection, new sources of information and new technologies require specialised personnel. It is therefore necessary to increase the effectiveness of the system of training for statistical positions by using the competency matrices developed from the competency catalogue, which is based on the new needs/tasks of the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic.

To improve beyond compliance with the ES CoP, the peer review team recommends:

7. The Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic should continue to develop the competency matrices to improve staff skills, ensuring that skills are aligned with the requirements of new data collection methods, new data sources and new technologies. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicator 7.6)

Processes in the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic are all organised in accordance with the requirements of the ISO 9001 standard. Generic process descriptions and guidelines are shared and accessible to all employees via the intranet. At a more detailed level, domain-specific units and process owners are responsible for creating process descriptions and other related documents, but this is not done systematically or regularly. Practices tend to be significantly uneven among domains and process owners both in terms of sharing documents and ensuring their timeliness. This means that there are no up-to-date, detailed descriptions for some processes, resulting in a slowdown in the harmonisation and standardisation of the processes needed to ensure the quality of the output and the most efficient use of resources. It is therefore recommended that the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic continues to describe processes in all statistical domains at a detailed level in order to use the possibilities offered by standardised approaches for process optimisation.

To improve beyond compliance with the ES CoP, the peer review team recommends:

8. The Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic should optimise all statistical processes based on detailed process descriptions, guidelines and visual mapping. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicators 8.3, 10.1 and 4.1)

The Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic faces difficulties in attracting young professionals due to the differences in salary with other public administration bodies. The current age structure, however, makes it essential to attract and recruit young professionals in the coming years, for example by

regularly offering internships to students of statistics and economics. Internship is a good way of discovering the reality and interestingness of work in a statistical office, and in particular the motivating working environment offered by the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, and should therefore be actively promoted.

To improve beyond compliance with the ES CoP, the peer review team recommends:

9. The Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic should develop more systematic and planned incentives to attract and retain young talent, especially university graduates. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicators 7.5 and 3.1)

The exchange of information between businesses and the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic is an essential part of the statistical production process. While the information needed for statistics is readily available in the IT systems of businesses, data compilation and transmission remain burdensome for businesses and causes delays. Automating the retrieval of the data needed for statistics will improve the efficiency of the statistical production process.

To improve beyond compliance with the ES CoP, the peer review team recommends:

10. The Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic should further develop automated ways of collecting data from data providers to reduce the burden on businesses and speed up data collection. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicator 9.3)

Under the governance of the Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic, European statistics are currently produced by two units in the Migration Office and one unit in the Bureau of Border and Alien Police. Additionally, a Chief Statistician (head of the department of operational management of the fire department) has been appointed to coordinate the production of statistics in the Ministry. It was noted that contacts and cooperation between the units take place randomly or based on emerging needs, rather than systematically and regularly. The lack of such support and central coordination and cooperation is a missed opportunity in a situation where the field of statistics has long been understaffed at the Migration Office and in the Ministry in general. The Ministry of Interior should reflect on the setup for the production of European statistics in its area of governance and decide how to create and implement more systematic, regular approaches, and consider a greater centralisation of activities and jobs related to the production of statistics.

To improve beyond compliance with the ES CoP, the peer review team recommends:

11. The Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic should centralise the production of European statistics in the areas under its responsibility. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicator 10.4)

III. Embedding Quality Management Approaches throughout the National Statistical System

While methodology issues are discussed internally in the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic under the auspices of the Methodology Directorate, the Other National Authorities do not consult the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic systematically when they set up new statistical operations. It would be useful to create a methodology committee, with the involvement of external experts, to examine the methodology of new European statistics produced by the Slovak statistical system, analyse major revisions of existing statistical operations, evaluate statistical methods and propose new methodological solutions.

To improve beyond compliance with the ES CoP, the peer review team recommends:

12. The Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, in cooperation with the Other National Authorities developing, producing and disseminating European statistics, should establish a Methodology Committee involving external experts with the objective of advising on the methodology of new European statistics produced in the Slovak statistical system and on major revisions of existing statistical operations. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicators 7.1, 7.2, 12.3 and 4.2)

An important part of the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic's management system is a list of indicators describing the performance of various processes, and quality audits are systematically carried out with the help of these indicators. However, employees find the system of performance indicators complicated since, among other things, they are not aware of the indicators related to the organisation's strategic goals. Additionally, when conducting quality audits based on performance indicators, the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic has limited its focus to the functions and phases of production, rather than covering the statistics production line based on the Generic Statistical Business Process Model as a whole. Therefore, the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic should analyse its system of performance indicators and make it more efficient, understandable and usable. This will ensure that quality audits are even more systematic and regular and will cover the entire Programme of State Statistical Surveys in accordance with the production line based on the Generic Statistical Business Process Model.

To improve beyond compliance with the ES CoP, the peer review team recommends:

13. The Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic should further develop the system of performance indicators and quality reviews, by using a process-oriented approach. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicators 4.2 and 4.3)

According to the Act on State Statistics, the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic shall monitor the quality of state statistics and compliance with the basic principles of state statistics. Monitoring is regularly carried out in the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, through approaches based on ISO 9001 standard requirements. Additionally, methodological audits for Other National Authorities shall be carried out annually by the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic as a coordinator of the Slovak statistical system. However, to date, quality audits have not been organised systematically and regularly for the Other National Authorities.

To improve beyond compliance with the ES CoP, the peer review team recommends:

14. The Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic should implement systematic and regular quality reviews of the production of European statistics in the Other National Authorities developing, producing and disseminating European statistics. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicator 1bis.2)

The Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic has started to develop a Unified Information System of State Statistics to standardise statistical production processes, coordinate and evaluate the statistical products of the authorities performing state statistics and to facilitate the conduct and processing of state statistical surveys. The Unified Information System of State Statistics attempts to cover all the phases of the Generic Statistical Business Process Model but is currently in the testing phase and does not yet cover all the phases of the Business Process Model. Once finalised and implemented, statistical processes will be standardised, improving their efficiency.

To improve beyond compliance with the ES CoP, the peer review team recommends:

15. The Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic should extend the coverage of the Unified Information System of State Statistics to all phases of the Generic Statistical Business Process Model in order to standardise and improve the efficiency of statistical processes. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicator 7.2)

IV. Meeting User Needs in a Changing Data Environment

The Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic regularly consults users about their satisfaction in using its products and services. When the draft decree of the Programme of State Statistical Surveys is sent out, users have an opportunity to express their needs. However, there is no formal mechanism to collect and address the needs of Slovak society, beyond the traditional users, and to reach out to potential new users.

To improve beyond compliance with the ES CoP, the peer review team recommends:

16. The Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic should strengthen and institutionalise its user engagement by developing a strategy to identify and reach new user groups to engage wider sections of society. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicator 11.1)

The Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic is highly dependent on the use of administrative data but has no formal mechanism to be informed about the development of new administrative data. As an integral part of the national data ecosystem and dependent on its further developments, the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic should play a more active role in monitoring digitalisation efforts within the public administration, with the aim of understanding and benefiting from the development of the national data ecosystem, including the development of administrative data. The role of national data steward could also be considered, if deemed appropriate.

To improve beyond compliance with the ES CoP, the peer review team recommends:

17. The Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic should further develop a vision for its role in the emerging national data ecosystem and could consider the role of data stewardship. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicator 8.7)

The Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic has already successfully invested in the use of new data sources for producing statistics from scanner data, the motorway toll system and mobile network data. Given the potential of innovative data sources for statistics beyond those already used, the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic should increase its efforts to identify more new data sources and statistical domains in which methodological developments can accelerate the production of new experimental statistics.

To improve beyond compliance with the ES CoP, the peer review team recommends:

18. The Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic should further explore the use of new data sources to develop experimental statistics and extend the scope of the production of official statistics. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicators 10.3 and 2.4)

The Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic provides access to microdata for scientific purposes to legal entities - research institutions, universities and analytical units - through the Research Data Centre located in its premises. The Research Data Centre allows secure, controlled access to information but limits the use of software to that provided by the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic. The number of researchers who can access the data is also limited, as this is only possible at the headquarters of the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic. Remote access to microdata should be provided to the scientific community to extend access to a larger group of researchers and allow researchers to use their own software.

To improve beyond compliance with the ES CoP, the peer review team recommends:

19. The Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic should further improve the service provided to academia by providing researchers with a secure environment for remote access to microdata. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicator 15.4)

The Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic disseminates statistical products through various dissemination and communication channels targeting different user groups, including the web portal, the DATAcube. database, social networks and open data through the National Open Data Portal. However, some users have difficulties in accessing data. In the latest user satisfaction survey (2022), users suggested that data should be presented in a clearer and more user-friendly way, and the DATAcube. database ranked last in satisfaction with the products and services provided by the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic. Improving website accessibility, making the application more user-friendly and modernising data dissemination (digital products, dashboards, video, maps) would provide a better service to users.

To improve beyond compliance with the ES CoP, the peer review team recommends:

20. The Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic should make access to information more user-friendly and useful by redesigning the current dissemination platforms (such as website and DATAcube.), taking into account users' opinions. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicators 15.2 and 11.1)

Access to all outputs produced within the Slovak statistical system, with an indication of the date of their release, helps users plan their work and increases the transparency and credibility of the Slovak statistical system. All European statistics should have a prominent, clearly visible and easily accessible release calendar to foster their dissemination, including on the Other National Authorities' websites. While this is the case for the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, the Other National Authorities reviewed should improve the visibility of the European statistics they produce.

To improve beyond compliance with the ES CoP, the peer review team recommends:

21. The Other National Authorities reviewed (Slovak Hydrometeorological Institute, Migration Office, Administration of State Material Reserves) should enhance the visibility of the European statistics they produce, foster their dissemination on their website and display a release calendar. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicators 15.1, 15.2 and 6.5)

In the spirit of continuous improvement integral to the European Statistical System (ESS), the NSI will interpret the recommendations formulated in this report into improvement actions for implementation within the national statistical system (NSS).

2. INTRODUCTION

It is recognised that quality is one of the European Statistical System's (ESS) comparative advantages in a world experiencing a growing trend of instant information and new challenges, driven by exceptional circumstances or the continuous need for faster but quality-assured data. The European Statistics Code of Practice (ES CoP) is the cornerstone of the ESS common quality framework, and the ESS statistical authorities have committed themselves to adhere to it.

In this context, it is crucial for the ESS to be equipped with a review mechanism, the peer reviews, supporting with credible evidence this self-commitment to adhere to the ES CoP. The objective of this review mechanism is to enhance the integrity, professional independence and accountability of the ESS statistical authorities. The first round of peer reviews was carried out in 2006-2008, followed by a second round in 2013-2015.

In 2017, the ES CoP was reviewed and extended and now encompasses 16 principles. This revised version of the ES CoP triggered a third round of peer reviews, being carried out in the Member States of the European Union and of the European Free Trade Association, and Eurostat from 2021 to mid-2023. This round of peer reviews aims at improving the quality and trust in European statistics by assessing the compliance of the ESS with the principles of the revised ES CoP. The peer reviews cover the ESS statistical authorities (Eurostat, the National Statistical Institutes (NSIs) and selected Other National Authorities (ONAs)) developing, producing and disseminating European statistics. The peer reviews will be followed by a period of annual monitoring of the implementation of the improvement actions developed by the NSIs to address the recommendations laid down in the peer review reports.

The third round of peer reviews has the following two objectives:

- To review the compliance/alignment of the ESS with the ES CoP, in order to demonstrate to the ESS and to external stakeholders that the ESS is a system based on the principles of the ES CoP;
- To help NSIs, ONAs and Eurostat in their further improvement and development by indicating future-oriented recommendations; at the same time they should stimulate government authorities to support the implementation of these recommendations.

Each peer review is conducted by a team of four statistical experts (both from inside and outside the ESS). The peer review has four phases: completion of the Self-Assessment Questionnaires (SAQs) by a country; analysis of these SAQs by the peer review team; a country visit by the peer review team; and the preparation of the final report and ensuing recommendations by the peer review team. These recommendations are of two types:

- Compliance-relevant (ensuring compliance/alignment with the ES CoP);
- Improvement-related (less critical/technical supporting improvements).

A combination of an audit-like and a peer review approach is used when assessing the national statistical systems (NSS) in the countries to benefit from the positive aspects of both approaches. The audit-like approach requires the provision of documents as evidence, the ownership of the recommendations by the peer review expert team, and the right for the NSIs to express diverging views on the recommendations and to formulate the corresponding improvement actions. Whereas the peer review approach allows for common agreement within the ESS on the methodology, the objectives, scope and implementation arrangements, the focus on improvements and a peer learning process.

Although all principles of the ES CoP will be reviewed for all countries through the SAQ, the peer review experts are free to customise the country visit to concentrate on those principles where more clarification/explanation is needed. However, certain principles such as those concerning professional independence and coordination and cooperation, as well as principles including elements of modernisation, will be assessed during the peer review visit for every member of the ESS.

In addition to the common principles to be addressed for every member of the ESS, the peer review team also placed an emphasis on the management of quality in the Slovak statistical system, the use of resources and user engagement. The Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic has implemented a strong policy of quality management, including ISO 9001 certification. The peer review team therefore sought to find out whether quality management practices had become widespread within the Slovak statistical system, particularly in the Other National Authorities reviewed (ES CoP, Principles 1bis and 4). The scarcity of human resources reported by the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic led the peer review team to examine the adequacy of resources (ES CoP, Principle 3) and cost-effectiveness (ES CoP, Principle 10) to identify opportunities for improvement in the recruitment of staff and the optimisation of statistical processes. Finally, the peer review team examined the procedures for consulting users on the relevance of the statistical work programme (ES CoP, principle 11), as consultation seems to be limited to the opportunity to react to the publication of the draft decree of the Programme of State Statistical Surveys.

Also, although the reports should not be used to compare one country to another, much effort has been made to ensure the harmonisation of the reports and the ensuing recommendations across the countries so that all countries are treated equitably.

The peer review of Eurostat was conducted by the European Statistical Governance Advisory Board (ESGAB).

3. BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE NATIONAL STATISTICAL SYSTEM

Legislation

Pursuant to Section 26 of Act No. 575/2001 Coll. on the Organisation of Government Activities and the Organisation of the Central State Administration, the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic (SOSR) is the central authority of the state administration in the field of state statistics.

The main instrument regulating state statistics is Act 540/2001, amended by Act No. 144/2021 on State Statistics. The 2021 amendment to the Act on State Statistics clarifies, among other aspects, the definition of state statistics, strengthens the coordinating role of the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic within the Slovak statistical system and establishes the Coordination Council for State Statistics to ensure this coordination role.

The Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic is responsible for the development, production and dissemination of European statistics, and is the exclusive contact point for Eurostat (Section 5(1) of Act No. 540/2001 on State Statistics). It also coordinates the performance of other bodies producing state statistics (section 8.k of said Act).

The Slovak statistical system consists of the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, other central government authorities and government authorities with national competence established under a special regulation (hereinafter referred to as "other authorities performing state statistics").

The Act on State Statistics also defines the basic principles of state statistics (professional independence, impartiality, objectivity, reliability, statistical confidentiality and cost-effectiveness) and quality criteria (relevance, accuracy, timeliness, punctuality, accessibility and comprehensibility, comparability and coherence), which must be followed by all producers of state statistics.

Organisation

The SOSR is a budgetary organisation which is connected to the state budget of the Slovak Republic by its revenues and expenditures. The SOSR is managed by a President, who is responsible for its activities.

The SOSR consists of the headquarters (based in Bratislava) and eight regional statistical offices located in regional towns. The regional statistical offices are managed directly by the President of the SOSR. They are responsible for the collection and primary processing of domain-specific data for the whole country and provide information services to users in specific regions.

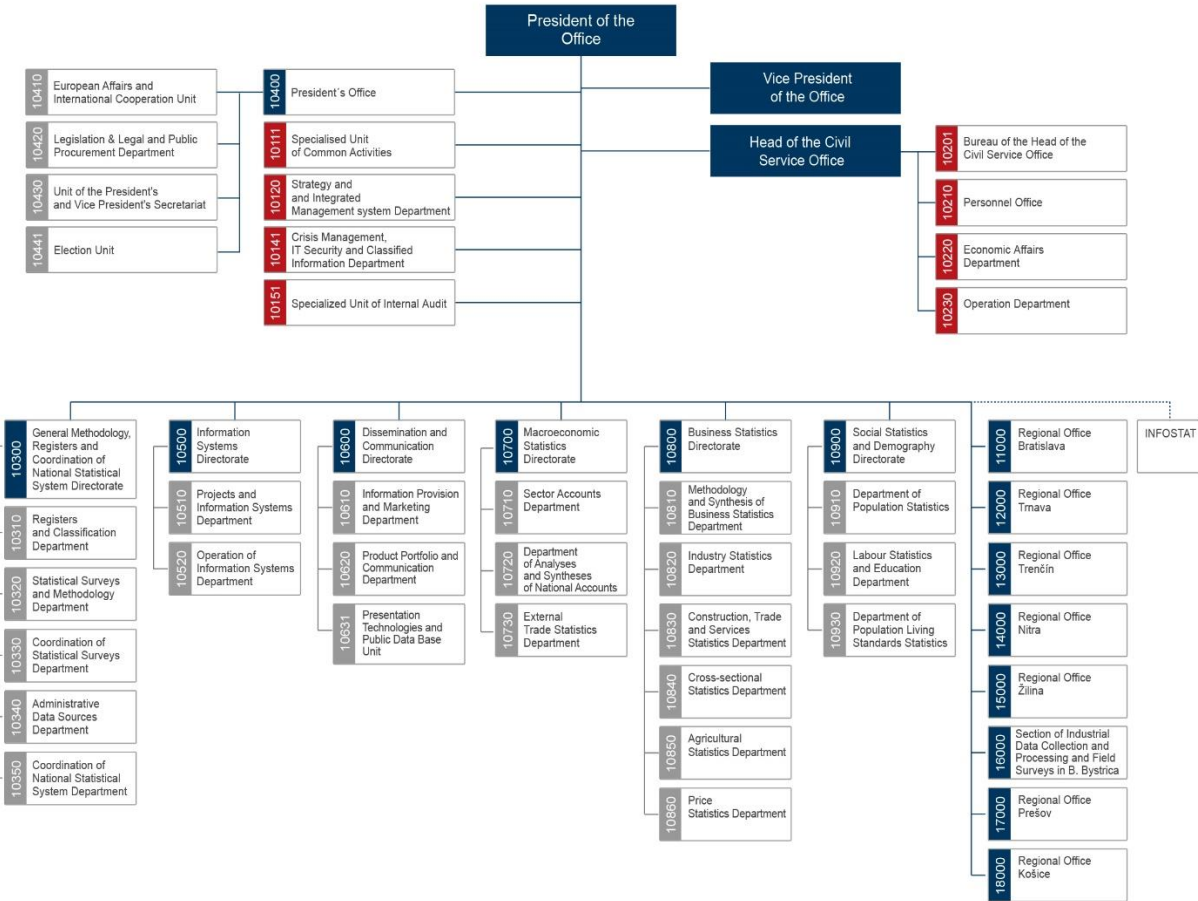
The President manages the SOSR with the support of the Vice-President (post currently vacant). In addition to the Head of the President's Office, the Secretary-General of the Civil Service Bureau and the Heads of the Units/Departments of Common Activities, Strategic and Integrated Management System, Crisis Management, IT Security and classified information, and Internal Audit, report directly to the President. The Heads of the three departments/units that do not have a statistical function per se (responsible for human resources, economic affairs and operations) are directly subordinate to the Office of the Secretary-General of the Civil Service Bureau.

Three main statistical sections (macroeconomic statistics, business statistics, social statistics and demography) and three supporting (cross-cutting) sections (general methodology, registers and coordination of the Slovak statistical system, dissemination and communication, information systems) are managed directly by the President.

The SOSR is the founder of the contributory organisation INFOSTAT - Institute of Informatics and Statistics, which implements research and development tasks related to state statistics, on the basis of annual contracts with the SOSR.

The SOSR has continuously maintained a quality management system that meets the requirements of both the ES CoP and ISO 9001.

Figure 1: Organisation chart of the Slovak Statistical Office



Source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic

Appointment procedures for the head of the NSI

According to Section 6.2 of the Act on State Statistics, the President of the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic shall be appointed and dismissed by the President of the Slovak Republic on the government's proposal. The position of President of the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic is incompatible with the performance of a function in another public authority, employment or a similar employment relationship, entrepreneurial activity, membership of the management or control body of a legal entity carrying out entrepreneurial activity, or with any other economic or gainful activity except the management of his/her own property. The term of the President shall be five years and he/she may be appointed for a maximum of two consecutive terms, after which he/she may not remain in office. The last presidents' average working time in the Office has been 7 and a half years. The current President was appointed in September 2022.

The President of the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic cannot be a member of the government and shall not be accountable for the performance of his/her duties to any Minister or to government. He/she may only be dismissed by the President of the Slovak Republic, upon the government's proposal, and only for the reasons listed exhaustively in the Act on State Statistics (section 7).

Statistical programmes

According to Section 12 of the Act on State Statistics, state statistical surveys shall be governed by a Programme of State Statistical Surveys drawn up by the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic in cooperation with other bodies carrying out state statistics for a period of three years. The SOSR shall issue the Programme of State Statistical Surveys by decree no later than 60 days before its entry into force.

As mentioned in Section 12 of the Act, other authorities performing state statistics and the bodies of the central state administration that do not perform state statistics shall submit to the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic their needs for state statistics produced by the Office (no later than 31 March of the year preceding the programme's entry into force), their proposals for own short-term state statistical surveys (before 30 April), and for their own long-term state statistical surveys (before 31 July).

Once the requirements of the authorities performing state statistics and the bodies of the central state administration that do not perform state statistics have been analysed and incorporated into the draft Programme, and if the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic considers the requests appropriate, it is submitted to the Coordination Council for State Statistics for comments. The SOSR then submits a request to the Ministry of Economy to decide on the obligation of the SOSR to conduct consultations with affected business entities in accordance with the Uniform Methodology for the Assessment of Selected Impacts. If the Ministry deems it appropriate, consultations with the affected business enterprises are carried out and the responses are sent to the Centre for Better Regulation. The next step is the legislative process of preparing the draft Decree on the Programme of State Statistical Surveys in accordance with the legislative regulations of the Government.

The current Programme of State Statistical Surveys is compiled for the years 2021 to 2023. It contains the list of state statistical surveys carried out by the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic (Annex 1), the list of national statistical surveys carried out by other authorities performing state statistics (Annex 2), the list of administrative data sources used for state statistics (Annex 3) and the list of legally binding EU acts to be transposed (Annex 4). For each state statistical survey, the Programme specifies the purpose and use, the substantive content and procedures, the reporting units, the periodicity and deadlines for provision, the authority competent to carry it out and, where appropriate, the specification of the required quality criteria for state statistics.

In years when a new Programme of State Statistical Surveys is not being compiled, the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic may, on its own decision or on the basis of the requirements of another body performing state statistics, issue decree amendments and supplements to the Programme of State Statistical Surveys.

The Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic draws up an annual report on the implementation of the Programme, which is published on its website once approved by the Coordination Council.

In addition to the 3-year Programme of State Statistical Surveys, the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic prepares the annual Plan of Statistical Activities, which covers the activities of the statistical units involved in statistical production (macroeconomic statistics, business statistics, social statistics and demography, provision of statistical products and services, general methodology, registers and

coordination of the national statistical system). The Plan of Statistical Activity has a public and a non-public part. The public part is published on the SOSR's website.

Resources

The production of state statistics is financed from the state budget, although the SOSR has its own budget chapter. The annual budget in 2022 was approximately €30.3 million, the same as the 2020 budget and 6% higher than the 2021 budget, mainly due to the 14% increase in IT costs. 56% of the 2022 total budget was spent on staff, 23% on IT and 20% on other costs.

In 2022, the SOSR employed 744 staff members, which is 16% less than in 2020 and 7% less than in 2021. Such decrease is due to a 10% reduction in the number of employees in 2021 and the gradual reduction of the tasks related to the 2021 Population and Housing Census. Nevertheless, in 2021 the role of the SOSR as coordinator of the Slovak statistical system was strengthened with 11 positions. 65.2% of the total staff were postgraduates, including PhDs (60% in 2020 and 62% in 2021).

Coordination of the National Statistical System

The SOSR's coordinating role is set out in the Act on State Statistics. Article 8.k of the Act states that "the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic coordinates the performance of the tasks of state statistics by other bodies producing state statistics". The coordination role of the SOSR is thus understood as a set of activities, including the coordination of statistical planning and reporting, quality monitoring, methodological guidance, data transmission and reporting on statistical measures.

The framework for coordination was designed to create conditions for the standardisation of selected activities in statistical production, for conducting methodological audits and for the joint management of structural metadata (variables and codes, indicators), reference metadata (quality reports) and statistical outputs (product catalogue). The 2021 amendment to the Act on State Statistics strengthened the position of the SOSR as the coordinator of the Slovak statistical system and set up the Coordination Council for State Statistics.

The Coordination Council for State Statistics supports the coordination of the Slovak statistical system in various matters, such as statistical planning and reporting on compliance with the statistical plan, the development of a methodological and quality framework for state statistics, determining and monitoring compliance with the quality requirements for statistical products, determining the method of transmission and dissemination of statistical data, and issuing interpretative opinions on the provisions of the Act on State Statistics and the provisions of relevant legislation. The Council is chaired by the President of the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic. The members of the Council are, as a rule, the persons responsible for the performance of the state statistics tasks and who occupy a senior official position. Members are appointed and dismissed by the President of the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic and membership of the Council is personal and honorary (unpaid). Invited experts from both internal and external environments can participate in Council meetings depending on the agenda.

Within the framework of institutional arrangements, a Central Coordination Unit was created within the SOSR and the position of Chief Statistician of the Slovak statistical system was created and entrusted with the coordination task.

Coordination is carried out by means of coordination tools, including the Programme of State Statistical Surveys, the Unified Information System of State Statistics (currently in trial operation) and methodological audits. In addition, communication is an important tool for coordination, and is ensured through the Confluence communication platform and other information exchange forums within the Slovak statistical system.

There are thirteen Other National Authorities developing, producing and disseminating European statistics (ONAs) in the Slovak Republic: Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development - National Forest Centre; Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development - Central Controlling and Testing Institute in Agriculture; Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport - Slovak Centre of Scientific and Technical Information; Ministry of Interior - Migration Office; Ministry of Interior - Bureau of Border and Alien Police of Presidium of the Police Force; Ministry of Environment - Slovak Environmental Agency; Ministry of Environment - Slovak Hydrometeorological Institute; Ministry of Economy – Slovak Innovation and Energy Agency; Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family; Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family - Institute for Labour and Family Research; Administration of State Material Reserves; and Institute of Informatics and Statistics (INFOSTAT). The updating and modification of the list of ONAs in terms of entities producing European statistics is the SOSR's responsibility.

ONAs involved in the peer review process

Three ONAs (Migration Office, Slovak Hydrometeorological Institute and Administration of State Material Reserves) were selected to participate in the peer review.

The **Migration Office (MU)** produces European statistics on migration and international protection, through its Organisation and Legal Affairs Department. Statistical reports containing monthly statistics on the granting of asylum are published on its website. Statistics are the responsibility of the Risk Analysis and Coordination Department, a department under the operational management of the fire department, whose head acts as the head of statistical entities. To carry out the tasks entrusted to it, the Migration office had 2 employees in 2022, the same as in 2020 and 2021.

The **Slovak Hydrometeorological Institute (SHMU)** focuses on European statistics for air emissions accounts. The SHMU is also responsible for maintaining the National Emission Inventory System. In addition to the accounts (in Excel format), the methodology, the quality report and the date on which Eurostat makes the data public are shown on the SHMU website. The Director of the Institute for Environmental Policy is the head of statistical entities of the Ministry of Environment, and the Emissions and Biofuels Department is responsible for state statistics and for reporting the data on air emissions accounts to Eurostat. Ten employees were part of the SHMU staff in 2022, one more than in the previous two years.

The **Administration of State Material Reserves (SSHR)** provides data on consumer prices on selected petroleum products and monthly data on crude oil, petroleum products and natural gas. The website contains information on statistical surveys, but the main product of these surveys (fuel prices) is disseminated by the SOSR on its portal. The unit responsible for state statistics is the Department of Management of State Material Reserves which reports to the Vice-President of the Administration of State Material Reserves who acts as the head of the statistical entity. In 2022, the SSHR employed 2 staff members, the same figure as in 2020 and 2021.

Data access

The mandate to collect data and access administrative data sources is specified in the 2001 Act on State Statistics. Access to privately held data sources depends on mutual agreements and the willingness of the data holder to provide these data to the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, either free of charge or for a fee.

According to Section 18(3) of the 2001 Act on State Statistics, reporting units are obliged to provide the data required for the state statistical surveys included in the Programme of State Statistical Surveys fully, truthfully, within the established deadlines, free of charge and in the established manner.

Section 13 "*Access to and use of administrative data sources*" of the 2001 Act on State Statistics provides for the right to access administrative data for statistical purposes without delay and free of charge. The provision of data is regulated by written agreement. The agreement contains the conditions for the technical provision of the data, the structure and scope of the data and metadata, including the methodology for their compilation, and other details of how the obligation to provide data is to be fulfilled. Access to administrative data for statistical purposes extends to all administrative data, including those that are subject to tax secrecy, or other secrecy or confidentiality obligations in accordance with specific legislation.

Relations with users / dissemination of statistical products and services

Dissemination rules are defined in the 2001 Act on State Statistics and in internal directives and guidelines. The SOSR's Policy on Dissemination of Statistical Information is the basic document for the dissemination of statistical information in the field of statistics and it is reviewed regularly. The SOSR provides all standard statistical information free of charge and anonymised statistical data for scientific purposes are provided at the Research Data Centre on a contractual basis and under specified conditions.

The Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic disseminates statistical products through various dissemination and communication channels aimed at different groups of users: its web portal www.statistics.sk, the DATAcube. database, printed and electronic publications, press releases, press conferences, social networks, newsletters, library, national open data portal and various applications. In the context of social media, the SOSR disseminates statistical products via Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn, and video content via YouTube. It communicates extensively with news agencies and the media, which are key in disseminating statistical information and products to the general public. Dynamic graphs, infographics and dashboards (also used by the media) are included in statistical products for easier interpretation and better understanding. In addition, the SOSR focuses on providing statistical information in the form of open data through the National Open Data Portal and is a leader in this area within the public administration in the Slovak Republic.

The professional approach of the regional offices providing information services also contributes to building relationships with users. The staff of these offices provide the required statistical information, navigate users on the SOSR's portal and in databases, including support to users working with European statistical information (ESDS Help Desk).

The Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic collects institutional user opinions through the consultation procedure for the draft Programme of State Statistical Surveys, and through interviews with businesses and other data providers. In addition, the SOSR conducts a user satisfaction survey every second year. The SOSR's credibility is monitored by a survey carried out by an independent agency. Based on the results of the survey, in 2021, 59% of respondents expressed confidence in the SOSR.

4. PROGRESS/ADVANCEMENT IN THE LAST 5 YEARS

Legislation and coordination

Many developments within the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic and the entire Slovak statistical system are related to the 2021 amendment to the Act on State Statistics. For example, the Act now specifies the basic principles of state statistics, so that they are in accordance with the Regulation on European statistics (No 223/2009, as amended), including the strict obligation for their application by all bodies performing state statistics. The amendment also strengthened the position of the SOSR as the coordinator of the Slovak statistical system, established the Coordination Council for State Statistics and defined the scope of coordination activities. In addition, it specified the scope of other bodies performing state statistics, established organisational and competence requirements for those bodies and explicitly enshrined a quality control mechanism across the Slovak statistical system. Institutional measures included establishing a Central Coordination Unit in the SOSR and creating the position of the Chief Statistician of the Slovak statistical system, entrusted with the responsibility for implementing coordination. Finally, a dedicated communication platform was set up for coordination purposes, along with a new logo for the Slovak statistical system.

Data collection and use of registers

The 2021 amendment to the Act on State Statistics strengthened the right to access administrative data, including data that are subject to tax secrecy, other secrecy or confidentiality obligations pursuant to specific legislation. In accordance with the government's strategy on reducing bureaucracy and the administrative burden, the use of administrative data has been intensified. As an example, the SOSR used nine administrative data sources during the 2021 Population and Housing Census. The same census also used an innovative electronic form, through which 86% of the population self-enumerated. For price statistics, the SOSR started using privately held data from retail chains. Controlled selections and optimisation of statistical reporting for small businesses and in foreign trade statistics was introduced for burden reduction, as well as the partial pre-filling of electronic forms in selected business surveys. Additionally, the Business Register was integrated into the Single Public Register and web services were made accessible on the public administration's central portal slovensko.sk with the aim of allowing the SOSR to communicate with entities registered in the Business Register and in the Register of Foreign Trade Entities.

Information technology

In 2014 and 2015, all planned statistical surveys were transferred into the new Integrated Statistical Information System (IŠIS). As an additional superstructure over IŠIS, the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic established a new Unified Information System of State Statistics (JIS ŠÚ). The new unified system JIS ŠÚ, currently in test operation, covers the Generic Statistical Business Process Model (GSBPM) phases 1 - Specify Needs, 2 - Design, 7 - Disseminate and 8 - Evaluate. JIS ŠÚ will be used within the Slovak statistical system for better coordination and process management across the statistical system. Another remarkable IT project is related to worktime monitoring and cost analysis by using the Personnel Workload Recording Information System (ISSOČ) and the Management Information System (MIS) for the calculation of the actual cost of statistical output by domain. The results of the cost analysis form one of the main bases for making decisions about allocating resources and optimising processes.

Data protection and security

The 2021 amendment to the Act on State Statistics also helped to improve legislation for the protection of confidential statistical data. Additionally, the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic specified certain conditions and updated an internal regulation on the protection and provision of microdata for scientific purposes. To support the use of data, the Research Data Centre (Safe Centre) has been modernised. Furthermore, the application of a proprietary algorithm to ensure the protection of confidential data in the 2021 Population and Housing Census was developed at process level. An automated process for protecting confidential statistical data and creating outputs for tourism statistics was introduced to ensure higher granularity of published outputs.

The Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic has strengthened data security through the certified implementation of the ISO27001 standard and related documentation, together with the IT security framework for the European Statistical System and national legislation on cyber security. That includes the implementation of security standards in the field of microdata exchange, which was also confirmed by a Eurostat audit in 2019.

Training

The Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic has started to offer its new employees relevant statistical e-training to ease their start in the office. This introductory e-training is now used not just by the new staff, but also by more experienced employees in the Office. Even the employees of Other National Authorities can access e-training through the communication platform that has been set up for better coordination of the Slovak statistical system. Examples of e-training include topics such as statistical methodology, protection of confidential statistical data, statistical disclosure control methods, the 2021 Population and Housing Census, etc. Additionally, intensive training was provided to the members of the Slovak statistical system as part of the “Reform of the collection and processing of statistical data in public administration” project implemented to set the framework for coordination of the Slovak statistical system.

Dissemination

The Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic has made great progress in terms of dissemination over recent years. Firstly, the release calendar is now published through the web portal, and this channel is also used for the systematic and regular publishing of standardised quality reports. Additionally, the SOSR has unified its databases into one and has introduced the open data functionality (REST API) with the highest number of published open data sets within the Slovak state administration. Furthermore, the SOSR has more actively started using social networks, video tools, interactive graphs, digital applications, Slovak versions of digital products by Eurostat, dashboards for selected statistical indicators, URL links to source data in collective publications and QR codes in selected publications. The Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic has also introduced a newsletter and improved the quality of outputs such as informative/press releases. For selected domains the data has been published at a lower level of granularity and for some statistics the frequency has improved.

5. COMPLIANCE WITH THE CODE OF PRACTICE AND FUTURE ORIENTATION

5.1 STRENGTHS OF THE NSI AND THE PARTICIPATING ONAs IN RELATION TO THEIR COMPLIANCE WITH THE CODE OF PRACTICE

Highly respected, professional, and trusted organisation

The Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic has a strong legal framework for the development, production and dissemination of European and state statistics. Act No. 540/2001 on State Statistics, which contains the basic principles and the organisation of state statistics, sets a solid basis for the Slovak statistical system. The peer review meetings showed that all stakeholders have high esteem for the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic and consider it as one of the most trusted and professional institutions in the country. Its products and services are regarded as objective and fully independent of any political influence. The statistics produced are used by the country's media, for scientific research and as a reference for evidence-based policies. The Slovak statistical system is based on a quality culture that is easily perceived by producers and users of the information. The quality of the resources also contributes to the positive image of the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, praised for its competencies and skills in the field of statistics and its service culture.

Coordination and communication

The Slovak statistical system is highly centralised and 95% of European statistics are produced by the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic. Other National Authorities also produce important European statistics on energy, the environment, transport, education, social phenomena, agriculture and the economy. The Other National Authorities that participated in the peer review confirmed the SOSR's strong coordination role in all aspects. This coordination is well-established, structured and defined in the Act on State Statistics. The SOSR provides regular training and expert advice to the Other National Authorities and direct communication channels at operational level facilitate effective coordination of the Slovak statistical system. Furthermore, the Coordination Council for State Statistics, whose legal statute sets out the rights and obligations of each member of the Slovak statistical system and defines the role of the Chief statistician in each statistical service, provides a stable basis for the sustainable, systematic coordination of statistics in Slovakia. The communication between the SOSR and the Other National Authorities is effective and the leadership of the SOSR is evident in establishing the Programme of State Statistical Surveys and in discussing specific issues in dedicated working groups.

Quality culture embedded in the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic

Throughout the peer review visit, the importance and attention given to the quality of statistics was remarkable. Quality considerations are embedded in the working methods of the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic in compliance with ISO 9001. Their application is ensured through exhaustive methodological audits and reviews, quality reports, direct contacts with data providers and training on quality, starting with the newcomers' induction programme. Furthermore, the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic is committed to managing and protecting information securely and safely. The certified implementation of the Information Security Management Systems standard (ISO/IEC – international Electrotechnical Commission 27001) facilitated confirmation of the security of the system by Eurostat and enabled the exchange of microdata among members of the ESS.

Cooperation with the scientific community

The SOSR's cooperation with the scientific community is strong, regular and systematic. The SOSR is in close contact with universities, giving lectures on statistics, supervising research in students' degree theses, etc. It supports, including financially, projects on modelling and analysis of statistical information, such as flash estimates of GDP and employment. It provides expert advice to researchers in demography and population, economics and data science courses in cooperation with the Faculty of Economics of Bratislava and the Faculty of Social Science of the Slovak Academy of Science. The establishment of specific agreements with universities is planned, to enhance cooperation with the scientific community and jointly develop methodology on social statistics and demography.

Law enforcing the position of the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic in the Slovak statistical system

Specific provisions in the current Act on State Statistics effectively enforce the role of the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic as leader of the Slovak statistical system. Such provisions cover the basic principles of state statistics, their quality criteria, the performance of state statistics and the competences of the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic and of the Other National Authorities developing, producing and disseminating European statistics, including sanctions for the non-fulfilment of obligations. These provisions set a solid framework for the coordination of the Slovak statistical system. Consequently, other authorities performing state statistics acknowledge the SOSR's leading role in the Slovak statistical system.

Motivating working environment

The Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic has created a motivating working environment for its employees. A 6-month induction programme for newcomers is in place, covering a wide spectrum of fields, from IT to quality guidance. It also provides opportunities to join courses organised jointly with universities and to participate in international conferences and international projects. E-learning is available to enhance staff competencies and skills, and a training plan lays down a minimum number of courses per employee per year. Newly recruited staff members are also given the option of mobility, to match their competencies with job requirements. Excellent relations between the SOSR, the other authorities performing state statistics and other stakeholders are also a source of wider motivation for the coordination of the Slovak statistical system, enhanced by the SOSR's capacity to provide support and guidance on statistical matters.

Systematic cost-controlling management information system

Activity-based costing (ABC) is implemented at the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, to optimise the use of resources, manage projects and processes effectively and enhance accountability, accurately attributing budgets to activities and products. This system also helps to identify more accurately the cost of specific overhead operations and helps to better manage the available resources.

INNOVATIVE PRACTICES

Coordination Council for State Statistics

A very important tool for ensuring the implementation of the SOSR's coordination role in the Slovak statistical system is the Coordination Council for State Statistics. Established in 2021, it is composed of specific representatives of the Other National Authorities. The Coordination Council has an official statute specifying the tasks, rights and obligations of each of its members in the production of state statistics. The Coordination Council officialises and facilitates the SOSR's coordination role and contributes to the effective coordination of and cooperation on statistics.

Communication-information platform

Communication within the Slovak statistical system is facilitated by a dedicated communication-information platform. It forms part of the development of the Unified Information System of State Statistics, a communication portal established to coordinate activities within phases 1, 2, 7 and 8 of the GSBPM. This tool is built on the Atlassian Confluence platform supporting teamwork and information sharing in the Slovak statistical system.

Logo for the Slovak statistical system

The use of a logo to indicate that statistical information is produced by the Slovak statistical system is a strong signal of the trustworthiness and identity of disseminated information. It gives users a memorable, high-quality signal and improves dissemination practices.

Experimenting with new data sources for producing official statistics

Although access to new data sources has not yet been granted by the Act on State Statistics, the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic has established agreements with private data holders and actively experiments with their use for producing official statistics. As a result, scanner data on food and non-alcoholic beverages will be used in statistical production as of the beginning of 2024. Future agreements with data providers will cover a wider spectrum of consumer products. Experimentation with toll and GSM mobile network data is ongoing as well as with data from web scraping.

Supporting statistical literacy

The Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic has a strong strategy for supporting statistical literacy, producing special products for students called 'Statistics made easy', which are available on the website. The effectiveness of this strategy is confirmed by the awards received by Slovakia in the European Statistics Competition for secondary schools in 2022.

5.2 ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.2.1 Strengthening the Institutional Environment

According to the 2011 Act on State Statistics, Section 6.2, the President of the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic “shall be appointed and dismissed by the President of the Slovak Republic on the proposal of the Government of the Slovak Republic”. However, the procedure lacks transparency: there are no regulations specifying how the government pre-selects candidates, the criteria used, what qualifications are required and how potential candidates are informed of the opening of the procedure so that they can express their interest in the post.

Although the independence of the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic and its President has not been questioned to date, the lack of transparency and regulation of the procedures for appointing the President of the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic carries a risk of political interference. This is the reason why the ES CoP requires that: “*The procedures for the recruitment and appointment of the heads of the National Statistical Institutes and Eurostat and, where appropriate, the statistical heads of other statistical authorities, are transparent and based on professional criteria only*”.

To comply with the ES CoP, the peer review team recommends:

R1. The relevant authorities should amend the legislation to make the procedure for the recruitment and appointment of the President of the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic more transparent and based on professional criteria. (Compliance-relevant: ES CoP, Indicator 1.8)

The 2021 amendment to the Act on State Statistics established the Coordination Council for State Statistics as a successor to the Statistical Board. According to its Statute, the Coordination Council is the expert body for issues related to the production of official statistics. The Coordination Council coordinates tasks related to the planning and reporting of statistical work, and discusses the development of a methodological quality framework, methodological guidance, quality monitoring and compliance with the principles of state statistics, the transmission and dissemination of statistical data, opinions on the provisions of the Act on State Statistics and related legislation, and other matters of state statistics proposed by the President of the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic or members of the Coordination Council. The President of the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic convenes meetings of the Coordination Council as necessary, and at least once a year. The inaugural meeting took place in May 2021 and annual meetings were held in December 2021 and December 2022.

However, during the peer review meetings it was noted that the Coordination Council for State Statistics had not yet discussed all the topics listed in its statute, mainly due to the lack of meetings. The need for closer cooperation and more frequent meetings was also noted. It is therefore recommended that the Coordination Council, under the leadership of the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, reviews its meeting schedule and work content so as to fulfil its mandate and improve the coordination of the Slovak statistical system. In doing so, all tasks, needs and expectations related to the coordination of the Slovak statistical system should be considered.

To improve beyond compliance with the ES CoP, the peer review team recommends:

R2. The Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic should further develop the work and functioning of the Coordination Council for State Statistics so that it systematically fulfils its mandate and is used as a dynamic tool for coordination in the Slovak statistical system. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicators 1bis.1 and 1bis.3)

Increasing digitalisation multiplies the volume of information that can potentially also be used for statistics. The use of privately held data is a way of decreasing the burden imposed by statistical surveys, producing more timely and granular statistics and enriching existing or creating new statistics. Access to privately held data is currently granted to Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic based on bilateral agreements with data providers and has proved to be a solid basis for developing statistics from new data sources. The agreements on scanner and toll data are prominent examples. Private data holders who participated in the peer review recognised the value added of cooperation with the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic for their organisation, learning how to manage their information, while exploring the use of their data for producing statistics. While there are good practices on using privately held data, the long-term, sustainable availability of such data and access to them are not legally formalised. This is, however, needed to maintain the stability of a statistical production process based on such data.

To improve beyond compliance with the ES CoP, the peer review team recommends:

R3. The relevant government authorities should ensure that appropriate legal provisions are in place to grant the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic access to privately held data for the development, production and dissemination of official statistics. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicator 2.4)

The Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic provides certain news agencies with pre-release access to information, under embargo. While the website mentions this fact, there is no clear, publicly available policy setting out guidelines and rules for the advance provision of statistical information to specific individuals or groups, including the designation of recipients, duration of access, security measures, confidentiality and non-disclosure.

Much of the information published by National Statistical Institutes is very sensitive and useful for decision-making, so simultaneous access should be given to all external users. Furthermore, although no breach of confidentiality has ever been observed, the difficulty of controlling possible leaks of information must be considered.

To ensure that all external users have equal access to information at the same time, as required by the ES CoP, and to guarantee impartiality, the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic should consider discontinuing the practice of giving pre-release access to selected news agencies.

To improve beyond compliance with the ES CoP, the peer review team recommends:

R4. The Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic should provide equal access to all users. If pre-release practices are continued, the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic should ensure that pre-release access for external users is limited, well-justified, controlled and publicised on its website. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicator 6.7)

The Slovak statistical system comprises 13 Other National Authorities developing, producing and disseminating European statistics. One of the criteria for being considered as an ONA is to send data directly to Eurostat. However, of the total volume of data sent to Eurostat in 2020 (the last year for which complete information is available), 93.5% was sent by the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, 3.4% by the Central Bank of Slovakia and only 1.2% by the State Material Reserves Administration, with all the Other National Authorities sending less than 1%. Of the three Other National Authorities reviewed, two have only two employees: the Migration Office of the Ministry of Interior and the State Material Reserves Administration. In addition, the heads of the Other National Authorities appointed by the relevant ministries are not always the persons responsible for producing

statistics, which may sometimes be a line supervisor, potentially raising an issue as regards taking responsibility for the methodology as required by the ES CoP.

The Other National Authorities developing, producing and disseminating European statistics must comply with the ES CoP, but this can be highly demanding for institutions with very limited human resources, particularly staff with statistical skills and competencies. Therefore, it may be more efficient for these authorities to act as providers of administrative data and for the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic to process these data and produce the corresponding European statistics, following the principles of the ES CoP.

To improve beyond compliance with the ES CoP, the peer review team recommends:

R5. The Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic should initiate a reflection on the set-up of the Slovak statistical system to define an efficient division of labour between the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic and the Other National Authorities developing, producing and disseminating European statistics. During this reflection, particular attention should be paid to the ES CoP requirement that the head of the Other National Authority has sole responsibility for deciding on statistical methods, standards and procedures. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicators 1.4 and 1bis.1)

5.2.2 Optimising the Use of Resources

Maintaining statistical production while investing in the production of new statistics, exploring the use of new sources of information to reduce the reporting burden, improving quality and striving to reach and satisfy increasing user needs all require significant investment and additional resources. The efforts to meet information needs in periods of crisis, e.g., during COVID, showed the Slovak statistical system's reliance on its highly qualified human resources. The Slovak statistical system is highly centralised, with 93.5% of the total volume of European statistics produced by the SOSR. Despite the Other National Authorities' small share in the production of European statistics, they produce European statistics of critical importance in several key domains such as energy, migration, the environment and education.

In the period 2020 to 2022, the general number of human resources attributed to the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic by the state budget decreased by 9.5%, and a similar trend was observed for staff with higher education. The Other National Authorities developing, producing and disseminating European Statistics also rely on very few employees that are dedicated to statistics. In several cases these employees are also involved in other activities within their organisation, creating risks for the sustainable production of European statistics. Furthermore, despite the SOSR's efforts to maintain a sustainable workforce, investing in training, valorising and developing the competencies and skills of its workforce, the salary gap with other public institutions reduces its attractiveness as an employer. To enable the sustainable development of a competitive internal workforce and meet current and new challenges, the relevant authorities should ensure that adequate additional human and financial resources are available to the Slovak statistical system.

To improve beyond compliance with the ES CoP, the peer review team recommends:

R6. The relevant government authorities should continuously ensure that adequate human and financial resources are available to the Slovak statistical system to meet current and new statistical needs, to cope with technology developments and to exploit the potential of new data sources for an improved service to users. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicator 3.1)

The Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic has a professional training plan for the continuous training of its employees. The training offered is listed in the catalogue of training and other courses. The staff's

use of the acquired knowledge and skills in their practical, daily work is continuously and comprehensively evaluated by senior managers within the framework of the annual evaluation of staff members. In addition, employees' individual competency training plans take into account the competencies necessary for the performance of their tasks.

New methods of data collection, new sources of information and new technologies require specialised personnel. It is therefore necessary to increase the effectiveness of the system of training for statistical positions by using the competency matrices developed from the competency catalogue based on the SOSR's new needs/tasks.

To improve beyond compliance with the ES CoP, the peer review team recommends:

R7. The Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic should continue to develop the competency matrices to improve staff skills, ensuring that skills are aligned with the requirements of new data collection methods, new data sources and new technologies. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicator 7.6)

Processes in the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic are all organised in accordance with the requirements of the ISO 9001 standard. The SOSR has been certified since 2006 and has subsequently been recertified 5 times, most recently in 2021. Generic process descriptions and guidelines are shared and accessible to all employees via the intranet. At a more detailed level, domain-specific units and process owners are responsible for creating process descriptions and other related documents and sharing them on the intranet, but this is not done systematically or regularly. Some of them are quite advanced in ensuring that descriptions are relevant and professional, even using diagrams based on Unified Modelling Language (UML), among other things.

Nevertheless, practices tend to be significantly uneven both in terms of sharing documents and ensuring their timeliness, meaning that there are no up-to-date and detailed descriptions for some processes. This results in a slowdown in the harmonisation and standardisation of the processes needed to ensure the quality of the output and the most efficient use of resources. A similar systemic problem was noted in the evaluation of the Quality Management System (QMS) in 2022, one of the recommendations of which was to increase the efficiency of internal processes, primarily through better synchronisation of methodology and technical means, and their use in regular statistics production.

It is therefore recommended that the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic continues to describe processes in all areas at a detailed level to use the possibilities offered by standardised approaches for reasonable process optimisation. This is especially important in a situation where the organisation must constantly operate under conditions of limited resources.

To improve beyond compliance with the ES CoP, the peer review team recommends:

R8. The Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic should optimise all statistical processes based on detailed process descriptions, guidelines and visual mapping. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicators 8.3, 10.1 and 4.1)

In 2022, the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic employed 817 people, 18% of whom were aged under 39, compared with 62% aged between 40 and 59, and 20% 60 and over. This means that one in five staff members will be retiring in the coming years. It is therefore essential for the SOSR to attract young employees to maintain a balanced age pyramid. The peer review team was informed that the SOSR was finding it difficult to attract young professionals due to the differences in salary with other public administrations. Nevertheless, the peer review team believes that the SOSR should build on its good relationships with academia to attract young graduates, for example by regularly offering internships to statistics and economics students. Internship is a good way of discovering the reality and

interestingness of work in a statistical office, and in particular the motivating working environment offered by the SOSR, and should therefore be actively promoted.

To improve beyond compliance with the ES CoP, the peer review team recommends:

R9. The Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic should develop more systematic and planned incentives to attract and retain young talent, especially university graduates. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicators 7.5 and 3.1)

The exchange of information between businesses and the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic is an essential part of the statistical production process. While the information needed for statistics is readily available in the IT systems of businesses in Slovakia, retrieving this information can be resource-intensive and time-consuming. Businesses told the peer review team of their appreciation of bilateral contacts with the staff of the SOSR. However, relying on regular contacts with businesses and manual interventions to retrieve their data is not necessary once the required information has been identified and a routine transmission of data has been established. Automating the retrieval of the data needed for statistics by, for example, linking businesses' accounting systems with the SOSR's IT system can reduce the burden on businesses, ensure regular and timely data transmission, minimise human intervention and the probability of errors, optimise the use of resources and improve the efficiency of the statistical production process.

To improve beyond compliance with the ES CoP, the peer review team recommends:

R10. The Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic should further develop automated ways of collecting data from data providers to reduce the burden on businesses and speed up data collection. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicator 9.3)

Under the governance of the Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic, European statistics are currently produced by the following three units: the Organisational and Legal Department of the Migration Office (2 positions out of 10), the Dublin Centre of the Migration Office (1 position out of 6), and the Risk Analysis and Coordination Department of the Bureau of Border and Alien Police of the Presidium of the Police Force. Representatives from the Migration Office were among the Other National Authorities developing, producing and disseminating European statistics that were met during the peer review. Their main tasks include the production of statistics on European migration and international protection, based on its administrative data (the information system MIGRA). The same system is also used by the Bureau of Border and Alien Police, and both units are its administrators and work closely together. Additionally, a Chief Statistician (head of the department of operational management of the fire department) has been appointed to coordinate the production of statistics in the Ministry of Interior. This person also participates in the Coordination Council for State Statistics. All these counterparts cooperate on matters such as quality, including the timeliness of statistical data, and internal cooperation is good. However, contacts and cooperation between the units take place randomly or based on emerging needs, rather than systematically and regularly.

The lack of such support and central coordination and cooperation is a missed opportunity in a situation where the units producing European statistics at the Migration Office, and in the Ministry in general, have long been understaffed, and this situation is not expected to change in the near future. Currently, the lack of human resources does not even allow the units to meet identified demands in relation to relevance, accessibility and clarity, e.g. the demand for information including metadata on the website by users of statistics. The Ministry of Interior should reflect on the setup for the production of European statistics in its area of governance and decide how to create and implement more systematic, regular approaches, and consider a greater centralisation of activities and jobs related to

the production of statistics. This would create the preconditions for the development and achievement of results in terms of quality of statistics and the efficiency of their production.

To improve beyond compliance with the ES CoP, the peer review team recommends:

R11. The Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic should centralise the production of European statistics in the areas under its responsibility. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicator 10.4)

5.2.3 Embedding Quality Management Approaches throughout the National Statistical System

Within the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, 50 people work in the Directorate of General Methodology. They provide methodology support to the SOSR's subject matter units and to the Other National Authorities developing, producing and disseminating European statistics upon request, on matter such as sampling, imputation and data protection. In the case of specific surveys, the methodology is discussed in working groups, such as the labour statistics working group. Another example of methodology support was reported by the Ministry of Social Affairs, which prepared a survey on gender-based violence and asked for the SOSR's support in designing the survey. According to Section 11.2 of the Act on State Statistics, Other National Authorities should consult the SOSR on the methodology for state statistical surveys and should use national statistical classifications, but this kind of consultation is not systematic.

Moreover, members of the scientific community advise the SOSR on some methodological issues, but here too, there is no systematic mechanism to review and validate the methodology of statistical operations. To ensure the quality of the methodology, the peer review team suggests setting up a methodology committee, with the involvement of external experts, to examine the methodology of new European statistics produced by the Slovak statistical system (whether by the SOSR or by the Other National Authorities), to review major revisions of existing statistical operations, evaluate statistical methods and propose new methodological solutions.

To improve beyond compliance with the ES CoP, the peer review team recommends:

R12. The Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, in cooperation with the Other National Authorities developing, producing and disseminating European statistics, should establish a Methodology Committee involving external experts with the objective of advising on the methodology of new European statistics produced in the Slovak statistical system and on major revisions of existing statistical operations. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicators 7.1, 7.2, 12.3 and 4.2)

An important part of the management system of the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic is a list of indicators describing the performance of various processes, such as statistical (based on GSBPM), support and management processes. Quality audits are systematically carried out with the help of these indicators, in accordance with the annual programme of internal system audits and internal methodological audits. The latter focus on individual statistics (production of statistical outputs) or selected sub-processes/activities of their production. One or two such audits are carried out per year.

During the peer review, it became apparent that the employees of the SOSR find the system of performance indicators complicated. Among other things, they did not know the most prioritised indicators related to the organisation's strategic goals. The need to review the key performance indicators (KPIs) in the light of the Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound (SMART) methodology for indicators was also raised during the evaluation of the QMS in 2022.

In addition, it was confirmed during the peer review that when conducting quality audits based on performance indicators, the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic has limited its focus to the functions and phases of production, rather than covering the GSBPM-based statistics production line as a whole, from beginning to end. For example, not all statistical surveys are audited throughout the GSBPM-based production line, from specifying needs to dissemination and evaluation. So-called methodological audits have so far only been carried out on an ad-hoc basis, when specific needs arose, or based on internal or external impulses, rather than purposefully covering the entire Programme of State Statistical Surveys within a specific time period.

Therefore, the peer review team recommends that the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic should analyse its system of performance indicators and make it more efficient, understandable and usable. This will ensure that quality audits are even more systematic and regular and will cover the entire Programme of State Statistical Surveys and all phases of the GSBPM-based production line.

To improve beyond compliance with the ES CoP, the peer review team recommends:

R13. The Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic should further develop the system of performance indicators and quality reviews, by using a process-oriented approach. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicators 4.2 and 4.3)

According to the Act on State Statistics, Section 8(1)k), the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic shall monitor the quality of state statistics and compliance with the basic principles of state statistics. That is also mentioned as one of the tasks of the Coordination Council for State Statistics in its statute. Quality monitoring is regularly carried out within the SOSR through approaches based on ISO 9001 standard requirements, such as the systematic use of key performance indicators, internal audits and reviews by process managers and management, and also by external auditors.

Regarding the Slovak statistical system, the performance and quality of the statistics produced by the Other National Authorities developing, producing and disseminating European statistics should be reviewed through methodological audits. These should be carried out annually by the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic as a coordinator of the Slovak statistical system, according to its National Quality Guidelines. The audit plan for a given year is available on the communication platform Confluence. The aim of these audits is to verify the state of internal documentation and compliance with the common guidelines, as well as the compliance of the implemented practice with the existing prescribed work procedures, formal standards and obligations associated with membership in the Slovak statistical system. Based on the findings from the audit of a member of the Slovak statistical system, suggestions for improvement or recommendations for taking corrective/preventive measures are formulated.

However, during the peer review meetings, it became clear that although the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic has created an audit plan for the evaluation of European statistics produced by the Other National Authorities, and those participating were aware of the dates and audits concerning them, the respective audits have not yet been organised systematically and regularly. It is therefore recommended that the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic should systematically and regularly conduct quality audits on the statistics produced by the Other National Authorities, in accordance with the principles agreed in legislation and to ensure performance and compliance with the quality requirements and guidelines for the production of statistics.

To improve beyond compliance with the ES CoP, the peer review team recommends:

R14. The Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic should implement systematic and regular quality reviews of the production of European statistics in the Other National Authorities developing, producing and disseminating European statistics. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicator 1bis.2)

The Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic has started to develop a Unified Information System of State Statistics to standardise statistical production processes, coordinate and evaluate the statistical products of the authorities performing state statistics and to facilitate the conduct and processing of state statistical surveys. The Unified Information System of State Statistics attempts to cover all phases of the GSBPM but is currently in the testing phase and does not yet cover all phases of the GSBPM. Once finalised and implemented, statistical processes will be standardised, improving their efficiency, and the European guidelines and good practices used in statistical processes will be adapted through innovation, as stated in the ES CoP.

To improve beyond compliance with the ES CoP, the peer review team recommends:

R15. The Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic should extend the coverage of the Unified Information System of State Statistics to all phases of the Generic Statistical Business Process Model in order to standardise and improve the efficiency of statistical processes. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicator 7.2)

5.2.4 Meeting User Needs in a Changing Data Environment

The Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic regularly consults users about their satisfaction in using its products and services. In addition, the Dissemination and Communication Directorate collects requests from users that have not been satisfied by the current products and services. This information, together with specific requests, particularly from state administrations, is used to prepare the Programme of State Statistical Surveys. When the preliminary decree of this Programme is sent out, users have another opportunity to express their needs. However, there is no formal mechanism, such as a Statistical Council, to collect and address the needs of Slovak society, beyond the traditional users, and to reach new potential users. Broadening user engagement could also generate greater societal support for the SOSR's activities.

To improve beyond compliance with the ES CoP, the peer review team recommends:

R16. The Slovak Statistical Office should strengthen and institutionalise its user engagement by developing a strategy to identify and reach new user groups to engage wider sections of society. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicator 11.1)

In the absence of a list of administrative data sources, the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic tries to identify potential data sources, by scrutinising new legal provisions, for example. When preparing the 2021 Population and Housing Census, the SOSR sent a questionnaire to administrations and municipalities, listing the variables it intended to collect and asking them whether this information was available. However, there is no systematic mechanism for the SOSR to be informed of projects likely to generate new sources of administrative data. As an integral part of the national data ecosystem and dependent on its further developments, especially those related to new data sources, the SOSR is encouraged to play a more active role in monitoring digitalisation efforts within the public administration, with the aim of understanding and benefiting from the development of the national data ecosystem. The role of national data steward, playing a leading role in the development of public information in the state administrations, could also be considered, if deemed appropriate.

To improve beyond compliance with the ES CoP, the peer review team recommends:

R17. The Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic should further develop a vision for its role in the emerging national data ecosystem and could consider the role of data stewardship. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicator 8.7)

The Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic has already successfully invested in the use of new data sources for producing statistics from scanner data, the motorway toll system and mobile network data. It has also gained experience in drafting cooperation agreements with private data holders to experiment with their data to produce state statistics. In addition, the SOSR's good cooperation with the scientific community could enhance its capacity to develop new methods of producing experimental statistics from new sources, as a first step, and to enrich their statistical production with new information in the longer term. The SOSR should increase its efforts to identify more new data sources and statistical domains where methodological developments could lead to the production of experimental statistics.

To improve beyond compliance with the ES CoP, the peer review team recommends:

R18. The Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic should further explore the use of new data sources to develop experimental statistics and extend the scope of the production of official statistics. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicators 10.3 and 2.4)

The provision of microdata (statistical data which does not allow direct identification of the statistical unit) for scientific and research purposes is provided for in the Act on State Statistics.

Based on this provision, the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic provides access to statistical microdata for scientific purposes to legal entities - research institutions, universities, analytical units - and students through the Research Data Centre. The Research Data Centre allows secure, controlled access to information but limits the use of statistical software to that provided by the SOSR. The number of people who can access the data is also limited because the service is only available at the SOSR headquarters in Bratislava.

Although the procedures for accessing microdata work well and are controlled by the SOSR staff members to prevent any breach of confidentiality, they make access difficult for researchers who wish to log in from outside the SOSR and use their own software.

To improve beyond compliance with the ES CoP, the peer review team recommends:

R19. The Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic should further improve the service provided to academia by providing researchers with a secure environment for remote access to microdata. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicator 15.4)

The Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic disseminates statistical products through various dissemination and communication channels targeting different user groups, including the web portal www.statistics.sk, the DATAcube. database, social networks such as Instagram, LinkedIn, Twitter and Facebook, video content through YouTube and open data through the National Open Data Portal. However, some users have difficulties in accessing data. In the latest user satisfaction survey (2022), users suggested that data should be presented in a clearer and more user-friendly way, and the DATAcube. database ranked last in satisfaction with the products and services provided by the SOSR. Improving website accessibility, making the application more user-friendly and modernising data dissemination (digital products, dashboards, video, maps) would meet user needs and bring the dissemination services in line with new information and communication technologies.

To improve beyond compliance with the ES CoP, the peer review team recommends:

R20. The Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic should make access to information more user-friendly and useful by redesigning the current dissemination platforms (such as website and DATAcube.), taking into account users' opinions. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicators 15.2 and 11.1)

Access to all outputs produced within the Slovak statistical system, with an indication of the date of their release, not only allows users to better plan their work, but also increases the transparency and credibility of the Slovak statistical system. Although the SOSR publishes a release calendar on its website for the statistics it produces, all European statistics, including those produced by the Other National Authorities developing, producing and disseminating European statistics, should have a prominent, clearly visible and easily accessible release calendar fostering the dissemination of their statistical data on the Other National Authorities' websites. This will ensure the transparency and accessibility of information.

To improve beyond compliance with the ES CoP, the peer review team recommends:

R21. The Other National Authorities reviewed (*Slovak Hydrometeorological Institute, Migration Office, Administration of State Material Reserves*) should enhance the visibility of the European statistics they produce, foster their dissemination on their website and display a release calendar. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicators 15.1, 15.2 and 6.5)

5.3 VIEWS OF THE NSI, AS THE NATIONAL COORDINATOR OF THE NSS AND THE PEER REVIEW, ON THOSE RECOMMENDATIONS WHERE THEY DIVERGE FROM PEER REVIEW EXPERTS' ASSESSMENT

None

ANNEX A – AGENDA OF THE VISIT

Timing	Topic	Participants
Day 1 – 19 June 2023		
9:00 - 9:45	Preparatory meeting	<p>The Peer Review Expert Team: All</p> <p>The NSI: Slovak PR Coordinator - Head of Civil Service Office Director of Directorate: General Methodology, Registers and Coordination of NSS Director of Directorate: Social Statistics Head of Unit: EU Affairs and International Cooperation</p>
9:45 - 10:00	Welcome and programme introduction	<p>The Peer Review Expert Team: All</p> <p>The NSI: President Slovak PR Coordinator - Head of Civil Service Office Director of Directorate: General Methodology, Registers and Coordination of NSS Director of Directorate: Social Statistics Head of Unit: EU Affairs and International Cooperation</p>
10:00 - 11:00	Presentation of the National Statistical System	<p>The Peer Review Expert Team: All</p> <p>The NSI: Director of Directorate: General Methodology, Registers and Coordination of NSS Director of Department: Coordination of NSS Director of Department: Coordination of Statistical Surveys Officer: General Methodology, Registers and Coordination of NSS Directorate Officer: General Methodology, Registers and Coordination of NSS Directorate</p>
11:00 - 11:15	Coffee break	

11:15 - 12:45	Coordination and cooperation	<p>The Peer Review Expert Team: All</p> <p>The NSI: Director of Directorate: General Methodology, Registers and Coordination of NSS Director of Department: Coordination of NSS Director of Department: Coordination of Statistical Surveys Director of Directorate: Social Statistics</p>
12:45 - 13:45	Lunch	
13:45 - 15:15	Professional independence and the Law on Official Statistics and related legislation	<p>The Peer Review Expert Team: All</p> <p>The NSI: Director of Directorate: General Methodology, Registers and Coordination of NSS Officer: General Methodology, Registers and Coordination of NSS Director of Department: Coordination of Statistical Surveys Head of Civil Service Office Bureau Director of Directorate: Social Statistics Director of Directorate: Dissemination and Communication Director of Directorate: Information Systems</p>
15:15 - 15:30	Coffee break	
15:30 - 17:00	Programming, planning and resources	<p>The Peer Review Expert Team: All</p> <p>The NSI: Slovak PR Coordinator - Head of Civil Service Office Director of Directorate: Information Systems Director of Directorate: General Methodology, Registers and Coordination of NSS Director of Department: Administrative Data Sources Director of Department: Coordination of Statistical Surveys Director of Department: Personnel Office Director of Department: Economic Affairs</p>
17:00 - 18:00	Peer review expert team discussion	

Timing	Topic	Participants
Day 2 – 20 June 2023		
9:00 - 10:15	Quality	<p>The Peer Review Expert Team: All</p> <p>The NSI: Director of Directorate: General Methodology, Registers and Coordination of NSS Director of Directorate: Social Statistics Director of Directorate: Macroeconomic Statistics Director of Directorate: Business Statistics Director of Directorate: Dissemination and Communication Director of Department: Administrative Data Sources Director of Department: Strategy and Integrated Management System Officer: Strategy and Integrated Management System Department Officer: Strategy and Integrated Management System Department</p>
10:15 - 10:30	Coffee break	
10:30 - 12:00	Dissemination and confidentiality	<p>The Peer Review Expert Team: All</p> <p>The NSI: Director of Directorate: General Methodology, Registers and Coordination of NSS Officer: General Methodology, Registers and Director of Directorate: Dissemination and Communication Director of Department: Information Provision and Marketing Director of Department: Product Portfolio and Communication Director of Directorate: Social Statistics Coordination of NSS</p>
12:00 - 13:00	Lunch	

13:00 - 14:45	Methodology, data collection, data processing and administrative data	<p>The Peer Review Expert Team: All</p> <p>The NSI: Director of Directorate: General Methodology, Registers and Coordination of NSS Director of Directorate: Business Statistics Director of Directorate: Social Statistics Director of Directorate: Macroeconomic Statistics Director of Department: Coordination of Statistical Surveys Director of Department: Statistical Surveys and Methodology</p>
14:45 - 15:45	Meeting with junior staff	<p>The Peer Review Expert Team: All</p> <p>The NSI: Officer: Social Statistics Directorate Officer: Macroeconomic Statistics Directorate Officer: Macroeconomic Statistics Directorate Officer: General Methodology, Registers and Coordination of NSS Directorate Officer: General Methodology, Registers and Coordination of NSS Directorate</p>
15:45 - 16:00	Coffee break	
16:00 - 17:00	Progress and plans for the future	<p>The Peer Review Expert Team: All</p> <p>The NSI: President Slovak PR Coordinator - Head of Civil Service Office Director of Directorate: General Methodology, Registers and Coordination of NSS Director of Directorate: Social Statistics Director of Directorate: Dissemination and Communication Director of Directorate: Macroeconomic Statistics Director of Directorate: Business Statistics Director of Department: Strategy and Integrated Management System</p>
17:00 - 18:00	Peer review expert team discussion	
Timing	Topic	Participants
Day 3 – 21 June 2023		

9:00 - 9:30	General opening session with all the Other National Authorities (ONAs)	<p>The Peer Review Expert Team: All</p> <p>The NSI: Director of Directorate: General Methodology, Registers and Coordination of NSS Director of Directorate: Business Statistics</p> <p>Slovak Hydrometeorological Institute Head of Department: Slovak Hydrometeorological Institute Officer: Slovak Hydrometeorological Institute</p> <p>Ministry of Interior of the SR – Migration Office Officer: Ministry of Interior - Migration Office</p> <p>Administration of State Material Reserves of the SR: Vice-President: Administration of State Material Reserves Officer: Administration of State Material Reserves Officer: Administration of State Material Reserves</p>
9:30 - 11:00	Meeting with ONA - Slovak Hydrometeorological Institute	<p>The Peer Review Expert Team: All</p> <p>The NSI: Director of Directorate: General Methodology, Registers and Coordination of NSS Director of Directorate Business Statistics</p> <p>Slovak Hydrometeorological Institute Head of Department: Slovak Hydrometeorological Institute Officer: Slovak Hydrometeorological Institute</p>
11:00 - 11:15	Coffee break	
11:15 - 12:45	Meeting with ONA - Ministry of Interior - Migration Office	<p>The Peer Review Expert Team: All</p> <p>The NSI: Director of Directorate: Social Statistics Director of Department Population Statistics</p> <p>Ministry of Interior - Migration Office: Officer: Ministry of Interior - Migration Office Officer: Ministry of Interior - Migration Office</p>
12:45 - 13:45	Lunch	

13:45 - 15:15	Meeting with ONA - Administration of State Material Reserves	<p>The Peer Review Expert Team: All</p> <p>The NSI: Director of Directorate: General Methodology, Registers and Coordination of NSS Director of Directorate Business Statistics</p> <p>Administration of State Material Reserves: Vice-President: Administration of State Material Reserves Officer: Administration of State Material Reserves</p>
15:15 - 15:30	Coffee break	
15:30 - 16:45	Meeting with the Coordination Council	<p>The Peer Review Expert Team: All</p> <p>The NSI: President Director of Directorate: General Methodology, Registers and Coordination of NSS</p> <p>Coordination Council: Director of Directorate: Digitalization and IT – Ministry of Health Director of Directorate: Health Data Management - National Health Information Centre Director of Department: Economic Analysis – Ministry of Transport Officer: Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family Vice-President: Administration of State Material Reserves</p>
16:45 - 17:45	Peer review expert team discussion	
Timing	Topic	Participants
Day 4 – 22 June 2023		

9:30 - 11:00	Meeting with main data providers: providers of administrative data	<p>The Peer Review Expert Team: All</p> <p>The NSI: Director of Directorate: General Methodology, Registers and Coordination of NSS Director of Department: Administrative Data Sources</p> <p>Ministry of Finance: Director of Department: Summary Reporting Officer: Summary Reporting Department</p> <p>National Health Information Centre: Director of Directorate: Health Data Management</p>
11:00 - 11:15	Coffee break	
11:15 - 12:00	Meeting with providers of new data sources	<p>The Peer Review Expert Team: All</p> <p>The NSI: Director of Directorate: General Methodology, Registers and Coordination of NSS Director of Department: Administrative Data Sources</p> <p>Providers of new data sources: Vice-Chairman of board of Directors and Charging and IT Directorate: Národná diaľničná spoločnosť Director of IT and Services Directorate: COOP Jednota Key Account Manager: O2</p>
12:00 - 13:00	Meeting with main users – Media	<p>The Peer Review Expert Team: All</p> <p>The NSI: Director of Directorate: Dissemination and Communication Director of Department: Product Portfolio and Communication</p> <p>Media: Editor in Chief: Zdravotnícke noviny Editor: Hospodárske noviny Publicist: Retailmagazín</p>
13:00 - 14:00	Lunch	

14:00 - 15:00	<p>Meeting with main users – Ministries and other public/private institutions (including Central Bank as a user)</p>	<p>The Peer Review Expert Team: All</p> <p>The NSI: Director of Directorate: Macroeconomic Statistics Director of Directorate: Business Statistics</p> <p>National Bank of Slovakia: Director of Directorate: Data Management and Data Governance Officer: Department of Statistics</p> <p>Institute for Work and Family Research: Researcher</p> <p>Ministry of Finance: Head of Unit: EU Budget</p> <p>Ministry of Transport: Officer: Public Transport Policy Department</p>
15:00 - 16:00	<p>Meeting with main users – business associations and federations and trade unions, as well as representatives of a committee of users</p>	<p>The Peer Review Expert Team: All</p> <p>The NSI: Director of Directorate: Business Statistics Director of Directorate: General Methodology, Registers and Coordination of NSS</p> <p>Main users: President: Hotels and Restaurants Association General Manager: Construction Entrepreneurs Association Director of Suppliers Directorate: Automotive Industry Association</p>
16:00 - 16:15	Coffee break	

16:15 - 17:15	Meeting with main users – Scientific community	<p>The Peer Review Expert Team: All</p> <p>The NSI: Director of Directorate: General Methodology, Registers and Coordination of NSS Director of Directorate: Social Statistics</p> <p>Scientific community: Independent Researcher: Slovak Academy of Science Head of Statistics Department: University of Economics in Bratislava Head of Macroeconomic Analysis and Forecasting Unit: Infostat</p>
17:15 - 18:15	Peer review expert team discussion	

Timing	Topic	Participants
Day 5 – 23 June 2023		
9:00 - 10:30	Peer review expert team discussion	
10:30 - 11:00	Coffee break	
11:00 - 13:00	Meeting with the senior management of the NSI and of ONAs: conclusions and recommendations	<p>The Peer Review Expert Team: All</p> <p>The NSI: President Slovak PR Coordinator - Head of Civil Service Office Director of Directorate: General Methodology, Registers and Coordination of NSS Director of Directorate: Information Systems Director of Directorate: Dissemination and Communication Director of Directorate: Macroeconomic Statistics Director of Directorate: Business Statistics Director of Directorate: Social Statistics Director of Department: Strategy and Integrated Management System Head of Unit: EU Affairs and International Cooperation</p> <p>ONAs: Vice-President: Administration of State Material Reserves Officer: Administration of State Material Reserves Officer: Ministry of Interior - Migration Office Officer: Ministry of Interior – Migration Office Head of Department: Slovak Hydrometeorological Institute</p>

ANNEX B – LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic – SOSR:

President

Head of European Affairs and International Cooperation Unit

Head of Civil Service Office - Slovak Coordinator of the Peer Review

Head of Civil Service Bureau

Director of Personnel Office

Director of Economic Affairs Department

Director of General Methodology, Registers and Coordination of NSS Directorate

Director of Coordination of Statistical Surveys Department

Director of Administrative Data Sources Department

Director of Coordination of NSS Department

Officers - General Methodology, Registers and Coordination of NSS Directorate

Director of Information Systems Directorate

Director of Dissemination and Communication Directorate

Director of Information Provision and Marketing Department

Director of Product Portfolio and Communication Department

Director of Macroeconomic Statistics Directorate

Officers of Macroeconomic Statistics Directorate

Director of Business Statistics Directorate

Director of Social Statistics Directorate

Director of Population Statistics Department

Officer of Social Statistics Directorate

Director of Strategy and Integrated Management System Department

Officers of Strategy and Integrated Management System Department

Ministry of Interior – Migration Office:

Officer

Officer

Slovak Hydrometeorological Institute:

Head of Department of Emissions and Biofuels

Slovak Hydrometeorological Institute:

Officer

Administration of State Material Reserves:

Vice-President

Officer of Management of state material reserves Department

Main administrative data providers:

Ministry of Finance:

Director of Summary Reporting Department

Officer of Summary Reporting Department

National Health Information Centre:

Director of the Health Data Management Directorate

New data sources providers:

COOP Jednota:

Director of IT and Services Directorate

Národná diaľničná spoločnosť – Ministry of Transport:

Vice-Chairman of the Board of Directors and Charging and IT Directorate

O2 – Telecommunication:

Key Account Manager

Media:

Daily newspaper Hospodárske noviny:

Editor

Online portal Retailmagazín:

Publicist

Medical Journal Zdravotnícke noviny:

Editor in Chief

Ministries and other public institutions:

National Bank of Slovakia:

Head of Directorate on Data Management and Data Governance
Department of Statistics

Ministry of Transport:

Director of Public Transport Policy Department

Institute for Work and Family Research (Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family):

Researcher

Ministry of Finance:

Head of EU Budget Unit

Business Associations:

Automotive Industry Association (ZAP):

Director of Suppliers Directorate

Construction Entrepreneurs Association:

General Manager

Hotels and Restaurants Association:

President

Scientific Community:

Centre of Social and Psychological Sciences - Slovak Academy of Sciences:

Independent Researcher

Infostat:

Head of Macroeconomic Analysis and Forecasting Unit

Faculty of Economic Informatics - University of Economics in Bratislava:

Head of the Statistics Department

ESGAB like body - Coordination Council:

National Health Information Centre - Ministry of Health:

Director of the Health Data Management Directorate

Administration of State Material Reserves of the Slovak Republic:

Vice- President

Ministry of Health:

Director of Digitalisation and IT Directorate

Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family:

Officer

Ministry of Transport:

Director Department of Economic Analysis