



IMPROVEMENT ACTIONS BULGARIA



REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA
NATIONAL STATISTICAL INSTITUTE

**PEER REVIEWERS' RECOMMENDATIONS AND
IMPROVEMENT ACTIONS OF THE NATIONAL STATISTICAL
SYSTEM OF THE REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA IN RESPONSE TO
THE RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Recommendation

The Council of Ministers should establish a procedure for recruiting and appointing the President of the National Statistical Institute, ensuring the transparency thereof and the recruitment to be based on professional criteria only. (Compliance-relevant: ES CoP, Indicator 1.8)

Current situation:

According to the Statistics Act, the National Statistical Institute is managed by a President and three Vice-Presidents appointed by a decision of the Council of Ministers for a term of seven years. They can be reappointed only once. The President and Vice-Presidents are appointed by the Prime Minister.

That means that the procedure for the recruitment of the President of the NSI should be regulated in a by-law, which should guarantee a transparent procedure and appointment by professional criteria only. The procedure for the recruitment of the President of the NSI was established by order of the Deputy Prime Minister for Good Governance. It consists of professional criteria that should be met by the candidates for the President of the NSI, as well as the procedure of hearing and presentation of Concept Papers on the Development of the NSI.

The abovementioned procedure was held from April 2022 to July 2022 for the appointment of the current President of the NSI. After the Peer Review, there is already a statutory procedure for the election and appointment of the President of the National Statistical Institute. The conducted procedure for the election of the NSI President was widely covered by the media.

Improvement sub-action 1.1: Establish a procedure for the election and appointment of the President of the NSI for the next terms.

Deadline: Q2 of 2022

Responsible institution for the improvement sub-action 1.1: Council of Ministers

Improvement sub-action 1.2: Use the established procedure for the appointment

Deadline: Q2 of 2022

Responsible institution for the improvement sub-action 1.2: Council of Ministers

2. Recommendation

The Council of Ministers should take all necessary steps to amend the statistical legal framework to clarify the role, responsibilities and prerogatives of the President of the National Statistical Institute, and of the heads of other national authorities where appropriate, in particular to establish that the President has the sole responsibility for deciding on statistical methods, standards and procedures, and on the content and timing of statistical releases. (Compliance-relevant: ES CoP, Indicators 1.4 and 1.3)

Current situation:

Ensuring professional independence also entails making it explicit that the President of the National Statistical Institute has the sole responsibility for taking all statistical decisions and for ensuring that official statistics are produced independently, including by deciding on the content and timing of statistical releases. In this respect, the current situation in Bulgaria in practice should be formalised by aligning the legal framework with the ES CoP. The legal framework should make it clear that the President of the National Statistical Institute and the heads of the Other National Authorities, as appropriate, have the sole responsibility for taking

<p>all statistical decisions and for ensuring that official statistics are produced independently. The President of the National Statistical Institute should have the sole responsibility for deciding on the content and timing of statistical releases. Both the content and the timing of the release of those statistics should therefore be known well in advance. The publication of the release calendar and the National Statistical Programme shall not be subject to approval by the Council of Ministers. In addition, the published release calendar can be revised if needed.</p>
<p>Improvement sub-action 2.1: Proposal for amendment of the relevant by-law to clarify the role and responsibilities of the President of the National Statistical Institute, and of the heads of Other National Authorities where appropriate</p> <p>The National Statistical Institute intends to submit a proposal for the amendment of the relevant by-law, in order to clarify and highlight the roles and responsibilities of the President of the National Statistical Institute and the heads of the Other National Authorities, ensuring professional independence in the production of official statistics and that all statistical decisions are taken by the President of National Statistical Institute and heads of Other National Authorities. This sub-action can be achieved through close collaboration and communication with the relevant ONAs and their principal bodies</p>
<p>Deadline: Q3 of 2027</p>
<p>Responsible institution for the improvement sub-action 2.1: National Statistical Institute and Other National Authorities</p>
<p>Improvement sub-action 2.2: Submission of the proposal to the government</p>
<p>Deadline: Q4 of 2027.</p>
<p>Responsible institution for the improvement sub-action 2.2: relevant bodies responsible for by-laws</p>
<p>Improvement sub-action 2.3: Approval by the relevant bodies responsible for by-laws</p>
<p>Deadline: Q4 of 2027</p>
<p>Responsible institution for the improvement sub-action 2.3: Council of Ministers</p>

<p>3. Recommendation</p> <p>The National Statistical Institute should review the pre-release access arrangements, particularly in relation to explaining the reasons for pre-release access, limiting the scope of pre-release access to well-justified cases, and making the arrangements more visible. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicator 6.7)</p>
<p>Current situation:</p> <p>Pre-release access is explicitly foreseen in the Rules for the Dissemination of Statistical Products and Services, Article 7(6), as follows: ‘Information to the President, Prime Minister and President of the National Assembly shall be sent by courier one hour prior to the official dissemination under strict embargo on data disclosure.’ The existing arrangement related to pre-release access to statistics includes several specific stakeholders who have general pre-release access to all statistics. However, the relevant provision does not make it clear that sending information prior to official dissemination constitutes a pre-release access, which should remain exceptional. Neither does it establish nor refer to the actual arrangements put in place for such access, notably as regards the strict embargo conditions.</p>
<p>Improvement sub-action 3.1: Establish a formal working group to assess the impact and necessity of the change of the pre-release access procedure.</p>
<p>Deadline: Q1 of 2025</p>

Responsible institution for improvement sub-action 3.1: National Statistical Institute
Improvement sub-action 3.2: On the basis of the conclusions of the working group, if they are found to be essential and necessary, amendments to the relevant internal regulations are to be made to specify, justify and distinguish the arrangements and the singular cases when they occur.
Deadline: Q3 of 2025
Responsible institution for improvement sub-action 3.2: National Statistical Institute
Improvement sub-action 3.3: On the basis of the conclusions of the working group, if it is found that no change is necessary, it should be described more fully in the information dissemination procedure.
Deadline: Q3 of 2025
Responsible institution for improvement sub-action 3.3: National Statistical Institute

<p>4. Recommendation</p> <p>The three other national authorities reviewed (the Agrostatics Department in the Ministry of Agriculture, the Directorate of Analysis, Planning and Prognosis and the Department of Medical Expertise of Working Capacity and Accidents at Work in the National Social Security Institute, the Directorate of Monitoring and Assessment of the Environment in the Executive Environment Agency) should increase the transparency and visibility of their statistics-producing role, including by explaining their professional independence, and statistical activities, based on their statistical work programme, both internally and externally. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicators 1.3 and 1.5)</p>
<p>Current situation:</p> <p>The statistical activities in the three Other National Authorities reviewed are located either within ministries (the 'Agrostatics' Department in the Directorate-General Agriculture and Regional Policy within the Ministry of Agriculture and the 'Monitoring and Assessment of the Environment' Directorate in the Executive Environment Agency within the Ministry of Environment and Water) or within national institutes (the 'Analysis, Planning and Prognosis' Directorate and the 'Medical Expertise of Working Capacity and Accidents at Work' Department in the 'Insurance and Short-term Benefits' Directorate within the National Social Security Institute). These organisations have other types of responsibilities and tasks besides statistics, some of which are political in nature and follow different practices and principles than the statistical activities. The statistical activities of these entities within ministries and institutes and the quality framework upon which European statistics are based are not clearly communicated to the outside audience or within the institutions.</p>
<p>Improvement action 4: The three other national authorities reviewed are to increase the transparency and visibility of their statistics-producing role, including by explaining their professional independence and statistical activities based on their statistical work programme, both internally and externally. –This will be done through dedicated sections on their websites, containing statistical data, relevant methodological documents, reference metadata and quality reports.</p>
Deadline: Q4 of 2025
<p>Responsible institution for improvement action 4:</p> <p>Ministry of Agriculture ('Agrostatics' Department in the Directorate-General Agriculture and Regional Policy),</p>

National Social Security Institute ('Analysis, Planning and Prognosis' Directorate and the 'Medical Expertise of Working Capacity and Accidents at Work' Department in the 'Insurance and Short-term Benefits' Directorate)

Ministry of Environment and Water ("Monitoring and Assessment of the Environment" Directorate in the Executive Environment Agency)

5. Recommendation

The National Social Security Institute and the Executive Environment Agency should delineate the statistical responsibilities and tasks within their organisations; the organisational structure and rules should support a clear distinction between their role in producing European statistics and other roles. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicator 1.3)

Current situation:

In two of the three Other National Authorities reviewed (the National Social Security Institute and the Executive Environment Agency), statistical tasks and various administrative tasks are carried out in the same departments by the same personnel. This involves a risk of statistics-producing roles and principles becoming unclear or mixed up with other roles and principles with regard to data quality, confidentiality and data sharing. Another risk for statistical production is whether there are adequate human resources for the production of official statistics if other non-statistical duties and roles are continuously given to the statistics workforce.

Improvement action 5: Delineation of statistical responsibilities and administrative tasks through the amendment of the Rules of procedure of the Executive Environment Agency and National Social Security Institute, pertaining to the clear distinction between the statistical and administrative activities of its structural units. The organisational structure and the Rules of Procedure should delineate the production of European statistics and the other roles of the relevant units.

Deadline: Q4 of 2025

Responsible institution for improvement action 5:

National Social Security Institute ('Analysis, Planning and Prognosis' Directorate and the 'Medical Expertise of Working Capacity and Accidents at Work' Department in the 'Insurance and Short-term Benefits' Directorate)

Ministry of Environment and Water ("Monitoring and Assessment of the Environment" Directorate in the Executive Environment Agency)

6. Recommendation

The National Statistical Institute should explore ways to engage with relevant stakeholders to address the current salary limitations and to identify internal solutions to these limitations, such as through efficiency gains or organisational reengineering. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicators 3.1 and 10.4)

Current situation:

The National Statistical Institute has an engaging, motivating and supportive work environment. Yet, retaining talent, and young talent in particular, remains a challenge in a context in which attracting and retaining talent is critical for the relevance and sustainability of the National Statistical Institute. Current career development efforts, such as promotions

across diverse seniority ranks with modest salary increases, are appropriate but insufficient. The low wages within the state administration and the National Statistical Institute are a major obstacle to attracting and retaining talent.
Improvement sub-action 6.1: Salary increase of 11 percent.
Deadline: December 2022
Responsible institution for improvement sub-action 6.1: National Statistical Institute
Improvement sub-action 6.2: Analysis of disparities in staff remuneration, including salaries and additional payments such as material incentives and project participation
Deadline: Q4 of 2023
Responsible institution for improvement sub-action 6.2: National Statistical Institute
Improvement sub-action 6.3: Amendments of the Internal Rules for administration of the European and other international projects, by stimulating the participation in projects of more employees and reducing the existing disparities
Deadline: Q4 of 2023
Responsible institution for improvement sub-action 6.3: National Statistical Institute
Improvement sub-action 6.4: Amendments of the Rules for additional incentives in order to be based on achieved results and thus to reduce the possibilities for disparities due to personal preference.
Deadline: Q4 of 2023
Responsible institution for improvement sub-action 6.4: National Statistical Institute

7. Recommendation

The National Statistical Institute should develop incentives to attract and retain staff in a more systematic and planned manner, and should put in place mechanisms to ensure knowledge transfer, career development and career opportunities. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicators 3.1 and 7.6).

Current situation:

Currently, the average age of NSI employees is high. For the attraction and retention of employees, as well as for the opportunities for their career development, it is necessary for more experienced employees (especially those in pre-retirement and retirement age) to train their younger colleagues. In this way, continuity of work and the transmission of good practices will be achieved.

Some of the work processes in the NSI are characterised by a small number of employees (even one in some cases) carrying out specified activities. It is a result of the employees' experience in conducting specific surveys. If the work process of the NSI employees is changed in line with the General Model of the Statistical Production Process (GSBPM), the employees will have the opportunity, on the one hand, to specialize in every individual phase of this model and, on the other hand, to participate in more surveys. This, in turn, will provide knowledge exchange and career development opportunities.

Improvement sub-action 7.1: Transfer of knowledge - experienced employees (especially those of pre-retirement age) are to train their younger colleagues. The transfer should begin at least 6 months before the experienced employee's retirement. Create a procedure with detailed rules

Deadline: Q4 of 2025
Responsible institution for improvement sub-action 7.1: National Statistical Institute
Improvement sub-action 7.2: Change the work processes following the General Statistical Manufacturing Process Model (GSBPM).
Deadline: Q4 of 2025
Responsible institution for improvement sub-action 7.2: National Statistical Institute

8. Recommendation

The National Statistical Institute should ensure that the approach to training includes both internal and external sources, and is based on a comprehensive assessment of needs, developed in consultation with staff, and linked to their mid-term career development plans. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicators 7.6 and 3.1)

Current situation:

The NSI follows an annual human resource training plan that covers all staff and draws upon the annual staff evaluation. The plan is quite comprehensive, and all personnel in the human resources department are involved in organising and evaluating vocational training. However, there seems to be a misalignment between training and career development. Staff are unaware of the connection between competency, training and promotion. This situation occurs in a context in which the design of individual training plans is not based on a collaborative diagnosis process involving staff (future trainees). The training courses offered are standard, which means that training sequences do not always suit specific individual career development needs. Furthermore, training plans have a short-term scope; they are done by year and do not incorporate a mid-term view (3-5 years) aligned to staff career progression inside the NSI.

Improvement sub-action 8.1: Assessment of NSI's needs in terms of staff training for the completion of current/future tasks and development of an Action Plan for the alignment of staff training with organisational needs.

Deadline: Q1 of 2024

Responsible institution for improvement sub-action 8.1: National Statistical Institute

Improvement sub-action 8.2: Identification of individual needs for specific personnel training and improvement in certain areas, ensuring the building-up of knowledge, expertise and career development competitiveness.

Deadline: Q2 of 2024

Responsible institution for improvement sub-action 8.2: National Statistical Institute

Improvement sub-action 8.3: Development of individual training plans.

Deadline: Q3 of 2024

Responsible institution for improvement sub-action 8.3: National Statistical Institute

Improvement sub-action 8.4: Conducting training of staff.

Deadline: Continuous process, started after Q1 of 2025

Responsible institution for improvement sub-action 8.4: National Statistical Institute

9. Recommendation

The National Statistical Institute, in cooperation with the other national authorities developing, producing and disseminating European statistics, should strengthen the coordination activities of the Bulgarian statistical system by introducing structured and regular procedures to provide methodological and other guidance to, and share good practices and tools with, other national authorities. A formal mechanism for the coordination should be targeted solely towards other national authorities. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicator 1bis.1)

Current situation:

The Statistics Act designates a clear mandate to the NSI to coordinate statistical activities in Bulgaria. The coordination is executed mainly through the National Statistical Council. The National Statistical Council participates by giving an opinion and recommendations on the Strategy for Development of the Bulgarian Statistical System for each 5-year period. The Council also discusses proposals from ONAs for the National Statistical Programme and supports the Bulgarian statistical system in implementing the National Statistical Programme. The Council is a useful body for discussing the Strategy for Development and the Statistical Programme. The National Statistical Council consists of representatives from each ONA, Academic community representatives and representatives of various respondents and users.

Improvement sub-action 9.1: Establishing a formal mechanism for coordination between national official producers of statistics through strengthening the role of the National Statistical Council, including through regular meetings of the Council and a report on the work done. Preparation of an action plan and detailed reports on the work performed.

Deadline: Q4 of 2023

Responsible institution for improvement sub-action 9.1: National Statistical Institute

Improvement sub-action 9.2: Development and implementation of standard procedures for methodological and quality guidance and exchange of good practices on a regular basis.

Deadline: Continuous process, started after Q1 of 2024

Responsible institution for improvement sub-action 9.2: National Statistical Institute

Improvement sub-action 9.3: Participation of a wider range of experts in working meetings and other forums, related to the implementation of structured and regular procedures for the provision of methodological and other support and the exchange of good practices and tools for producers of official statistics. Preparation of a report, describing the number of participating experts, meetings held, recommendations and decisions made.

Deadline: Continuous process, started after Q1 of 2024

Responsible institution for improvement sub-action 9.3: National Statistical Institute

10. Recommendation

The National Statistical Institute, in cooperation with the other national authorities developing, producing and disseminating European statistics, should take an active approach in coordinating the development of quality management among other national authorities and develop up-to-date national quality guidelines and support their implementation through staff training and regular monitoring. The National Statistical Institute should work to obtain appropriate funding to support the necessary coordination. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicators 1bis.2 and 3.1)

Current situation:

The NSI has published a good set of quality guidelines on its website and the three ONAs reviewed use these guidelines in their statistical activities. However, the guidelines are rather old and do not fully support good quality and modern statistical production and processes. The NSI has actively developed its quality management system, including quality management and information security. While the quality management system has been updated, the national quality guidelines have not been adjusted to this new quality management system and are therefore outdated. Furthermore, while the NSI is in a position to implement this coordination task, it also needs appropriate funding to do so. Since the National Statistical Institute has advanced its quality work, there is a possibility to enhance ONA quality management, e.g. through additional training of the ONAs by the NSI. With the very limited resources for quality management, this is currently not possible to the extent needed and thus the NSI should be appropriately resourced for the task. Quality management within the Bulgarian statistical system can also benefit the e-government work within the Bulgarian government by adding quality and data security to the overall data management. The NSI and ONAs work closely with register holders in the Bulgarian government while using the data for statistical purposes. They are thus in a position to pay attention to data quality and, in cooperation with the register holders, to improve the quality and quality management of Bulgarian data.

Improvement sub-action 10.1: Active approach in the further development and enhancement of the national quality guidelines in the National Statistical System through revision of the national quality guidelines, used as a reference standard for the assessment of data quality in the entire National Statistical System.

Deadline: Q1 of 2025

Responsible institution for improvement sub-action 10.1: National Statistical Institutes and Other National Authorities

Improvement sub-action 10.2: Publication of those national quality guidelines on the sites of the National Statistical Institute and the Other National Authorities.

Deadline: Q1 of 2025

Responsible institution for improvement sub-action 10.2: National Statistical Institutes and Other National Authorities

Improvement sub-action 10.3: Creation and implementation of 'audit' procedures for the regular and frequent review of the statistical processes and products in the ONAs in an objective and amicable manner, in the spirit of mutual trust, aimed solely at improvement.

Deadline: Q1 of 2025

Responsible institution for improvement sub-action 10.3: National Statistical Institutes and Other National Authorities

Improvement sub-action 10.4: Provision of periodic quality training of staff in the Other National Authorities by the National Statistical Institute, focused on the quality-related topics of statistical information.

Deadline: Continuous process, after the Q1 of 2026

Responsible institution for improvement sub-action 10.4: National Statistical Institutes and Other National Authorities

11. Recommendation

The three other national authorities reviewed (the 'Agrostatistics' Department in the Ministry of Agriculture, the Directorate of Analysis, Planning and Prognosis and the Department of Medical Expertise of Working Capacity and Accidents at Work in the National Social Security Institute, the Directorate of Monitoring and Assessment of the Environment in the Executive Environment Agency) should publish a release calendar and statistics on their websites. Alternatively, the three other national authorities reviewed should publish their official statistics on the website and/or web services of the National Statistical Institute and provide links from their respective websites. The three other national authorities should publish their statistical information in reusable format (e.g., xlsx, open data). (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicators 6.5 and 15.2)

Current situation:

The NSI has a well-structured release calendar on its website for statistics produced by the NSI. For the three ONAs reviewed, there is no release calendar on their English-language websites. Their corresponding statistics were also not to be found on their websites or the NSI's website. Statistical release dates and times should be pre-announced so that users know when to expect statistical data to be published and can plan their work accordingly. Users also need access to statistical information, which can be printed and/or a web-based publication or a database service on a website. The NSI has developed the INFOSTAT information system to offer users flexible access to statistical data; this service could also be used as a national service to offer access to official statistical information. This could offer an economical and efficient service for the Bulgarian statistical system.

Improvement sub-action 11.1: Improve the visibility and enhancement of user-oriented services of the three reviewed Other National Authorities through regular publication of data from conducted statistical surveys and a release calendar in both English and Bulgarian, divided into topics and dates, in reusable formats (open data formats) on the websites of the three reviewed Other National Authorities.

Deadline: Q1 of 2024

Responsible institution for improvement sub-action 11.1:

Ministry of Agriculture ('Agrostatistics' Department in the Directorate-General Agriculture and Regional Policy),

National Social Security Institute ('Analysis, Planning and Prognosis' Directorate and the 'Medical Expertise of Working Capacity and Accidents at Work' Department in the 'Insurance and Short-term Benefits' Directorate)

Ministry of Environment and Water ("Monitoring and Assessment of the Environment" Directorate in the Executive Environment Agency)

Improvement sub-action 11.2: Publication of reference links to the specific sections of National Statistical Institute's website to access other relevant information and web services in both Bulgarian and English.

Deadline: Q1 of 2024
<p>Responsible institution for improvement sub-action 11.2:</p> <p>Ministry of Agriculture ('Agrostatistics' Department in the Directorate-General Agriculture and Regional Policy),</p> <p>National Social Security Institute ('Analysis, Planning and Prognosis' Directorate and the 'Medical Expertise of Working Capacity and Accidents at Work' Department in the 'Insurance and Short-term Benefits' Directorate)</p> <p>Ministry of Environment and Water ("Monitoring and Assessment of the Environment" Directorate in the Executive Environment Agency)</p>
Improvement sub-action 11.3: Publishing the European statistics Code of Practice on the websites of the three reviewed ONAs in both English and Bulgarian.
Deadline: Q1 of 2024
<p>Responsible institution for improvement sub-action 11.3:</p> <p>Ministry of Agriculture ('Agrostatistics' Department in the Directorate-General Agriculture and Regional Policy),</p> <p>National Social Security Institute ('Analysis, Planning and Prognosis' Directorate and the 'Medical Expertise of Working Capacity and Accidents at Work' Department in the 'Insurance and Short-term Benefits' Directorate)</p> <p>Ministry of Environment and Water ("Monitoring and Assessment of the Environment" Directorate in the Executive Environment Agency)</p>
<p>12. Recommendation</p> <p>The three other national authorities reviewed (the 'Agrostatistics' Department in the Ministry of Agriculture, the Directorate of Analysis, Planning and Prognosis and the Department of Medical Expertise of Working Capacity and Accidents at Work in the National Social Security Institute, the Directorate of Monitoring and Assessment of the Environment in the Executive Environment Agency) should publish quality reports and methodological and quality documents on their websites. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicators 15.6 and 15.7)</p>
<p>Current situation:</p> <p>Users of statistical information are interested in knowing what data the statistics are based on and how they are compiled, i.e. the methods behind the numbers. This information can be obtained from methodological documentation. The National Statistical Institute has developed its website structure so that both metadata and methodology as well as quality reports are easily accessible in connection with the statistics published. The same kind of structure should be developed for the statistics compiled by the three ONAs reviewed.</p>
Improvement sub-action 12.1: Enhancing transparency of the methods behind the statistics produced by the three reviewed ONAs through improving the dedicated sections of the websites of the three reviewed ONAs by structuring and linking the statistical data contained, relevant methodological documents, reference metadata and quality reports, so they can be easily accessible and comprehensive for the users.
Deadline: Q1 of 2025
Responsible institution for improvement sub-action 12.1:

Ministry of Agriculture ('Agrostatistics' Department in the Directorate-General Agriculture and Regional Policy),

National Social Security Institute ('Analysis, Planning and Prognosis' Directorate and the 'Medical Expertise of Working Capacity and Accidents at Work' Department in the 'Insurance and Short-term Benefits' Directorate)

Ministry of Environment and Water ("Monitoring and Assessment of the Environment" Directorate in the Executive Environment Agency)

Improvement sub-action 12.2: Using the Standard Integrated Metadata Structure (SDMX format) to publish reference metadata and quality reports on the websites of the three reviewed ONAs.

Deadline: Q1 of 2025

Responsible institution for improvement sub-action 12.2:

Ministry of Agriculture ('Agrostatistics' Department in the Directorate-General Agriculture and Regional Policy),

National Social Security Institute ('Analysis, Planning and Prognosis' Directorate and the 'Medical Expertise of Working Capacity and Accidents at Work' Department in the 'Insurance and Short-term Benefits' Directorate)

Ministry of Environment and Water ("Monitoring and Assessment of the Environment" Directorate in the Executive Environment Agency)

<p>13. Recommendation</p> <p>The Government should take steps towards removing all legal obstacles to accessing administrative sources, as well as towards expanding the information included in registers and improving their timeliness. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicator 2.2)</p>	<p>15. Recommendation</p> <p>The Council of Ministers should take all necessary steps to amend the Statistics Act to clarify that the National Statistical Institute and the other national authorities developing, producing and disseminating European statistics have the legal right to be consulted about the concepts, definitions and quality of administrative data. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicator 2.2)</p>
<p>Current situation:</p> <p>The Statistics Act (Article 20.6) gives the National Statistical Institute and the ONAs the right of access, free of charge, to administrative data held based on a law. This has enabled the National Statistical Institute and the ONAs to be very successful in using a wide range of administrative data for the production of official statistics. In practice, it is not always easy to obtain access, and access is sometimes refused with arguments relating to the law on which the requested administrative data is based. There are also no registers of houses and other buildings, and geo-information is almost always lacking. Registers are not always updated frequently enough to be used for timely statistics. The National Statistical Institute and the ONAs could benefit from public support from the government, e.g. by giving access to administrative data a prominent place in the government's e-strategy.</p>	<p>Current situation:</p> <p>In many cases, the NSI and the ONAs are already effectively consulted about the concepts and definitions used for administrative data, even though the Statistics Act does not seem to give them the right to be consulted. In other cases, consultation is not effective enough or timely enough, and the NSI has to implement detailed conversions to statistical concepts and definitions. These conversions are carried out by the NSI's statistical units, as these issues are not considered to be horizontal; as a consequence, more advanced statistical methods might not be investigated or might remain underutilized. Also, the opportunities for reusing administrative data within the NSI do not seem to be fully exploited.</p>
<p>Improvement sub-actions 13.1 and 15.1: Highlighting the prominent place of the National Statistical Institute in the national administrative data strategy by establishing a dialogue with administrative data holders and relevant decision-makers for the purpose of bringing up system-level issues, pertaining to the access and timeliness of administrative data.</p>	
<p>Deadline: Q1 of 2024</p>	
<p>Responsible institution for improvement sub-actions 13.1 and 15.1: National Statistical Institute and relevant stakeholders</p>	
<p>Improvement sub-actions 13.2 and 15.2: Highlighting the prominent place of the National Statistical Institute in the national administrative data strategy by submitting a motivated proposal for the amendment of the legal basis to clarify the role of the NSI and the other national authorities developing, producing and disseminating official statistics regarding the legal rights of those public bodies to access and be consulted about the concepts, definitions and quality of administrative data.</p>	
<p>Deadline: Ongoing process, after Q4 of 2024 (timeline depends on decision-makers)</p>	
<p>Responsible institution for improvement sub-actions 13.2 and 15.2: National Statistical Institute and relevant stakeholders</p>	

<p>14 Recommendation</p> <p>The National Statistical Institute should continue to develop and implement a strategy for access to and use of administrative data, and to work very actively with administrative data providers to ensure access, both at working level and at the strategic and highest management levels. This administrative data strategy should include the necessary actions to achieve, in cooperation with the administrative data providers, better alignment between administrative and statistical concepts and definitions, and to increase the quality of administrative data. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicator 9.4)</p>	<p>16. Recommendation</p> <p>The National Statistical Institute's administrative data strategy should include applied research and the development of statistical methods for the use of administrative data in the production of official statistics, and ensure the necessary resources for this work. The National Statistical Institute should also explore the opportunities for an increased reuse of administrative data within the National Statistical Institute. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicator 8.7)</p>
<p>Current situation:</p> <p>Obtaining access to and the use of administrative data could benefit from a more proactive approach by the National Statistical Institute. An explicit strategy would provide a framework for improving relations with administrative data providers, obtaining access to administrative data and using such data in statistical production.</p>	<p>Current situation:</p> <p>The use of administrative data in the production of official statistics is not entirely straightforward. Administrative data may contain errors, and their concepts may differ from statistical concepts; also, linking with other administrative data or survey data may produce errors. It would therefore be useful for the National Statistical Institute to extend its expertise in this area.</p>
<p>Improvement sub-actions 14.1 and 16.1: Inventory of the existing sources of administrative data and identification of promising new ones for the production of official statistics in the National Statistical Institute.</p>	
<p>Deadline: Q3 of 2024</p>	
<p>Responsible institution for the improvement sub-action 14.1 and 16.1: National Statistical Institute and other relevant stakeholders</p>	
<p>Improvement sub-actions 14.2 and 16.2: Signing agreements with public bodies pertaining to access to administrative data for statistical purposes when necessary.</p>	
<p>Deadline: Q1 of 2025</p>	
<p>Responsible institution for improvement sub-actions 14.2 and 16.2: National Statistical Institute and other relevant stakeholders</p>	
<p>Improvement sub-actions 14.3 and 16.3: Development of tools/methods for the quality assessment and use of administrative data in the National Statistical Institute.</p>	
<p>Deadline: Q4 of 2025</p>	
<p>Responsible institution for improvement sub-actions 14.3 and 16.3: National Statistical Institute and other relevant stakeholders</p>	

17. Recommendation

The National Statistical Institute, other national authorities developing, producing and disseminating European statistics and administrative data providers should take the necessary steps to launch and maintain an automated data exchange. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicator 10.3).

Current situation:

Data exchange between the National Statistical Institute, ONAs developing, producing and disseminating European statistics, and administrative data providers and respondents, in particular enterprises, takes various forms: web portals, CD-ROMs, paper format, USB sticks, etc. Progress is being made in this area, and the National Statistical Institute plays an important role here, for example, as coordinator of the Single-Entry Point project, whereby enterprises need to provide their data only once. Automatic data exchange between the NSI, ONAs, administrative data holders and respondents will reduce expenses for all parties by decreasing the number of manual operations and will bring about a higher quality official statistics, thus reducing the probability of errors during processing.

Improvement action 17: Scaling up and improving existing automated data exchange by applying automated data exchange through integration between the different information systems of NSI and those of other public bodies.

Deadline: Q4 of 2027

Responsible institution for improvement action 17: National Statistical Institute and other relevant stakeholders

18. Recommendation

The National Statistical Institute should continue research and development activities for exploring new data sources and in other methodological fields, and publish the results of this work on its website. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicator 13.5)

Current situation:

The area of new data is very promising for official statistics, for example, for producing more frequent and more detailed statistics. The NSI has very successfully performed applied research and development on new data, such as scanner data, big data and data obtained by web scraping. This was carried out in cooperation with other European NSIs and has led to the development of experimental statistics, in particular for online job advertisements and for online-based enterprise characteristics. It would give impetus to the NSI's reputation as a knowledge institute if this research and any future research were to be published on its website, for example on a separate webpage for research and development. The resulting statistics could then be published on a separate page for experimental statistics. This could also contribute towards making the NSI an even more attractive employer for talented data scientists and statisticians.

Improvement sub-action 18.1: Exploring the potential of and using alternative data sources (web data sources, scanner data, privately held data and others) for official statistics, including through the increased visibility of experimental results.

Deadline: Q4 of 2024

Responsible institution for improvement sub-action 18.1: National Statistical Institute

Improvement sub-action 18.2: Development of methodological and quality documents related to all stages of the production process related to the usage of alternative data sources and their use in official statistics.
Deadline: Q4 of 2024
Responsible institution for improvement sub-action 18.2: National Statistical Institute
Improvement sub-action 18.3: Regularly publishing experimental statistics from various alternative data sources in different statistical fields.
Deadline: Q1 of 2025
Responsible institution for improvement sub-action 18.3: National Statistical Institute
Improvement sub-action 18.4: Adapting the national statistical business model and legislation when necessary for the use of internet data sources and specifically via using Eurostat's Web Intelligence Hub.
Deadline: Q4 of 2027
Responsible institution for improvement sub-action 18.4: National Statistical Institute

19. Recommendation
The National Statistical Institute should establish a consultative body with business associations to discuss current challenges and actions to address the response burden on businesses. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicators 9.3 and 9.1)
Current situation:
The National Statistical Institute has a good relationship with users and facilitates and promotes regular information exchanges. Institutional users, including producers of official statistical data, are members of the National Statistical Council. In this setting, operational work with institutional users such as the business community tends to be ad hoc, conducted in inter-organisational working groups and without user-specific agendas addressed through systematic and regular exchange channels. Given that there still remain challenges in the response burden, especially on businesses, a more targeted approach would be advisable.
Improvement sub-action 19.1: Improving relations with different focus business groups through organising annual meetings with the nationally representative employers' organisations to discuss the current challenges and further actions to reduce respondent burden.
Deadline: Q4 of 2025
Responsible institution for improvement sub-action 19.1: National Statistical Institute and other relevant stakeholders
Improvement sub-action 19.2: Establishing an advisory body - Council or Committee, to the President of the NSI, where the nationally representative employers' organisations would be represented.
Deadline: Q4 of 2026
Responsible institution for improvement sub-action 19.2: National Statistical Institute and other relevant stakeholders

20. Recommendation

The National Statistical Institute should intensify and customise interaction with different user profiles to maximise the potential of their experience as users of statistics. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicators 11.1 and 11.3).

Current situation:

The range of users of official statistics in Bulgaria is becoming more and more comprehensive. Citizens, civil servants in relevant ministries, academic researchers, policymakers, business organisations and the media increasingly use statistics. Their distinct requirements and evolving needs call for a customised approach. However, there are no consultative bodies for different user groups and profiles in a context in which two of the National Statistical Institute's strategic goals are transitioning from statistics to value-added statistics, and maintaining high quality and confidence in official statistics.

Improvement sub-action 20.1: Conducting a user survey and segmenting the statistical data user groups.

Deadline: Q3 of 2024

Responsible institution for improvement sub-action 20.1: National Statistical Institute

Improvement sub-action 20.2: Development of a questionnaire for each specific data user group, in order to study their expectations on the produced statistical data by the NSI.

Deadline: Q4 of 2024

Responsible institution for improvement sub-action 20.2: National Statistical Institute

Improvement sub-action 20.3: Development of a report and an action plan based on the conducted survey.

Deadline: Q4 of 2024

Responsible institution for improvement sub-action 20.3: National Statistical Institute

21. Recommendation

The National Statistical Institute should establish and maintain a dialogue with the Government about new data sources and their role in official statistics and e-government. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicator 2.4)

Current situation:

The National Statistical Institute has made promising developments exploring new data sources in a context in which the data landscape in the country is expanding, and the newly developed e-government strategy opens the door to new possibilities. The current National Development Programme Bulgaria 2030 explicitly mentions that decision-making based on data is crucial to improving the country's institutional environment and the will to transform into a data-driven economy. The programme also advocates an open data policy and efforts to implement e-government services. This national context offers fertile ground to work on options that have not yet been capitalised upon. The NSI is especially well placed to participate in data stewardship for the e-government strategy, for example by providing support or by playing a central role as data steward.

Improvement sub-action 21.1: Active partnership with the Government in harnessing the potential of new data sources by establishing a dialogue with the relevant government bodies

to address the challenges of new data sources and their use in official statistics. Establishing an annual forum.
Deadline: On-going process, dependent on decision-makers, after Q4 of 2024
Responsible institution for improvement sub-action 21.1: National Statistical Institute and relevant stakeholders
Improvement sub-action 21.2: Active participation in the development of a general policy for the enlargement and management of the national data ecosystem - within the National Statistical System and beyond - to address public demand for timely, accurate and reliable statistical data. Proposals made during the annual forum.
Deadline: On-going process, dependent on decision-makers, after Q4 of 2024
Responsible institution for improvement sub-action 21.2: National Statistical Institute and relevant stakeholders

22. Recommendation

The National Statistical Institute, in cooperation with the National Statistical Council, should explore the possibility of a strategic data alliance to elevate the current system-level challenges to society, particularly in the context of the role of data and official statistics for evidence-based policymaking, the push for a data-driven economy and the desired role of statistics in a democratic society. This alliance should go beyond the current programming and operational partnerships and include a broader range of actors. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicators 10.4, 10.2 and 2.1)

Current situation:

The National Statistical Institute has a remarkable status in the country. Partners and users across the Bulgarian statistical system value the National Statistical Institute highly, considering it a trustworthy, credible and competent organisation. Still, the National Statistical Institute faces some critical challenges that hinder its optimisation as an organisation. Some of these challenges are system-level aspects external to the organisation, such as salary level constraints and limitations on the access to and exchange of administrative data. In this context, cooperation with data producers, data holders and institutional users of official statistics is very fluid and constructive, yet it tends to be an ad hoc, issue-based and operational-level type of cooperation. System-level issues are not necessarily addressed as part of a collective effort. The setting of the National Development Programme Bulgaria 2030 and the government's e-strategy offer the opportunity to start discussing and finding system-level solutions to aspects that hinder the optimal performance of the National Statistical Institute within the Bulgarian statistical system.

Improvement sub-action 22.1: Taking a leading role in the national data stewardship by significantly increasing efforts for the creation of strategic alliances related to the access and usage of new data sources, taking into account the important role of official statistics for society and e-government by discussing it within the National Statistical Council.

Deadline: Q4 of 2024

Responsible institution for improvement sub-action 22.1: National Statistical Institute and relevant stakeholders

Improvement sub-action 22.2: Initiate the establishment of a national Committee or Council, dedicated entirely to data governance and systematic and harmonised approach to the processes of storage, usage and access to data from various sources. At discretion, this may

also be included in the functions of the National Statistical Council or a new council or committee may be created.

Deadline: Q4 of 2025.

Responsible institution for improvement sub-action 22.2: National Statistical Institute and relevant stakeholders