



PEER REVIEWERS' RECOMMENDATIONS AND STATISTICS ESTONIA'S IMPROVEMENT ACTIONS IN RESPONSE TO THE RECOMMENDATIONS

Peer reviewer's recommendations and Statistics Estonia's improvement actions in response to the recommendations

Ensuring the availability of adequate resources to meet the requirements for European and National statistics

- 1. The relevant authorities should provide Statistics Estonia with adequate budgetary resources to ensure that all European statistical requirements, particularly those required under EU regulations, can be met in a satisfactory manner. (European statistics Code of Practice, indicator 3.1.)***

Current situation:

The core annual budget of Statistics Estonia (SE), i.e. excluding expenditure on the periodic population and housing census and related activities and foreign funding, is approximately €6 million. It has been around this level since 2009 when a reduction of 20% was imposed as part of general Government cutbacks. Over 90% of the cost of the Statistical Programme is determined by European statistical needs, which have continued to expand over the period. In order to continue to comply with the European statistical programme and meet priority national needs, SE has had to achieve substantial improvements in its efficiency. From the evidence provided to the Peer Review team it is clear that it has made substantial progress in this regard and it is difficult to see how further substantial savings can be anticipated in the foreseeable future.

Improvement action 1.1: *Describe the process of assuming additional obligations of producing European statistics and inform the Ministry of Finance and the users of statistics of it*

In Europe, including in Estonia, the obligations of producing European statistics are too often agreed upon without discussing the cost of the additional obligations with statistical organisations. In order to improve the situation and to better inform the Estonian organisations involved in decision-making processes (first and foremost the ministries), Statistics Estonia will describe the process of assuming obligations and will inform the Ministry of Finance and other relevant organisations of it. The description of the process also includes recommendations regarding calculating the cost of every additional statistical obligation before assuming the obligation, and upon assuming the obligation, necessary resources must be provided to fulfil that obligation. In the long term, this present activity will support the objective (which is independent of Statistics Estonia) that the range and detail of the demands of European statistics should be limited to what is absolutely necessary, including the need to set more negative priorities in Europe.

Timeline:

Ministry of Finance and other organisations will have been informed by the end of 12/2016 at the latest.

Improvement action 1.2: *Bring the planning of the Statistical Programme into line with the planning of the budget*

Until now the Statistical Programme has not been conclusively negotiated with the users before the start of planning the State Budget. Generally speaking, the Statistical Programme has been stable, but as all additional obligations involve additional necessary resources, we have not always been aware of them before the start of planning the budget. As a result, there have been deficiencies in the resources necessary for carrying out the work.

Planners are working to finish and coordinate the Statistical Programme with the ministries before the start of processing the 2018 State Budget and the budget of Statistics Estonia (which traditionally occurs in the beginning of the previous year i.e. in January 2017) starting of the development of the Statistical Programmes for 2018-2022.

Timeline:

Planning of the Statistical Programme will have been brought into line with the planning of the budget by the end of 12/2016 at the latest.

2. The current salary levels applying in Statistics Estonia should be reviewed by the relevant authorities in order to ensure that staff of the required calibre can be recruited and retained on a sustainable basis. (European statistics Code of Practice, indicators 3.1 and 7.5.)

Current situation:

The average number of staff in SE in 2014, expressed in full-time equivalents, was 350 (compared with 358 in 2013). When interviewers are excluded the staff complement falls to 313 full time equivalents. While Estonia is a small country the fact that almost all official statistics are produced by SE means that the staff number is relatively small when compared to other NSIs, particularly when the economies of scale associated with statistical work (negative in Estonia's case) are taken into account. The implied high relative productivity is perhaps explained by the fact that over 55% of the staff have a Master's degree or higher and a further 20% have a Bachelor's degree.

In the context of such a high skills level, the Peer Review team was surprised to learn that the average salary levels are amongst the lowest in the Estonian public service, with an average salary level of just 85% of the overall public service average. When it is considered that average salary levels in the public sector are low compared to those in the private sector the tendency to leave SE must therefore be expected to be high. Unfortunately, information on staff turnover rates and length of service in SE confirms this expectation.

Improvement action 2.1: *Develop a salary strategy*

Due to the wage pressures of the external environment, a salary strategy, which is in line with the long term strategic objectives of the Estonian and the European statistical systems, must be developed under the guidance of HR officers to support the development of Statistics Estonia and its employees.

Timeline:

First version of the salary strategy will have been created by the end of 12/2015 at the latest.

Improvement action 2.2: *Analyse the necessary prerequisites for fulfilling work-related tasks*

In order to efficiently rearrange the working processes and the fields of responsibility in Statistics Estonia and for them to function in a sustainable manner, it is necessary to analyse the prerequisites for the posts which change in time. This activity involves the analysis of preferable education levels and experience, and, if necessary, bringing them up to date.

Timeline:

The requirements will have been analysed by the end of 12/2016 at the latest.

Improvement action 2.3: *To increase the capability for carrying out commissioned works*

In order to increase the salaries of the employees it is possible to obtain additional resources by carrying out commissioned works. In order to assume and carry out more commissioned works than currently done it is necessary to analyse and develop the capability needed for carrying out commissioned works; this will be done through the entire process of producing statistics, from planning to the processing, analysis and dissemination of data.

Timeline:

Carried out commissioned works will comprise at least 1.7% of the budget of Statistics Estonia by the end of 12/2018 at the latest.

3. *The service level agreement between the Information Technology Centre of the Ministry of Finance and Statistics Estonia should be reviewed in order to ensure an improved recognition of the critical importance of Information and Communications Technology to the operation of a modern national statistical institute and thus guarantee that Statistics Estonia's justified needs in this regard are addressed as a matter of the highest priority. (European statistics Code of Practice, indicators 3.1, 10.1 and 10.2.)*

Current situation:

The IT service provider of Statistics Estonia is the Information Technology Centre (ITC) of the Ministry of Finance, which is responsible for the entire IT infrastructure of SE and also for the sourcing of software and related licences. The ITC is also responsible for providing IT services to the Ministry itself and the other public agencies under its remit. The budget for SE's overall IT maintenance and development is held by the ITC and there is a service level agreement between the two parties. However, there are some justifiable concerns at the extent to which SE's priority needs are included and/or addressed in an adequate manner within the agreement. For example, there has been no budget allocated for IT developments since 2010 other than for the preparation of the register-based population and housing census in 2020. Moreover, the ITC is just the service provider as the decision to allocate adequate resources for the maintenance and development of SE's IT resources is effectively retained within the purview of the Ministry of Finance.

Improvement action 3: *Update of the service contract and service level agreements with the ITC*

The service contract and service level agreements between the Information Technology Centre (ITC) of the Ministry of Finance and Statistics Estonia are partly outdated and must be updated to more accordance with the current situation. It is already agreed between both organisations, that the new service contract must also include a statement to guarantee fulfilment of Statistics Estonia's justified needs as a matter of the highest priority.

Timeline:

The service contract and service level agreements will have been renewed by 06/2016 at the latest.

4. The Ministry of Finance should allocate the Information Technology budget for statistics directly to Statistics Estonia so that it can influence and determine in a more effective and prioritised manner the delivery of IT services required for the production of high quality statistics. (European statistics Code of Practice, indicators 3.1, 10.1 and 10.2.)

Current situation:

The IT service provider of Statistics Estonia is the Information Technology Centre (ITC) of the Ministry of Finance, which is responsible for the entire IT infrastructure of SE and also for the sourcing of software and related licences. The ITC is also responsible for providing IT services to the Ministry itself and the other public agencies under its remit. The budget for SE's overall IT maintenance and development is held by the ITC and there is a service level agreement between the two parties. However, there are some justifiable concerns at the extent to which SE's priority needs are included and/or addressed in an adequate manner within the agreement. For example, there has been no budget allocated for IT developments since 2010 other than for the preparation of the register-based population and housing census in 2020. Moreover, the ITC is just the service provider as the decision to allocate adequate resources for the maintenance and development of SE's IT resources is effectively retained within the purview of the Ministry of Finance.

Improvement action 4.1: *Improve the planning and using the IT budget in collaboration with ITC*

In the past few years, there have been weekly operative meetings of specialists and middle managers between the team responsible for the development of SE and the providers of the ITC service. Unfortunately, these meetings have not been able to fully ensure the fulfilment of all strategic IT developments in a way that their quality would meet the needs and requirements of Statistics Estonia. In order to improve the development processes, there is a plan to start holding monthly meetings with the management of SE and the managers of the ITC departments providing the services in order to achieve a higher quality of implementing IT development projects and functioning of the applications, and thereby make using the Statistics Estonia IT budget, which is meant for developments, more efficient.

Timeline:

Top level regular meetings will start taking place monthly by the end of 10/2015 at the latest.

Improvement action 4.2: *Optimise the amount of base software and licences*

Various paid software programs are used to produce and support the production of statistics. The licences of such programs are remarkably costly. In order to cut costs, we will analyse the software and licences used in cooperation with the Information Technology Centre for the Ministry of Finance, to optimise the amount of base software and licences.

Timeline:

The need for base software and licences will have been analysed and the follow-up activities planned by the end of 12/2016 at the latest.

5. *Statistics Estonia should review and develop its training programme to meet the emerging professional and managerial training needs of its staff, particularly in the context of the new process based organisational structure. (European statistics Code of Practice, indicators 4.1, 6.8 and 7.6.)*

Current situation:

A comprehensive human resources policy is a part of the strategy of SE. This policy includes a detailed description of, and commitment to, continuous vocational training. Yearly training programmes are based on input from yearly performance evaluations conducted by supervising managers. A specialist in the General Department is responsible for the central coordination of training including the assessment of training needs and the distribution of the training budget according to needs and strategic priorities. Information about upcoming training seminars is provided in daily electronic newsletters sent to all employees. Additional e-mails are sent to relevant managers and target groups. Participation in training courses is registered and analysed.

Over the past two years substantial change has taken place in SE with the introduction of the new GSBPM-based organisational structure as well as the implementation of a new integrated information system. The Peer Review team believes that these changes bring with them the need to develop new professional and managerial skills and competencies throughout the organisation. Examples might include training on project management and team working.

Improvement action 5.1: *Develop a system of internal training programmes*

In order to efficiently reorganise the working processes and fields of responsibility in SE, it is necessary to develop the expertise of the employees. Due to the characteristics of producing statistics, it is impossible to outsource relevant training programmes in many fields of work, as the training competency meeting the needs of SE does not exist in Estonia and, often, nor in other countries. Therefore, it is necessary to develop and implement a system of internal training programmes which takes into account the training needs of a developing statistical organisation and implements the expertise, skills and experience of the organisation's own employees to meet those needs.

Timeline:

The principles of the new system of internal training programmes will have been developed by the end of 12/2015 at the latest.

Improvement action 5.2: *Implement a system of internal training programmes*

Implement a system of internal training programmes which takes into account the training needs of a developing statistical organisation and implements the expertise, skills and experience of the organisation's own employees to meet those needs.

Timeline:

The principles will have been gradually implemented by the end of 12/2017 at the latest.

6. Statistics Estonia should introduce a staff mobility programme in order to meet the professional and managerial career development needs of its staff. (European statistics Code of Practice, indicators 3.1 and 7.6.)

Current situation:

Detailed requirements for qualification are described in job descriptions for all positions in SE. They include level of education, work experience, knowledge, computer and language skills etc. Tests, interviews and task-solving exercises are used during the recruitment process to evaluate the suitability of candidates. Filling of posts is based strictly on the use of open competitions. Vacant positions are open to all employees and internal candidates are encouraged to apply for these jobs. Previous experience at SE is an advantage during the selection of candidates.

In the opinion of the Peer Review team, there is a weakness in the human resource policy of SE in that career paths are not described and there would not appear to be any emphasis on succession planning. Theoretically there are possibilities for job shadowing, mentoring and rotation, but they do not always apply in practice.

It should also be acknowledged that Statistics Estonia has already described the policy for career management as part of the more general human resources policy. Statistics Estonia had also described the possible career paths for the previous structure of the organisation, but those are outdated and unusable in the context of the new structure and therefore new paths must be analysed. It is also important to acknowledge the current experience of Statistics Estonia, the individual nature of each career path and that it depends on the background of the employee.

Improvement action 6: *Analyse the possibilities for a career within SE*

In a changing organisation, besides the fact that the job tasks of posts have changed, there have also been changes in inter-post relations, and new possibilities have emerged for employees to rotate within the organisation or to develop both by specialisation and between different levels of management. In this situation, it is necessary to analyse possible career paths to, if needed, facilitate the mutual support and movement of employees and unit, to enhance the general flexibility of the organisation (including e.g. when carrying out commissioned works) and to make the cooperation between different posts and units more efficient. Job shadowing, mentoring and rotation can be used in practice, if possible.

Timeline:

Analysis of internal career paths will have been carried out by the end of 12/2017 at the latest.

Strengthening the institutional environment

- 7. *The relevant authorities should amend the Official Statistics Act so that all public authorities producing European statistics are designated as producers of official statistics under the Act and hence made subject to its provisions requiring adherence to the European statistics Code of Practice. (European statistics Code of Practice, all Principles and Coordination)***

Current situation:

Eesti Pank is the only agency formally identified as an Other National Authority (ONA) in the context of the production of European statistics. However, during the course of the visit it was revealed that some European statistics are actually produced by other agencies. The most important is the National Institute for Health Development (NIHD), which is responsible for mortality and morbidity statistics and also statistics on health expenditure (including the System for Health Accounts). The NIHD is also not listed as a producer of official statistics, within the meaning of the Official Statistics Act (OSA), with the result that the statistics that it produces are not part of the Official Statistical Programme (OSP) and hence cannot be classified as official statistics. The reason for this anomaly is the desire, in accordance with Estonian law and practice, that only producers of official statistics under the OSA should be formally nominated to Eurostat as ONAs.

The Peer Review team considers the exclusion of important statistics from the scope of the OSP and by extension classification as official statistics, as a significant shortcoming. As a general coordinating principle, the Peer Review team is also of the view that European statistics should always be classified as official statistics.

Improvement action 7: *Specify the law regarding producers of European statistics in the Official Statistics Act*

At the moment, not all public sector organisations that produce European statistics are defined as producers of official statistics under the Official Statistics Act. Given the need, we have commenced amending the Official Statistics Act, as a result of which we shall also specify the law regarding producers of European statistics.

Timeline:

The amendment will have been adopted by the end of 12/2016 at the latest.

8. *Appropriate legal and other arrangements should be put in place so that, in principle, all European statistics are included in the annual Statistical Programme unless there is a clear reason for their exclusion. (European statistics Code of Practice, all Principles and Coordination)*

Current situation:

Eesti Pank is the only agency formally identified as an Other National Authority (ONA) in the context of the production of European statistics. However, during the course of the visit it was revealed that some European statistics are actually produced by other agencies. The most important is the National Institute for Health Development (NIHD), which is responsible for mortality and morbidity statistics and also statistics on health expenditure (including the System for Health Accounts). The NIHD is also not listed as a producer of official statistics, within the meaning of the OSA, with the result that the statistics that it produces are not part of the OSP and hence cannot be classified as official statistics. The reason for this anomaly is the desire, in accordance with Estonian law and practice, that only producers of official statistics under the OSA should be formally nominated to Eurostat as ONAs.

The Peer Review team considers the exclusion of important statistics from the scope of the OSP and by extension classification as official statistics, as a significant shortcoming. As a general coordinating principle, the Peer Review team is also of the view that European statistics should always be classified as official statistics.

Improvement action 8: *Specify the law regarding statistical activities carried out under the European law in the Official Statistics Act*

At the moment, not all statistical activities as named under the European law are described in the Statistical Programme because the performers of those statistical activities are not defined as producers of official statistics under the Official Statistics Act. Given the need, we have commenced amending the Official Statistics Act, as a result of which we will also specify the law regarding producers of European statistics and adding the statistical activities performed under the European law to the Statistical Programme.

Timeline:

The amendment will have been adopted by the end of 12/2016 at the latest.

9. *Statistics Estonia should finalise and agree at the earliest opportunity a detailed memorandum of understanding with Eesti Pank covering the coordination of their respective statistical activities. (Coordination)*

Current situation:

SE and Eesti Pank cooperate closely in the production of European statistics within their respective spheres of competence. However, the signing of a formal memorandum of understanding governing their relationship has been delayed pending clarification of corresponding working relationships at EU level between Eurostat and the European Central Bank.

Improvement action 9: *Sign a memorandum of understanding between Statistics Estonia and Eesti Pank*

Statistics Estonia and Eesti Pank are the producers of official statistics under the Official Statistics Act. The fields of statistics of both organisations have been distributed with the Official Statistics Act. Eesti Pank is a constitutional institution and Statistics Estonia is a government office. Due to acting on different legal bases it is necessary to additionally organise the interorganisational cooperation with a memorandum of understanding.

Timeline:

The memorandum of understanding will have been signed by both organisations by the end of 12/2016 at the latest.

10. Statistics Estonia should endeavour to position itself to undertake more statistical work under commission outside the scope of the Statistical Programme, on the clear understanding that such work is undertaken in conformity with the provisions of the Official Statistics Act and the European statistics Code of Practice. (European statistics Code of Practice and Coordination)

Current situation:

Section 20 (1) of the OSA permits producers of official statistics to undertake work outside the Statistical Programme, provided such work “does not interfere with the preparation or implementation of the programme”. Section 20 (2) requires that such work be carried out in compliance with the same quality criteria laid down in the OSA for official statistics undertaken as part of the Statistical Programme.

Improvement action 10: *Inform the users of the compliance of commissioned works with the requirements of the European statistics Code of Practice*

At the moment, the users of statistics have not been sufficiently informed of the fact that all Statistics Estonia’s commissioned works have been carried out at a high level of compliance with the requirements of the European statistics Code of Practice. In order to further inform the users, we shall add a reference to the relevant subsections of the Official Statistics Act to the webpage of the Standards of Services and the webpage of requesting information and issuing commissioned works.

Timeline:

The references will have been added to the webpage of the Standards of Services and the webpage of requesting information and issuing commissioned works by the end of 12/2015 at the latest.

11. The relevant authorities should amend the Official Statistics Act so that the definition of, and provisions relating to, the principle of statistical confidentiality are explicitly addressed in the Act. (European statistics Code of Practice, indicator 5.1.)

Current situation:

SE applies very high standards to implementing the principle of statistical confidentiality in practice in all aspects of its work. One notable example is its voluntary adoption of a security standard, IT Baseline Security System - ISKE, which is based on a German information security standard that has been adapted to meet Estonian public service requirements in respect of the handling of databases and registers. ISKE has been adopted by SE to demonstrate the seriousness with which it takes the principle of statistical confidentiality in practice

While the adherence in practice to the principle of statistical confidentiality is exemplary, the concept of statistical confidentiality is not explicitly defined or referred to in the OSA. Instead it is covered indirectly through the provision in Section 7 (1) of the OSA that states that official statistics are produced “according to the statistical principles and quality criteria prescribed in the EU Regulation”. Since the latter includes the principle of statistical confidentiality, and since EU regulations are directly applicable in all Member States, it was considered unnecessary from a legal viewpoint to make explicit reference to the principle in the OSA.

Improvement action 11: Specify the definition of confidential statistics in the Official Statistics Act

At the moment, statistical confidentiality is covered by subsection 7 (1) of the Official Statistics Act with a reference to the Regulation on European statistics; however, this is not sufficient. Therefore, it is necessary to specify the definition of the confidentiality of statistics in the Official Statistics Act and to determine it.

Timeline:

The amendment will have been adopted by the end of 12/2016 at the latest.

Further developing quality procedures and the service to users and data providers

12. *Statistics Estonia should prepare and publish a quality policy statement. (European statistics Code of Practice, indicator 4.1.)*

Current situation:

SE has a strong tradition of using a total quality management approach in monitoring and developing its statistical products and processes. In addition to the CoP related self-assessment and peer review exercises, SE carried out EFQM/CAF-based assessments on three occasions (2007, 2009 and 2011) and received the “Committed to Excellence” recognition for two of these exercises.

The Peer Review team experienced a clear engagement by SE on quality issues, which corresponds to the legal requirement laid down in the Regulation on European statistics and which is referenced indirectly in the OSA. However, aside from this indirect reference there is no quality policy or related criteria readily available to users and other stakeholders.

Improvement action 12: *Prepare and publish a quality policy statement*

Up to now, Statistics Estonia has based its work on the fact that quality-political approaches have been agreed upon and described in the Official Statistics Act, in the Regulation on European statistics and the ESS Code of Practice, and there has been no need for a supplementary quality policy which would largely duplicate the content of the aforementioned documents. For the purposes of unambiguousness and clarity we will prepare and publish a quality policy statement based on the aforementioned documents.

Timeline:

The quality policy statement will be published on the policies webpage of Statistics Estonia by the end of 12/2015 at the latest.

13. Statistics Estonia should further develop its quality tools, methods and related documentation as part of a regular and comprehensive system of self-assessment of its statistical processes and products. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principle 4)

Current situation:

SE management has a clear commitment to use the CoP together with the EFQM/CAF excellence model as a framework. The strong commitment can be confirmed in practice by the actions of SE in areas such as customer focus, leadership, involvement of people, process approach, etc. The underlying process for statistical work follows the Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) cycle. This is now facilitated by the adoption of the GSBPM as the basis for both the organisational structure and work processes, as the overarching approach to quality management in the GSBPM follows a similar Plan-Run-Evaluate-Improve cycle. There is GSBPM structured documentation available in the newly developed intranet on requirements, guidelines and methodological standards. These are considered to constitute quality guidelines.

Every year assessments of the previous cycle and consequential quality planning are carried out – as reported. However, no standard tools, templates or documentation are available for these self-assessments although channels are available to formulate proposals for improvement actions.

Improvement action 13.1: Update the descriptions all the sub-processes of the GSBPM-based main production process and guidelines for their high-quality implementation

Following the recent structural changes of Statistics Estonia, the rearranging of working processes and fields of responsibility is ongoing. In order for the new work order to function in a sustainable manner, it is necessary to revise and update all the descriptions and guidelines created for the support of GSBPM-based main production process and all its sub-processes, and create supplementary descriptions and guidelines for those sub-processes, where the descriptions and guidelines have so far been incomplete (including for a systemic self-assessment of statistical activities).

Timeline:

The descriptions and guidelines of all the sub-processes of the GSBPM-based main production process will have been updated by the end of 12/2019 at the latest. The expected intermediate results will be the following: 20% (2015), 40% (2016), 60% (2017), 80% (2018), 100% (2019) of the sub-processes of the GSBPM.

Improvement action 13.2: *Publish standardised quality indicators of all statistical activities*

For historical reasons, quality indicators have not been systemically calculated for all statistical activities. To improve the situation, Statistics Estonia is developing a central IT solution which will help to calculate and publish standardised quality indicators for all statistical activities.

Timeline:

Standardised quality indicators will have been published for all statistical activities by the end of 12/2019 at the latest. The expected intermediate results will be the following: 10% (2015), 30% (2016), 60% (2017), 80% (2018), 100% (2019) of statistical activities.

14. *Statistics Estonia should undertake on a targeted basis detailed quality assessments, involving external experts as appropriate, of its key statistical processes and products. (European statistics Code of Practice, indicator 4.4.)*

Current situation:

External audits are initiated and carried out as requested by partners (i.e. Eurostat, OECD etc.), but SE has not yet introduced the practice of systematically conducting quality reviews of its key statistical products with the involvement of external experts where possible and as appropriate. One of the tasks of the Statistical Council (SC) is to advise the producer on the production of official statistics concerning the implementation of statistical principles and quality criteria. The conduct of systematic targeted audits would facilitate the work of the SC in this regard – something they expressed an interest in at the meeting with the Peer Reviewers.

Improvement action:

Statistics Estonia has a divergent view on this recommendation and therefore no improvement action is envisaged.

Timeline:

N. A.

15. Arrangements should be put in place so that the activities of the current and proposed user councils are formally overseen and coordinated by the Statistical Council in conjunction with Statistics Estonia. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principle 11 and Coordination)

Current situation:

The SC has a strong mandate based on the OSA with a general task to advise the producers of official statistics and give recommendations and report to the Minister of Finance on statistical matters. The objective of the SC is also to ensure, by giving advice and delivering opinions, the proper functioning of the official statistical system. On the one hand, the SC is concerned with the production of official statistics. On the other, it is representing the users of official statistics and thereby the public in general. Overall, the SC is expected to strengthen the independence of official statistics, to make the production of statistics more transparent and to include society in the process of statistics production on a wider scale.

SE has set up three advisory bodies: the Council of Regional Statistics; the Scientific Council of Social Statistics; and the Population Census Council. Five new advisory councils will be formalised before summer 2015 covering: Research and Development Statistics; Energy Statistics; Governmental Finance Statistics; Macroeconomic Statistics; and Environmental Statistics.

Improvement action 15: *Develop the principles of the working arrangements between the Statistical Council and scientific councils*

Until now, more significant topics of the scientific councils have reached the stage of being discussed in the Statistical Council in a somewhat irregular manner as there is no systemic or regular approach to co-relate the work and results of the scientific councils to the work arrangements of the Statistical Council. It is necessary to regulate the present situation in a more systemic manner especially as there will be additional scientific councils created in Statistics Estonia. The discussions on the working arrangements between the Statistical Council and all the scientific councils will be added to the Statistical Council's 2016 working plan.

Timeline:

The principles of the working arrangements between the Statistical Council and scientific councils will have been developed by the end of 12/2016 at the latest.

16. Statistics Estonia should prepare and publish more analytical reports of its statistical outputs to meet the needs of users. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principle 15)

Current situation:

The Peer Review team met several groups of users during its visit. All of the groups expressed their satisfaction with the services provided by SE. The journalists were especially happy with the blog of SE, but some users, mainly from government institutions, would welcome more analytical reports. This also forms part of SE plans, but due to limited resources the progress has been slower than intended. SE sees commissioned work in data analysis as a potential market niche. A recent report (from the National Audit Office of Estonia) shows that ministries and state institutions have spent considerable sums on various studies, a number of which could have been readily undertaken by SE. This point has already been made above in regard to strengthening the institutional structure. However, the publication of analytical reports based on such studies would also serve to raise the profile of SE.

Improvement action 16.1: *Define the profile of the potential subscribers of the analytical reports*

All products and services of Statistics Estonia are described in detail in the Dissemination Policy. To understand the needs of the users better and thereby to regularly develop products and services, marketing analyst will define the profiles of the target groups for the most important products and services including analytical reports. The marketing team of SE will more actively inform specific target groups about the possibility of ordering analytical reports from SE. The information about subscriptions to analytical reports will be better presented on the website of SE.

SE will prepare the concept of the analytical publication which can be published on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the Estonian Republic in 2018. The concept will be introduced to the potential clients in order to ensure financing of the publication.

Timeline:

The profile of the target groups for the most important products and services will have been defined by the end of 12/2015 at the latest.

Improvement action 16.2: *Revise the catalogue of products and services having regard to the needs of the target groups*

The needs and expectations of the users with regard to the products and services offered change in time. As a result, it is necessary to get suggestions from the users about improving the products and services, to analyse the feasibility of the suggestions, and, if possible, to enhance the range of selection.

Timeline:

The catalogue of products and services will have been revised and, upon need, complemented by the end of 12/2016 at the latest.

17. Statistics Estonia should address the Information Technology–related technical concerns of some researchers in regard to accessing confidential microdata for scientific purposes. (European statistics Code of Practice, indicator 15.4.)

Current situation:

SE provides access to microdata for research purposes through different channels and the rules and procedures are published. The selection of channels (public use files, remote access, remote execution and safe centres) is dependent on the needs of users and the confidentiality/sensitivity of the data requested. In 2013 SE carried out a microdata users' satisfaction survey to get feedback on the experience of researchers and to identify future needs. The respondents indicated that they were satisfied with the time taken to grant access to the data, which is quite fast compared to some other countries, and there were no complaints on pricing. However, the need to improve the technical conditions for accessing the data was mentioned and this was repeated during the peer review meeting with the scientific community. Apparently, the problem concerns the slow speed of the Virtual Private Network (VPN) connection used for remote access. This has forced some researchers to take out unnecessary intermediate results in some cases – which have to be checked for disclosure thereby adding to the time and workload required.

Improvement action 17: *Improve the service offered to the users of microdata*

The causes of the slow speed of the Virtual Private Network (VPN) connection may lay in all parts of the process, including in the technical solutions of the user of microdata. Therefore, the present situation must, first and foremost, be analysed and possibilities for optimising the service offered must be found. We are also considering developing a pay-to-use service for users who would prefer paying for a faster service.

Timeline:

Analysis of possibilities for optimising the service will have been carried out by the end of 12/2017 at the latest.

18. Statistics Estonia should engage more actively with appropriate educational and other stakeholders in promoting statistical literacy. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principle 15)

Current situation:

SE has close contact with universities, not only in research and development programmes, but also in connection with education and training. SE staff members give lectures, provide training for students on the use and availability of official statistics, provide consultation if asked. SE offers microdata access to students to work on their thesis as well as internships to suitable students. As part of its Dissemination Policy, SE offers training to users free of charge, which is targeted at current and potential users and respondents. All these activities help to improve statistical literacy and are to be commended. However, during the meeting with the Peer Reviewers some university professors commented that the statistical knowledge of new students was decreasing, was mostly insufficient and in some cases students were actually afraid of numbers per se. Today statistical literacy is an important competence not only at university level but at lower levels also and SE might consider how it might engage with educational and other stakeholders to improve the situation.

Improvement action 18.1: *Develop a dissemination strategy for products and services*

Statistical literacy requires constant development as, without that skill, users cannot efficiently use the products and services offered by Statistics Estonia. Therefore, developing statistical literacy is one of the most important topics taken into account when developing a new dissemination strategy. The dissemination strategy will also describe a continuous and developing cooperation with universities and university students.

Timeline:

The dissemination strategy of products and services will have been created by the end of 12/2015 at the latest.

Improvement action 18.2: *Introduce the benefits and using (including the possibilities of opendata) of the new database software (.Stat) to the users*

For years, Statistics Estonia has used PC-Axis software in the statistical database to disseminate data which, compared to the .Stat software, has offered fewer possibilities to the users. Therefore, Statistics Estonia will be implementing a new database software, .Stat, in the second half of 2015, and will be actively introducing the new software to the users. The interface of the new software is more user-friendly and will increase interest in official statistics. The statistical database is the main source for obtaining statistical information. The new software will offer better visualisation of statistics which will attract more attention, especially among pupils and students, who are an important target group in terms of increasing statistical literacy. Using the new software helps also to make open data more available. During the trainings organised by SE the new possibilities of the statistical database will be promoted.

Timeline:

The .Stat software will have been introduced to the users by the end of 12/2016 at the latest.

Improvement action 18.3: *Create introductory videos on the principles of producing statistics and the principles of conduct of the registry-based Population and Housing Census*

Statistics Estonia has used various videos, in addition to slide shows and presentations, in order to introduce its products and services, and has received positive feedback. Now, the need to create video introducing the general principles of producing statistics has arisen. A video is also being created to better explain the principles of conduct of the registry-based Population and Housing Census to the general public and cooperation partners.

Timeline:

Introductory videos will have been completed by the end of 12/2015 at the latest.

Improvement action 18.4: *Develop a statistical product designed for schools*

For years, there was a webpage on the Statistics Estonia website which was meant for schools and which explained and disseminated statistics in a simple and understandable way for the ordinary user. By today, this solution has become outdated both technologically and by content. Therefore this approach needs to be developed further to satisfy the needs of the modern information user.

Timeline:

The statistical product designed for schools will have been created by the end of 12/2017 at the latest.

Improvement action 18.5: *Compile and publish the document on the production process of official statistics*

Using statistics seems to be complicated for the people who have not used statistics before. SE has published different products and services for various user groups. In order to raise interest in statistics, SE conducts special trainings where new products are introduced. The information about trainings is published on the website. In the course of trainings the principles of the production process of statistics are also presented. SE will compile and publish the document which describes the production process of statistics in a simple way. It will help users to better understand the whole statistical system and encourages them to start using statistics in their everyday life.

Timeline:

The document describing the production process of statistics will have been published on the website by the end of 08/2015 at the latest.

Improvement action 18.6: *Compile and publish a statistical quiz*

The output of statistics can be very different and also fun. Besides traditional statistical products SE will compile a statistical quiz which can be used when participating in fairs, seminars, conferences. It gives SE the opportunity to present interesting facts published in the statistical database or in other products.

Timeline:

The statistical quiz will have been compiled and published by the end of 12/2015 at the latest.

Improvement action 18.7: *Presentation of statistical products and services to the members of statistical councils*

The members of the Statistical Council are representatives of the main users. The Statistical Council holds regular meetings, where SE introduces the principles of producing official statistics and the possibilities of using different statistical output. There are also specialised statistical councils working alongside Statistics Estonia: the Scientific Council of Social Statistics, the Scientific Council of the Population and Housing Census, and the Scientific Council of Regional Statistics. In the next few years, we are planning to create more specialised councils so as to enhance communication with the users. The members of specialised councils are esteemed professionals in their respective fields and their opinion matters to Statistics Estonia. SE considers it important to improve the statistical literacy of the members of the councils through common activities and training courses so that they would develop the skills necessary to use official statistics when making decisions.

Timeline:

Statistical products and services will have been presented to the members of statistical councils by the end of 12/2016 at the latest.

19. Statistics Estonia should continue to work with other public authorities to reduce the administrative burden on respondents by entering into data sharing agreements and by developing automatic industry standard tools such as Extensible Markup Language (XML) and Extensible Business Reporting Language (XBRL). (European statistics Code of Practice, Principle 9)

Current situation:

SE continues to explore methods for reducing the burden, including the development of tools such as Extensible Mark-up Language (XML) and Extensible Business Reporting Language (XBRL) to extract relevant data automatically from the accounting and personnel systems of the responding enterprises. It is also examining how it might participate in appropriate data sharing arrangements with other public authorities, without compromising statistical confidentiality, in order to avoid multiple collections of the same data. The Peer Review team would support SE in undertaking these activities.

Improvement action 19: *Describe statistical activities in the meta information system*

The prerequisite for implementing automatic standard solutions efficiently is the development and implementation of a production system which is based on metadata, which is described in a standardised manner. The prerequisites for such a system have already been created in Statistics Estonia and the system is being developed; the process of describing standardised metadata has also been started.

For data used from administrative sources all variables will be described in the meta information system. In the future these variable descriptions will be used for administrative data acquisition using a predefined XML format. These variable descriptions will also be used for maintaining these data in our administrative data warehouse.

Timeline:

The administrative data (variables) used will have been described in the meta information system by the end of 12/2018 at the latest.

20. Statistics Estonia should endeavour to have the overall administrative burden measured by the appropriate authorities so that the statistical burden can be clearly seen in the context of the overall burden on respondents. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principle 9)

Current situation:

While the burden imposed by statistical demands is relatively small it is incorrectly perceived by respondents to be much greater. To counter this misperception it is necessary to have actual data to compare the statistical burden with the overall administrative burden. While SE measures and publishes in great detail information on the statistical burden there is no measure of the overall administrative burden. The Peer Review team would encourage SE to endeavour to have the overall burden measured by the appropriate authorities so that the true situation regarding the statistical burden can be communicated to respondents.

Improvement action:

Statistics Estonia has a divergent view on this recommendation and therefore no improvement action is envisaged.

Timeline:

N. A.