



HELLENIC REPUBLIC



HELLENIC STATISTICAL AUTHORITY

PEER REVIEWERS' RECOMMENDATIONS AND HELLENIC STATISTICAL AUTHORITY (ELSTAT) IMPROVEMENT ACTIONS IN RESPONSE TO THE RECOMMENDATIONS

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

To launch the implementation of recommendations 1 to 8, 11, 12, 15, 16 and 19, in May 2015 a joint letter from ELSTAT and Eurostat has been sent to the Greek Minister of Finance proposing amendments to the Hellenic Statistical Law and other relevant legislation

Sustainability

Recommendation 1

The relevant authorities in the Greek government must ensure that the Hellenic Statistical Authority has the practical authority to spend its budget on staff resources and contracts for services, in line with the commitments to financial and administrative independence already enshrined in law.

Current situation

There has been considerable progress in establishing ELSTAT as a professionally independent agency through a range of appropriate legal and institutional measures, such as the adoption of the Greek Commitment on Confidence in Statistics (CoC) and the subsequent amendment of Greek Statistical Law (3832/2010). However, regarding the full budgetary autonomy of ELSTAT, as it is envisaged under the Statistical Law and in the CoC, only some progress has been made so far and obstacles appear to remain to its full achievement in practice. This situation is reflected in the two annual reports of GPAC, and the description of the situation remains applicable as of today.

Moreover on 24 March 2015 the Chair of ESGAB sent to the Minister of Finance the Opinion of ESGAB, urging full implementation of the Greek Statistical Law and Greece's Commitment on Confidence in Statistics. In its Opinion, ESGAB highlights a number of concerns that are mentioned in the 2nd GPAC report and the Peer Review report on compliance with the European Statistics Code of Practice. According to one of these concerns as included in the Opinion: "The Greek Government's commitment on confidence in statistics must be respected and put into practice, particularly in relation to ensuring institutional independence and providing adequate financial and other resources. More specifically, ELSTAT must be able to recruit and maintain a sufficiently qualified workforce."

Improvement actions 1.1 and 1.2: Ensure that ELSTAT has the practical authority to spend its budget on staff resources and contract services

1.1 ELSTAT will send a letter to the Ministry of Finance apprising it of the need to carry out Recommendation 1.

1.2 The main body of the recommendation shall be implemented under the responsibility of the Greek Government and Parliament, through (i) appropriate amendment of the Statistical Law and (ii) a supportive environment, in which delays of decisions at political level and bureaucratic obstacles are eliminated, by other parts of Government so that ELSTAT has the practical authority to spend its budget on staff resources and contracts for services.

Timeline:

Transmission of ELSTAT letter to the Ministry of Finance: June 2015

Implementation of main body of the recommendation: June 2015 regarding the change in the Statistical Law and on an ongoing basis regarding the supportive environment

Recommendation 2

The relevant authorities must fulfill the commitments set out in the Commitment on Confidence signed by the Prime Minister of Greece, most urgently as regards the provision of adequate and stable resources

Current situation

One of the “solemn commitments” of the Greek government that is included in Greece’s Commitment on Confidence in Statistics is “to secure adequate and stable resources necessary to maintain and further improve the quality and coverage of Greek statistics”; however this has not yet been met. Already in its 1st annual report the GPAC expressed the opinion that ELSTAT’s resources are not sufficient to enable it to discharge fully in a satisfactory manner its obligations in respect of the European Statistical Programme.

Following large and continuing reductions in staff since 2010 on account mainly of early retirements, finally in 2014 some progress was made in recruiting new staff—46 staff were redeployed to ELSTAT from other Government agencies in the first half of 2014. However obstacles and delays continue in relation to the provision of adequate human resources to ELSTAT sufficient to deliver high quality statistics. Following the completion of the redeployment campaign, ELSTAT sought to recruit another 67 staff from outside the government sector, especially in the context of continuing net reductions in the number of its staff. For 33 of these, the process finally got under way by the end of the 4th quarter of 2014 but its completion is still pending. For the rest 34 staff, the Ministry of Finance needed to pass a legal provision for the creation of the positions in ELSTAT, which remains outstanding since June 2014. In Q1 2015 ELSTAT was told by the Ministry of Administrative Reform that the previous approval in principle of the hire of the 34 staff was void and a new request needed to be submitted for 2015. Moreover, the recruitment of 10 specialized scientific personnel provided for in the Greek Statistical Law in force is still pending as ELSTAT has been informed by ASEP that ELSTAT does not have the legal authority to specify the specialization of these specialized scientific personnel.

In the meantime, the total net loss of staff (after redeployments of staff to ELSTAT) between 1/1/2010, when there were over 1000 staff in ELSTAT, and 31/3/2015 was about 239 staff, i.e., nearly one in four positions were lost.

On 19/3/2015 ELSTAT submitted a request to the Ministry of Administrative Reform for the recruitment in 2015 of 119 staff, including the above 34 staff, in order to cover urgent operational needs. This along with the recruitment of the 10 specialized personnel would allow ELSTAT to reach about 900-920 staff by end-2015, depending on the number of retirements during 2015.

For ELSTAT to be able to discharge fully in a satisfactory manner its obligations in respect of the European Statistical Programme, the number of ELSTAT staff should be maintained at about **930 well qualified staff** over the medium term (compared with well over 1000 staff in the previous decade), which implies the need to further increase the staff numbers in 2016 to 930 and ensuring full replacement of those retiring from 2016 onwards.

Improvement actions 2.1 and 2.2: Ensuring the provision to ELSTAT of adequate and stable resources

2.1 ELSTAT will send letters to the competent Ministries (Ministry of Administrative Reform and Ministry of Finance) apprising them of the urgent need to carry out Recommendation 2.

2.2 The main body of the recommendation shall be implemented under the responsibility of the Government and the Parliament, through (i) appropriate amendments adopted for the Statistical Law, and (ii) the provision of a supportive environment by competent Government institutions so that the necessary recruitments of well qualified staff take place in a timely manner.

Timeline:

2.1 Transmission of ELSTAT letters: June 2015

2.2 Main body of the recommendation: (i) June 2015 for adoption of appropriate Statistics Law amendment. (ii) June 2015 and then on an ongoing basis regarding provision of supportive environment; completion of recruitment of 119 new regular staff and of 10 specialized personnel by December 2015; recruitment of staff to ensure 930 staff at ELSTAT by December 2016; maintenance of 930 staff level in 2017 and onwards

Recommendation 3

The relevant authorities must provide the Hellenic Statistical Authority with access to administrative data in accordance with the requirements of the Statistical Law and related memoranda of understanding and agreements.

Recommendation 4

Specifically, the relevant authorities must, without further delay, provide the Hellenic Statistical Authority with access to tax records to support the production of business statistics, as required by the Statistical Law and agreed between the parties in memoranda.

Current situation

The right of ELSTAT to have access to administrative data is comprehensively stipulated in the Greek Statistical Law in force. Moreover, the improvement actions (3) and (4) included in the Annex of Greece's Commitment on Confidence in Statistics state that: "Full and timely access to administrative data sources and to the delivery of administrative data will be ensured in accordance with the Statistical Law" and "ELSTAT will be entitled to full and timely access for statistical purposes to the economic and financial accounts of all entities belonging to or controlled by general government". Access to administrative sources for statistical purposes is also well covered by the European Statistical Law 223/2009. Despite the provisions of national and EU statistical legislation, access in practice to administrative data sources for statistical purposes is improving very slowly, and in some cases it is stagnant or even deteriorating.

In 2014 some progress was made in improving the modalities for implementing the national and European statistical legislation as regards ELSTAT's access to administrative (tax) data (amendment of the Greek Tax Law allowing the access of ELSTAT to tax data, signing of an updated Memorandum of Cooperation between ELSTAT, two General Secretariats of the Ministry of Finance and the Social Security Institute). However, the problems in the practical access of ELSTAT to the tax data have not improved. The implementation by the Ministry of Finance of the Tax Law and the Memorandum of Cooperation as regards the transmission of tax data to ELSTAT is still pending. ELSTAT's request to the Ministry of Finance for the provision of information on the technical characteristics (size, format, etc.) of the tax data to be provided has not yet been satisfied. Moreover, the provision by the Ministry of Finance to ELSTAT of other (non-confidential) data has actually deteriorated in a number of areas. For example the provision of data for updating the Statistical Business Register has been discontinued since 2013. The situation creates significant risks not only about the quality but also the very existence of structural business statistics for Greece for 2015, as ELSTAT—on the basis of the commitments made—had envisaged in its 2015 annual statistical work program to use administrative data sources and not carry out the traditional SBS surveys.

There are also recurring problems in accessing administrative data sources of other parts of the Ministry of Finance as well as other Ministries and public agencies.

Improvement actions 3/4.1 and 3/4.2: Provision to ELSTAT of tax and other administrative data

3/4.1 ELSTAT will send a follow up letter to the Ministry of Finance to apprise it of the urgent need to carry out the recommendation 4 underlining the possibility of imposing administrative sanctions in case of non-compliance as provided in the Statistical Law. ELSTAT will also send similar letters to other competent administrative data providers.

3/4.2 The main body of the recommendation shall be implemented under the responsibility of Greek Government by the provision of the necessary access to administrative data sources.

Timeline:

3/4.1 Transmission of ELSTAT's letters: June 2015

3/4.2 Main body of the recommendation: Provision of all necessary data and information starting in June 2015 and, following that, on an ongoing basis

Recommendation 5

The Hellenic Statistical Authority should put proposals to the relevant authorities to amend the Statistical Law to give the Hellenic Statistical Authority the right to be consulted on the design of, and validation of, any administrative data system elsewhere in the public sector that has the potential to produce statistical data of public value. The amendments should also create an obligation on all public authorities to invite the Hellenic Statistical Authority to advise on these matters.

Current situation

ELSTAT has signed several memoranda of cooperation with administrative data providers, which define the specifications of data to be provided to ELSTAT. However, there is an irregular/non-uniform approach of administrative data providers in consulting with ELSTAT on possible areas of cooperation in the design of and validation of administrative data. Besides the reference to the Code of Practice (which addresses such issues) in the Statistical Law, there is no explicit legislation in Greece regarding these matters.

Improvement actions 5.1 and 5.2: Amendment of the Greek Statistical Law

5.1 ELSTAT stands ready to provide proposals to the relevant authorities to amend appropriately the Statistical Law.

5.2 The main body of the recommendation shall be implemented under the responsibility of Government and the Parliament, through appropriate amendments of the Greek Statistical Law. These amendments will be proposed by Government and adopted by Parliament in order to explicitly address the matters of recommendation 5.

Timeline:

5.1 ELSTAT provided the above mentioned proposals for amendment of the Statistical Law in May 2015 (completed)

5.2 Main body of the recommendation: June 2015

Recommendation 6

The relevant authorities, on the advice of the Hellenic Statistical Authority, should propose to Parliament amendments to the Statistical Law in respect of the arrangements for the appointment of the President - specifically to change the stated selection criteria to better reflect the skills required and to reduce to an absolute minimum political involvement in the selection process.

Current situation

GPAC in its second annual report recommends that "...a transparent and objective selection process be put in place to assist in identifying the best candidate. Such a process should include the specification in law of the sole criteria for selection for the position, the preparation of a comprehensive job specification and the use of a legally mandated high level independent selection board consisting of national and international experts in the fields of statistics or related disciplines and management."

Improvement actions 6.1 and 6.2: Amendment of the Greek Statistical Law

6.1 ELSTAT stands ready to provide a proposal to the relevant authorities for the amendment of the Greek Statistical Law in respect of the arrangements for the appointment of the President with a view to reducing to an absolute minimum political involvement in the selection process and changing the stated selection criteria to better reflect the skills required.

6.2 The main body of the recommendation shall be implemented under the responsibility of Government and the Parliament, through appropriate amendments of the Greek Statistical Law. These amendments will be proposed by Government and adopted by Parliament.

Timeline:

6.1 ELSTAT provided the above mentioned proposal for amendment of the Statistical Law in May 2015 (completed)

6.2 Main body of the recommendation: June 2015

Recommendation 7

The Hellenic Statistical Authority should put proposals to the relevant authorities for an amendment to the Statistical Law such that the Good Practice Advisory Committee shall continue to operate.

Current situation

ELSTAT considers that the operation of the Good Practice Advisory Committee should be established on a permanent basis. To this end, ELSTAT sent a letter to the Minister of Finance on 5 November 2014, in which it proposed the amendment of the Greek Statistical Law in force by deleting paragraph 13 of Article 4. However, the proposed amendment has not yet taken place. In this context, the term of GPAC expired in January 2015.

According to ESGAB's Opinion: "The work and role of GPAC as established in law should continue and its members for the next term of office should be appointed without delay."

Improvement actions 7.1 and 7.2: Amendment of the Greek Statistical Law

7.1 ELSTAT will send a follow up letter to the Minister of Finance recommending the relevant amendment of the Greek Statistical Law.

7.2 The main body of the recommendation shall be implemented under the responsibility of Government and the Parliament, through appropriate amendments of the Greek Statistical Law. These amendments will be proposed by Government and adopted by Parliament.

Timeline:

7.1 ELSTAT sent the letter to the Ministry of Finance in May 2015 (completed)

7.2 Main body of the recommendation: June 2015

Co-ordination of the Hellenic Statistical System

Recommendation 8

Bearing in mind the recommendation above relating to the Good Practice Advisory Committee, and informed by international consultation with experts in statistical governance, the Hellenic Statistical Authority and the other relevant authorities should review the membership and chairmanship of the Council of the Hellenic Statistical System to ensure the future effectiveness and coherence of the advisory functions. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principles 1,10, 11-15 and coordination)

Current situation

ELSTAT performs its coordinating role in the Hellenic Statistical System through, inter alia, the Council of the Hellenic Statistical System (SYELSS), which is established by Article 3 of the Law 3832/2010. The Council is chaired by the President of ELSTAT and in the Council are represented, inter alia, the National Statistical Authorities, which are the Hellenic Statistical System (ELSS) agencies responsible for developing, producing and disseminating European statistics. Also represented in SYELSS are users of statistics from the business community, the academic and research community and the unions.

The SYELSS gives an advisory opinion to ELSTAT concerning:

- a) The Hellenic Statistical Program.
- b) The Regulation on Statistical Obligations.
- c) The ELSS. priorities, taking into consideration the developments at Community and international levels and the measures for the reduction of the administrative response cost of the ELSS agencies.
- d) Issues concerning the safeguarding of the required consistency of the production of statistics by ELSS. agencies and the observance of the statistical principles, as well as the development and dissemination of the European Statistics Code of Practice to all the ELSS. agencies.
- e) Issues concerning statistical confidentiality.
- f) Methodological issues arising during the preparation and implementation of statistical programs and especially issues concerning statistics at Community and international levels.

ELSTAT has diverging views on recommendation 8 as follows: “The Hellenic Statistical Authority (ELSTAT) would agree with the recommendation that the membership and chairmanship of the Council of the Hellenic Statistical System (SYELSS) be reviewed, as long as the current mandate of the SYELSS is also reviewed so as to focus the latter’s advice on the needs of the users of official statistics and on whether these needs and their prioritisation are being met and reflected in the annual work programs of SYELSS agencies and in the three-year Hellenic Statistical Program. In this way, the SYELSS, with its membership revised to represent users of the official statistics produced by the Hellenic Statistical System (ELSS), could potentially support further improvements in the ELSS’ applying Principle 11 of the European statistics Code of Practice on “Relevance”.

ELSTAT would strongly disagree with recommendation 8 if there was no change of the mandate of the SYELSS in tandem with the review of the latter’s membership and chairmanship. Such an approach could potentially undermine the efforts of ELSTAT to comply with several Principles of the Code of Practice, such as Principles 1, 5, 6, 7 and 8. In the absence of an appropriate focusing of the mandate of the SYELSS there would also be overlap and conflict with the mandate of the existing Good Practice Advisory Committee of the ELSS”.

Improvement actions 8.1 and 8.2: Amendment of the Greek Statistical Law

8.1 ELSTAT stands ready to provide a proposal for an amendment of the Statistical Law regarding a revised mandate, membership and chairmanship of the SYELSS. After the amendment of the Greek Statistical Law, ELSTAT will proceed to relevant amendments of (i) the Regulation on the Statistical Obligations of the Agencies of the Hellenic Statistical System and (ii) the Regulation on the Operation and Administration of ELSTAT.

8.2 The main body of the recommendation shall be implemented under the responsibility of Government and the Parliament, through appropriate amendments of the Greek Statistical Law. These amendments will be proposed by Government and adopted by Parliament.

Timeline:

8.1 ELSTAT provided the above mentioned proposal for amendment of the Statistical Law in May 2015 (completed)

8.2 Main body of the recommendation: June 2015

Amendment of Regulations: July 2015

Recommendation 9

The Hellenic Statistical Authority should give increased priority to the formal certification of those Hellenic Statistical System agencies responsible for the development, production and dissemination of European statistics (“national authorities”), to fulfil as soon as practicable the requirements of the Statistical Law and the Regulations. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principle 1)

Current situation

The process of certification by ELSTAT has begun. The methodology followed by ELSTAT for the certification of statistics produced by the ELSS agencies is outlined in (i) the Regulation on the Operation and Administration of ELSTAT and (ii) the document on Principles and Procedures for the Certification of Statistics of the ELSS which was presented in the SYELSS meeting that took place on 17 December 2014 following its updating on the basis of the two pilot exercises carried out. As committed in ELSTAT’s 2015 Annual Statistical Work Program and information provided to SYELSS, ELSTAT will intensify the certification processes of statistics produced by ELSS agencies and has proceeded to the compilation of a timetable for the certification processes that are programmed to be conducted in 2015.

Improvement actions 9.1 and 9.2: Conduct of the certification of statistics produced by other national authorities (ONAs)

9.1 ELSTAT shall intensify the conduct of the certification processes of statistics produced by ELSS national authorities. A timetable for the certification processes to be conducted in 2015 will be published in ELSTAT’s website.

9.2 ELSTAT will finalize the certification processes of statistics produced by national authorities by end-2015.

Timeline:

9.1 The timetable for the certification processes that are programmed to be conducted in 2015 has been published in ELSTAT’s website in June 2015 (completed)

9.2 Finalization of the certification processes for statistics produced by national authorities: End of 2015

Recommendation 10

The national authorities within the Hellenic Statistical System should give greater priority to developing the internal quality procedures associated with their statistical processes and the statistical products - and as part of this should make sure that adequate process documentation exists as soon as possible, and not wait on the certification process requiring it. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principles 4 and 8)

Current situation

During the SYELSS meeting that took place on 29 May 2014, SYELSS members, including the representatives of the national authorities of the ELSS, were informed by ELSTAT about the basic requirements for the certification of statistics. Among other things in these requirements are included: a) the appointment of the statistical head of the agency having the characteristics and competencies provided for in the European Statistics Code of Practice and b) the development and publication by the ELSS agencies of a quality policy, quality guidelines and quality reports for statistical processes, as well as the development and publication by them of a system for monitoring the quality of the statistical production processes and output.

Improvement actions 10.1 and 10.2: Development of internal quality procedures and relevant documentation by ELSS national authorities

10.1 A workshop on the certification of ELSS statistics will be organized by ELSTAT, in which the ELSS agencies will be invited to participate. In this workshop the ELSS agencies will be informed in detail about the steps that are essential for the certification of their statistics as “official”. Among these steps are the development of internal quality procedures and relevant documentation.

10.2 The main body of the recommendation involves the development of internal quality procedures and relevant documentation by ELSS national authorities.

Timeline:

10.1 The workshop on the certification of ELSS statistics was held in June 2015 (completed)

10.2 Main body of the recommendation: by end of 2015

Recommendation 11

Each of the other national authorities producing European statistics should nominate the most appropriate senior, statistically qualified, individual in that organisation as the ‘Senior Statistical Professional’ and delegate to that individual (on the authority of the relevant Minister) practical authority for all statistical decisions relating to the Code of Practice. The Hellenic Statistical Authority should also put forward proposals for this requirement to be included in the Regulation on the Statistical Obligations of the Agencies of the Hellenic Statistical System. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principle 1)

Current situation

ELSTAT has addressed this issue in consultations with ELSS agencies, including at a SYELSS meeting on 29.5.2014 where it was emphasized that all other national authorities (ONAs) should identify and appoint a Statistical Head who has the characteristics and competencies provided for in the European Statistics Code of Practice.

Improvement actions 11.1, 11.2 and 11.3: Appointment of the Statistical Head of National Authorities – Amendment of Regulation on the Statistical Obligations of the Agencies of the ELSS

11.1 ELSTAT will send letters to national authorities of the ELSS apprising them of the need to carry out the recommendation 11.

11.2 ELSTAT will proceed to the relevant amendment of the Regulation on the Statistical Obligations of the Agencies of the ELSS.

11.3 The nomination of a Statistical Head in each ONA shall be implemented under the responsibility of national authorities of the ELSS.

Timeline:

11.1 Transmission of ELSTAT’s letter to national authorities of the ELSS: June 2015

11.2 Amendment of the Regulation on the Statistical Obligations of the Agencies of ELSS: July 2015

11.3 Main body of the recommendation: nomination of a Statistical Head in each ONA: July 2015

Recommendation 12

The Hellenic Statistical Authority should establish a Coordination Committee of the Hellenic Statistical System chaired by the President of the Hellenic Statistical Authority. (Coordination)

Current situation

ELSTAT performs its coordinating role in the Hellenic Statistical System through, inter alia, the Council of the Hellenic Statistical System (SYELSS), which is established by Article 3 of the Law 3832/2010. The Council is chaired by the President of ELSTAT and in the Council are represented, inter alia, the National Authorities of the ELSS, which are the ELSS agencies responsible for developing, producing and disseminating European statistics.

Improvement actions 12.1 and 12.2: Establishment of a Coordination Committee of the Hellenic Statistical System

12.1 ELSTAT will proceed to relevant amendments of (i) the Regulation on the Statistical Obligations of the Agencies of the ELSS and (ii) the Regulation on the Operation and Administration of ELSTAT providing for a Committee of the Hellenic Statistical System chaired by the President of the Hellenic Statistical Authority.

12.2 ELSTAT will subsequently issue a decision establishing the Committee.

Timeline:

12.1 Amendment of the Regulations: July 2015

12.2 Constitution of the Committee: July 2015

Recommendation 13

Each of the other national authorities should identify those published statistical reports and press releases that relate to official statistics (those statistics that will be official once certified) and include in each a prominent statement that the publication forms part of the output of the Hellenic Statistical System and is required to comply with the Code of Practice. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principles 14 and 15)

Current situation

At the moment, given that the certification processes are under way for the Other National Authorities (ONAs) of the ELSS, there is no such statement in the statistical reports and press releases of Other National Authorities of the ELSS.

Improvement action 13: Prominent statement of official statistics

ELSTAT will develop an appropriate statement, which will be required to be used in those published statistical reports and press releases that are related to statistics certified by ELSTAT as official.

Timeline:

Implementation by ONAs of the ELSS: Upon certification of published statistics as official. Confirmation of certification by ELSTAT will potentially start in the 3rd quarter of 2016.

Recommendation 14

The Hellenic Statistical Authority should aim to develop its current system of statistical press releases to provide more guidance and advice to users of statistics. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principle 15)

Current situation

ELSTAT has communicated its diverging views as following: “The Hellenic Statistical Authority disagrees with recommendation 14 as it firmly believes that in recent years it has achieved the right balance in the content of its statistical press releases. It has done so by meeting Principle 15 of the European statistics Code of Practice and at the same time avoiding risks of noncompliance (and/or the appearance of noncompliance) with Principle 1 (in particular indicator 1.6) and Principle 6 of the Code. Following indicator 15.1 of the Code of Practice, ELSTAT has uploaded on its website statistical tables and metadata presented in an easily understandable way so as to facilitate proper interpretation and meaningful comparisons of its statistics by the users. However the interpretation of statistics — i.e. the identification and analysis of the economic, sociological or other meaning of the statistics — is explicitly left to the users as such interpretations can actually vary depending on the vantage point and paradigm used by the user/analyst.”

Improvement action

ELSTAT has a divergent view on this recommendation and therefore no improvement action is foreseen.

Timeline:

N.A.

Recommendation 15

The Hellenic Statistical Authority should aim to develop its existing good relationships with the academic community to further promote the use of microdata and encourage the analysis of official statistics, and thus further enhance its public reputation. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principles 7 and 15)

Current situation

ELSTAT conducts through its website a continuous user satisfaction survey and organizes user conferences addressed to specific user categories. In the framework of these actions, ELSTAT gathers comments and suggestions made by the users of its statistical data concerning the dissemination of statistical information, users' access to statistical data and any shortcomings in the produced statistics.

ELSTAT publishes on its website, the agendas of conferences, the presentations made, the list of participants and the minutes of the conferences.

In 2014, a specialized tab was created in the website of ELSTAT through which users can submit their requests for statistical data and find in one place all the relevant information they might need, as described below:

- General information regarding statistical data requests
- Customized requests forms for tailor-made products
- Price-list of products
- Information on access to confidential data for scientific purposes
- Information on provision of anonymized microdata of statistical surveys
- Information on anonymization criteria
- Confidential Data Contract, Statistical Confidentiality Declaration, Authorization Form
- Pricing Policy

It is noted that ELSTAT has a partly diverging view on recommendation 15. Specifically, ELSTAT will aim to further advertise more rigorously the availability and procedures of access to its microdata and enhance, through new communication vehicles, its outreach to the scientific community. However, it should be noted that the current practices of ELSTAT are already very supportive of the academic community's scientific work. These practices are carefully spelled out in the (publicly available) procedures that ELSTAT uses, which also safeguard the privacy of data providers and ensure the equality of access of different (scientific) users, as stated above.

ELSTAT will also continue to seek close collaboration with the academic and research community in the context of statistical development projects that ELSTAT undertakes and in the framework of engagements with the scientific community as users of ELSTAT's statistics. However, these collaborations can only take place to the extent that relationships of dependency, privileged access of some users to data, and pressures to ELSTAT's professional independence and impartiality do not arise from such arrangements.

Improvement actions 15.1, 15.2, 15.3 and 15.4: Promotion of the use of microdata and encouragement of the analysis of official statistics

15.1 In addition to the actions already being undertaken by ELSTAT, a public announcement will be issued periodically, which will provide comprehensive information concerning the established processes for the provision of microdata.

15.2 ELSTAT will review the existing User Satisfaction Survey questionnaire in order to encourage more feedback and comments from users and especially those that have received microdata.

15.3 ELSTAT will aim to periodically organize one-day conferences for the users of microdata.

15.4 The SYELSS, under its revised mandate and membership, will support promotion of open dialogue with different user communities.

Timeline:

15.1 Issuing of the public announcement: Starting in June 2015 and annually updated if needed

15.2 Review of the existing User Satisfaction Survey questionnaire: June 2015

15.3 Microdata User Conference: Starting in September 2015 and repeated on annual basis

15.4 For the part of the establishment of SYELSS with revised mandate and membership: June 2015 and ongoing (see improvement action 8 above)

Recommendation 16

The Hellenic Statistical Authority should aim to develop its organisational culture to put more emphasis on service to users and the value of open dialogue with different user communities, so as to support statistical planning, to understand and stimulate use, and to further build external and internal confidence in itself as an institution. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principle 11)

Current situation

ELSTAT has a diverging view as follows: “The Hellenic Statistical Authority currently gives high priority to the production and release of European Statistics required under EU legislation as full adherence of any EU member state to Union Law constitutes a *sine qua non*. Moreover, emphasis on the production of European Statistics according to the EU regulations ensures that the most widely recognized and prioritized user needs for European Statistics—depicted and codified in the Regulations through the European Union legislative process—are met. Thus, ELSTAT does not see the need to change these priorities.

However, it should also be noted that ELSTAT already devotes significant resources to the collection of user views for its statistical output and services. These views are taken into account by ELSTAT for the improvement of the quality of statistics produced and the services provided as well as for deciding on new statistics to be produced and on those to be discontinued. To this end, ELSTAT conducts a user satisfaction survey on an ongoing basis, receives views from the Council of the Hellenic Statistical System, organizes annual User Conferences, and carries out thematic conferences and many ad hoc meetings with specific categories of users. Thus, ELSTAT productively and appropriately engages users in order to comply with Principle 11 while safeguarding compliance with Principles 1 and 6.

In light of the above, ELSTAT considers that recommendation 16 is by and large not applicable.

However, there is the potential for further improvement in the application of Principle 11 of the European Statistics Code of Practice if recommendation 8 is appropriately implemented.”

Improvement action 16: More emphasis on service to users

There is room for further improvement if the SYELSS is established with revised mandate and membership (representing users of official statistics) providing advice on user needs as well as on whether these needs are being met and reflected in the Hellenic Statistical Program and the annual work programs of ELSTAT.

Timeline:

For the part of the establishment of the SYELSS with revised mandate and membership: June 2015 (see improvement action 8 above)

Subsidiary issues

Recommendation 17

The Hellenic Statistical Authority should complete the work to adopt a new organizational chart describing responsibilities and functions within the institution to improve long term efficiency. Special attention should be paid to how to fit within the organizational structure the proposed Research and Studies Department. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principles 3 and 10)

Current situation

The adoption of a new Organizational Chart of ELSTAT is included in the Joint Overall Statistical Greek Action Plan as an action. ELSTAT envisages that the new organizational chart will sufficiently describe the allocation of responsibilities across ELSTAT, including the new budgetary, financial and accounting functions, which were set up from the beginning of 2013. The new Organizational Chart has to take the form of a presidential decree on the basis of a common proposal by the Minister of Internal Affairs and the Minister of Finance, which in turn is made on the basis of a proposal of ELSTAT. A solid draft of ELSTAT's Organizational Chart is currently available and under finalization.

Improvement actions 17.1 and 17.2: Adoption of new Organizational Chart

17.1 ELSTAT will finalize the new Organizational Chart and will subsequently submit it as a proposal to the Minister of Internal Affairs and the Minister of Finance.

17.2 The Ministers will take action as provided for by the law so that the Organizational Chart proposal is adopted via a Presidential Decree.

Timeline:

17.1 ELSTAT proposal to competent Ministers of the new Organizational Chart: June 2015

17.2 Adoption of the new Organizational Chart: July 2015

Recommendation 18

The Hellenic Statistical Authority should aim over time to delegate more routine decision-making to middle managers in order to enhance efficiency and ease the current burden on senior managers. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principles 3 and 10)

Current situation

ELSTAT has a diverging view on this recommendation. Specifically, the Hellenic Statistical Authority does not see recommendation 18 as applicable, given that there is already delegation to middle management, and the senior management of ELSTAT is involved in decisions only when there is clear evidence for a need to do so. The view of ELSTAT is that delegation of routine decision making can and does take place to the extent that there are sufficient human resources and standardization of statistical processes, so that quality and adherence to the Code of Practice are effectively assured. Progress in increasing the numbers of ELSTAT staff with well qualified staff and improving the capacity of existing staff through the ongoing capacity building efforts, in tandem with the standardization and improved documentation of statistical processes, are envisaged to result in further delegation of decisions from senior management. It should be noted that as Principle 1 of the Code of Practice assigns the responsibility for decisions on statistical methods, standards and procedures, and on the content and timing of statistical releases solely to the head of the National Statistical Institute, and accountability for the quality of statistics reaching the users remains with the head of the NSI under all circumstances, appropriate delegation has to take also the above into account.

Improvement action

ELSTAT has a diverging view on this recommendation and therefore no improvement action is foreseen.

Timeline:

N.A.

Recommendation 19

The Hellenic Statistical Authority and the agencies of the Hellenic Statistical System should take further steps to ensure that their criteria and decision-making processes in relation to the provision of microdata and other data for research are well understood both internally and externally. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principles 11 and 15)

Current situation

In 2014, a specialized tab was created in the website of ELSTAT through which users can submit their requests for statistical data and find in one place all the relevant information they might need, as described below:

- General information regarding statistical data requests
- Customized requests forms for tailor-made products
- Price-list of products
- Information on access to confidential data for scientific purposes
- Information on provision of anonymized microdata of statistical surveys
- Information on anonymization criteria
- Confidential Data Contract, Statistical Confidentiality Declaration, Authorization Form
- Pricing Policy

Improvement actions 19.1, 19.2, 19.3, 19.4 and 19.5: Improved communication of criteria and decision-making processes in relation to the provision of microdata

19.1 ELSTAT will organize internal seminars for each division of the Authority involved in the production, processing and dissemination of microdata or other statistical data required for research and scientific purposes with a view to maximizing the familiarization and understanding of its staff with the established processes and the applied criteria for the provision of such data.

In addition to the actions already being undertaken by ELSTAT vis-à-vis users, the following **(same improvement actions as for recommendation 15)** will be undertaken:

- 19.2 A public announcement will be issued periodically, which will provide comprehensive information concerning the established processes for the provision of microdata.
- 19.3 ELSTAT will review the existing User Satisfaction Survey questionnaire in order to encourage more feedback and comments from users and especially those that have received microdata.
- 19.4 ELSTAT will aim to periodically organize one-day conferences for the users of microdata.
- 19.5 The SYELSS, under its revised mandate and membership would support promotion of open dialogue with different user communities.

Timeline:

19.1 Internal ELSTAT seminars: First round to be completed in December 2015 and repeated on annual basis

19.2 Issuing of the public announcement: Starting in June 2015 and annually updated, if needed

19.3 Review of the existing User Satisfaction Survey questionnaire: June 2015

19.4 Microdata User Conference: Starting in September 2015 and repeated on annual basis

19.5 For the part of the establishment of SYELSS with revised mandate and membership: June 2015 and ongoing

Recommendation 20

The Hellenic Statistical Authority and the agencies of the Hellenic Statistical System should examine international best practice with a view to further improving the accessibility of microdata by academic researchers in the longer term. (European Statistics Code of Practice, Principles 11 and 15)

Current situation

ELSTAT has developed specific procedures for the provision of microdata, in order to ensure a uniform and strict handling of requests for microdata and that appropriate criteria are applied. At the same time, ELSTAT has dedicated a specific part (tab) on its website through which the public is informed about all aspects concerning the provision of microdata. This part includes detailed information, such as on the anonymization process applied to confidential microdata by ELSTAT. ELSTAT also addresses specific needs for microdata, through the possibility it provides to users to request tailor-made data.

Improvement actions 20.1, 20.2 and 20.3: Improving the accessibility of microdata by academic researchers

ELSTAT plans to undertake the following steps:

- 20.1 Securing the provision of consultancy by an external expert on this subject and establishment of a working group consisting of ELSTAT's officials and representatives from the academic community.
- 20.2 Both the expert and the working group will submit to ELSTAT management proposals on specific actions with the aim of improving the accessibility of microdata by academic researchers. On the basis of these proposals ELSTAT will formulate an action plan. This action plan will be communicated to the other agencies of the Hellenic Statistical System, so that they can potentially also adapt their own practices.
- 20.3 Implementation of the action plan

Timeline:

20.1 Provision to ELSTAT management of proposals by external expert and working group: December 2015

20.2 Formulation by ELSTAT of action plan: March 2016

20.3 Completion of implementation of action plan: September 2016

Recommendation 21

The Hellenic Statistical Authority should incorporate into the ‘Regulation on the Operation and Administration of the Hellenic Statistical Authority’: a) the recently established process of systematic assessment of each division of the Hellenic Statistical Authority against the Code of Practice and b) the ongoing existence and functions of the Group for Supervision and Management of Quality. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principle 4)

Current situation

The assessment of each division of ELSTAT against the Code of Practice and the functioning of the Group for Supervision and Management of Quality are currently provided for in a circular issued by ELSTAT.

Improvement action 21: Amendment of the Regulation on the Operation and Administration of the Hellenic Statistical Authority

ELSTAT will appropriately amend the Regulation on the Operation and Administration of the Hellenic Statistical Authority in order to reflect the internal assessment process of ELSTAT against the CoP and the operation of the Group for Supervision and Management of Quality.

Timeline:

Amendment of the Regulation: July 2015

Recommendation 22

The Hellenic Statistical Authority should ensure that the documentation of statistical processes is given high priority within all its divisions. (European statistics Code of Practice, indicators 4.2, 12.2 and 15.5)

Current situation

In 2014 ELSTAT issued ELSTAT's "Quality Guidelines" which is a "living" document, to be updated from time to time according to the developments in various areas, such as in the internal organization of ELSTAT, the available resources, the availability of administrative data to produce statistics and the emergence of new technologies for the collection, processing and dissemination of data.

The work regarding the compilation of Quality Reports, User Oriented Quality Reports, metadata and methodological notes continues in ELSTAT. ELSTAT plans to complete all outstanding documentation for already published statistics in May 2015.

ELSTAT is also in the process of preparing the publication of hitherto unpublished statistics along with the necessary documentation with a view to completing this task by end-2015.

In the framework of assessing the compliance of the statistical divisions of ELSTAT with the principles of the CoP, particular emphasis has been put to the documentation of statistical processes and methods.

Improvement actions 22.1, 22.2 and 22.3: Completion of documentation of statistical processes

22.1 Completion of compilation of Quality Reports, User Oriented Quality Reports, metadata and methodological notes for already published statistics.

22.2 Completion of publication of hitherto unpublished statistics already compiled by ELSTAT along with the above necessary documentation.

22.3 Completion of compilation of documentation of statistical processes by all ELSTAT divisions.

Timeline:

22.1 Completion of compilation of Quality Reports, User Oriented Quality Reports, metadata and methodological notes for already published statistics: May 2015

22.2 Completion of publication of hitherto unpublished statistics already compiled by ELSTAT along with the above necessary documentation: end 2015

22.3 Completion of compilation of documentation of statistical processes by all ELSTAT divisions: end 2015

Recommendation 23

The Hellenic Statistical Authority should seek to improve its human resource management and financial accounting systems to allow more detailed allocation of resources to the different statistical processes and products. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principle 10)

Current situation

ELSTAT monitors regularly the efficiency of its human resources allocation to the different statistical processes and products, in the framework of the Group for Supervision and Management of Quality and on the basis inter alia of the work of the Programming Section in the Methodology Division of ELSTAT.

Subproject 8 of ELSTAT's current ICT project concerning the establishment of a human resource management system in ELSTAT will contribute to the upgrading and automatization of the existing monitoring and allocation processes regarding resources. It is expected that the contract for subproject 8 will be signed in May 2015. The deadline for the completion of the subproject is end-October 2015.

ELSTAT's financial accounting system was upgraded when ELSTAT gained its financial autonomy from the Ministry of Finance in January 2013. Improvements will continue to be made as necessary, making inter alia use of the improved ICT environment that will result from the completion of ELSTAT's major ICT project in October 2015.

Improvement action 23: Improvement of the human resource management system

Completion of ELSTAT's ICT subproject for the establishment of a human resource management system.

Full implementation/use of the new human resource management system in ELSTAT.

Timeline:

October 2015

Recommendation 24

The Hellenic Statistical Authority should seek to make further improvements to its website making use of new methods for data presentation and handling in order to make it more user-friendly. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principle 15)

Current situation

ELSTAT's website contains a wide range of statistical information on nearly fully bilingual basis. ELSTAT is continuing to upload user oriented quality reports, quality reports and metadata to the website and improvements in this respect will be completed in 2015 (see recommendation 22).

Subproject 2 of the current ICT project on upgrading ELSTAT's portal will upgrade the dissemination services provided through ELSTAT's portal.

Improvement actions 24: Improvement of ELSTAT's website to render it more user friendly

Completion of Subproject 2 (on the portal) of ELSTAT's ICT project to render ELSTA's website more user friendly.

Timeline:

Completion of Subproject 2: October 2015

Recommendation 25

The Hellenic Statistical Authority should devote more efforts to develop a coherent and public system for assessing response burden and use it to track efficiency gains as it increasingly obtains access to administrative data. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principle 9)

Current situation

In the framework of the assessment of each division of ELSTAT against the Code of Practice, improvement actions related to the implementation of Principle 9, regarding the monitoring of the response burden posed to respondents, have been decided, among others. Specifically, the assessed divisions of ELSTAT conducting surveys have been asked to gather and utilize data concerning the time needed for respondents to complete the survey questionnaire and at the same time to promote the development and use of more automated data collection solutions as well as data from administrative sources.

Improvement action 25: Assess response burden

ELSTAT will incorporate into each statistical questionnaire questions regarding the burden posed on the respondents. Based on the information collected, ELSTAT will systematically monitor response burden, taking also into account relevant experience from other NSIs. This information will be used for tracking efficiency gains from the use of administrative data in the production of statistics. When sufficient information will be gathered through this procedure, ELSTAT plans to publish it on its website and update it regularly.

Timeline:

December 2015 and then on an ongoing basis

Recommendation 26

The Hellenic Statistical Authority should seek to prepare analyses comparing statistics from different sources relating to the same phenomenon in order to improve the coherence and completeness of the statistical message. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principle 14)

Current situation

ELSTAT, recognizing the importance of the ELSS producing coherent statistics that describe the same phenomenon, has already performed and continues to perform comparative analyses for several important statistical outputs (SBS vs STS, External Trade Statistics vs BOP, National Accounts vs External Trade Statistics, National Accounts vs Health Accounts). The results of these analyses have led already to improvements in the coherence and the quality of the produced statistics. However, there is room for improvement and regular monitoring of such issues by incorporating such comparative analyses in the existing production and validation scheme of the basic statistics of ELSTAT and the ELSS in general. Specifically regarding the coherence of ELSTAT's statistics with relevant statistics produced by other National Authorities of the ELSS this is expected to be further improved in a systematic way through the certification by ELSTAT of ELSS statistics.

Improvement action 26: Improvement of coherence and completeness of statistics

ELSTAT will regularly examine the coherence and comparability of the main statistical outputs produced both within ELSTAT and in the ELSS as a whole. This work will be carried out with the support and co-operation of Eurostat as necessary. ELSTAT will carry out this work also in the context of the certification process of statistics produced by other ELSS agencies.

Timeline:

Completion of examination of coherence and comparability of main statistical outputs: December 2015 and then on an ongoing basis