Global Assessment of the National Statistical System of the Republic of Belarus

Final Report

April 2020

This report was financed by and prepared in partnership between Eurostat (the Statistical Office of the European Union), the Statistical Office of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), in cooperation with Belstat, the National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus.

This project has been financed by

eurostat

Table of Contents

List of abbreviations

BEC	Classification by Broad Economic Categories
Belstat	National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus
BPM	Balance of Payments and International Investment Position Manual
BSUIR	Belarusian State University of Informatics and Radioelectronics
CAPI	Computer-Aided Personal Interviews
CAWI	Computer-Aided Web Interviews
CEEC	Committee of European Economic Co-operation
CEPA	Classification of Environmental Protection Activities
CES	Conference for European Statisticians
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CN	Combined Nomenclature
COFOG	Classification of the Functions of Government
COICOP	Classification of Individual Consumption According to Purpose
COPNI	Classification of the Purposes of Non-Profit Institutions Serving Households
CPA	Statistical Classification of Products by Activity
CPI	Consumer Price Index
DCC	Data Computing Centre
DESAP	Quality Self-Assessment Questionnaire of the European Statistical System
EAEU	Eurasian Economic Union
EaP	Eastern Partnership
EDS	External Debt Statistics
EECCA	Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia
EFTA	European Free Trade Association
ESCoP	European Statistics Code of Practice
ESS	European Statistical System
EU	European Union
EU-SILC	European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation
FISIM	Financial Intermediation Services Indirectly Measured
GA	Global Assessment
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GFS	Government Finance Statistics
GFSM	Government Finance Statistics Manual
GLOS	Generic Law of Official Statistics
GRP	Gross Regional Product
GSBPM	Generic Statistical Business Process Model
HBS	Household Budget Survey
HLSS	Household and Living Standards Survey

HS	Harmonised System
IBRD	International Bank for Reconstruction and Development
ICD	International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems
ICF	International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health
ICP	International Comparison Programme
ICSE	International Classification of Status in Employment
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IISSS	Integrated Information System of State Statistics
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IMF	International Monetary Fund
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
ISO	International Organisation for Standardisation
ITC	Information Technology Centre
LFS	Labour Force Survey
LSS	Law on State Statistics
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
MoF	Ministry of Finance
NACE	Statistical classification of economic activities
NBB	National Bank of the Republic of Belarus
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NSS	National Statistical System
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OKED	National classification of the Republic of Belarus “Types of Economic Activities”
OKOPF	National classification of the Republic of Belarus “Organizational and legal statuses”
PES	Post Enumeration Survey
PMG	Production of Manufactured Goods
PPI	Producer Price Index
PPP	Purchasing Power Parities
PPS	Probability Proportional to Size
QM	Quality Management
QMS	Quality Management System
R&D	Research and Development
SAET	Satellite Account for Education and Training
SAQ	Self-Assessment Questionnaire
SBR	Statistical Business Register
SBS	Structural Business Statistics
SCC	State Customs Committee
SDDS	Special Data Dissemination Standard
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SDMX	Statistical Data and Metadata eXchange

SEEA	System of Environmental-Economic Accounting
SEIS	Shared Environmental Information System
SIMS	Single Integrated Metadata Structure
SITC	Standard International Trade Classification
SNA	System of National Accounts
SOATO	System of designations for components of administrative and territorial division and settlements
STB	State standard of the Republic of Belarus
STEP	Statistics Through Eastern Partnership
STS	Short-term Statistics
TAIEX	Technical Assistance and Information Exchange Instrument
TSA	Tourism Satellite Account
TUS	Time Use Survey
UN	United Nations
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNECE	United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNFPOS	United Nations Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNIDO	United Nations Industrial Development Organisation
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UNSD	United Nations Statistics Division
WHO	World Health Organisation

Preface

The Global Assessment (GA) of the National Statistical System (NSS) of the Republic of Belarus was undertaken within the framework of the project *"The provision of global assessments, sector assessments and light peer reviews for enlargement and ENP countries"*. Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union, funded and managed the project and DevStat, a company contracted by Eurostat, organised all activities and tasks related to the GA.

Eurostat initiated the GA following an official request by the National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus (hereinafter Belstat).The assessment was conducted by the following experts: Mr Gerry O'Hanlon (independent consultant), who was the leading expert, Mr Priit Potisepp (independent consultant) Ms Jolanta Szczerbinska (Eurostat), Mr Lars Svennebye (European Free Trade Association - EFTA), Mr Marius Andersen (EFTA), and Mr Steven Vale (United Nations Economic Commission for Europe - UNECE).

The assessment findings are based on an extensive review performed during the assessment missions, which took place on 17-21 June 2019 and on 12-15 November 2019 in Minsk.

Prior to the first mission, Belstat staff completed Self-Assessment Questionnaires (SAQs) and returned them with other relevant supporting documents, which together served as a starting point for the assessment. The results of the assessment are based on the analysis of the documents provided by Belstat, documents available on its website, and information collected and discussed during the in-country missions. Missing documentation was also provided by Belstat after both missions in electronic format.

The collaboration between the Assessment experts and the team of Belstat was constructive throughout all phases of the GA. The Assessment Team is confident that the assessment will be of major benefit to the further development of the statistical system in Belarus.

Executive Summary

The main goal of the Global Assessment (GA) of the National Statistical System (NSS) of Belarus was to evaluate the level of conformity with European statistical standards, with particular reference to compliance with the European Statistics Code of Practice (ESCoP)[1] and, for specified statistical domains, with the Eurostat Statistical Requirements Compendium. Accordingly, the report provides an assessment of the state of development of official statistics in Belarus, and of the progress achieved during recent years, and also provides recommendations for further improvement in the near and longer terms.

The Assessment Team formed a positive impression of Belstat and noted that it and the NSS are well resourced, in terms of both people and technology, to function as a highly effective statistical system. In particular, the Assessment Team concluded that Belstat complies to a considerable extent with the statistical principles set down in the European Statistics Code of Practice (ESCoP). The recommendations set out below will assist Belstat in achieving fuller compliance with European and international statistical standards.

Compliance with ESCoP

Principle 1 – Professional Independence

In the Global Assessment, the extent to which Belstat is compliant with the principle of professional independence was assessed in detail by reference to the individual indicators for the principle set down in the ESCoP.

In general, the Assessment Team found that there is a good understanding of, and adherence in practice to, the principle throughout Belstat. However, the Assessment Team is of the opinion that the legal underpinning of the principle in the Law on State Statistics (LSS) and/or Statute of Belstat could be improved and aligned more closely with the relevant guidelines of the Generic Law on Official Statistics (GLOS) that was adopted by the Conference of European Statisticians in April 2016.

In particular, the Assessment Team would recommend that the professional independence of the Chairperson of Belstat, and the heads of statistical production within the Other Producers of Official Statistical Information, should be explicitly provided for in the LSS and/or the Statute of Belstat. Furthermore, appropriate legal or other measures should be adopted to align the procedures for the appointment/dismissal of the Chairperson with the relevant recommendations in the GLOS and the ESCoP.

Recommendations

1. The professional independence of the Chairperson of Belstat, and the heads of statistical production within the Other Producers of Official Statistical Information within the National Statistical System as appropriate, should be specifically addressed and reinforced in the Law on State Statistics in line with the recommendations of the Generic Law on Official Statistics and the European Statistics Code of Practice.

[1]In accordance with the methodology agreed for the current round of Global Assessments for enlargement and ENP countries, the 2011 version of the ESCoP was used as the reference base for the assessment. Changes introduced to the Code of Practice in November 2017 were therefore not explicitly taken into account in the assessment process or in the presentation of this report. Many of the issues entailed in the changes were, however, addressed in the detailed discussions with Belstat and included, where appropriate, in the report. In particular, the new Principle 1 bis of the ESCoP, on Coordination and cooperation, is largely covered in Chapter 14 of the report.

2. Legislative and/or other appropriate measures should be adopted for the appointment of the Chairperson of Belstat to take into account to the fullest extent the processes recommended in the Generic Law on Official Statistics for the appointment of the Chief Statistician of national statistical offices.
3. Legislative and/or other appropriate measures should be adopted to clearly specify, in line with the recommendations of the Generic Law on Official Statistics, that the term of office of the Chairperson of Belstat cannot be terminated before its expiry date for any reasons compromising statistical principles.

Principle 2 – Mandate for data collection

Belstat has a very strong mandate for data collection that is specified in the LSS, which stipulates the rights and obligations of all stakeholders in the National Statistical System. Belstat has the right and power to give its permission for the organisation of statistical surveys and data collection by Other Producers of Official Statistical Information, impose the statistical methodology and check the compliance with statistical standards and norms. The use of administrative data for statistical purposes is also enabled under the LSS.

Principle 3- Adequacy of resources

In general, Belstat, and the Other Producers of Official Statistical Information, seem to be adequately resourced for their current tasks, with approximately 1,700 staff working in Belstat in the central, regional and local offices. Recruitment and retention of suitably qualified staff would also not appear to be a problem.

There did not seem to be much internal mobility within Belstat, with many specialists staying in the same area for long periods. Although there were some examples of mobility between the different agencies comprising the National Statistical System, this also seemed to be rather low in comparison to other countries. Furthermore, the skills needed by any statistical organisation can be expected to change over time, due to changes in technology and methodology. To prepare for this, Belstat (like any other statistical organisation) needs to reflect on the skills it will need, compare these with the existing skills of staff, and develop a strategy to fill the gaps, either through recruitment or training, or a combination of both. This should be done in cooperation with the Other Producers of Official Statistical Information, to the extent possible.

Regarding information technology, Belstat seems to have sufficient resources to meet current needs. There are around 2,000 personal computers for a workforce of around 1,700 staff, and around 60% of these are less than five years old. Networks, servers and other IT infrastructures are also sufficient for current needs. An "Integrated Information System of the State Statistics of the Republic of Belarus" was put in place in 2013, and automates the collection, processing, storage and transfer of statistical data. An "Information-Analytical System of Dissemination of Official Statistical Information" has been put in place recently for statistical dissemination via the Internet. Software is mostly developed in-house or bought from Belarusian companies (mainly from the two specialist IT companies that are subordinated to Belstat). Belstat recently started investigating the use of free and open source software and had a training course in the "R" programming language from a United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO)'s expert.

Belstat currently encourages staff to undertake language training, particularly in English. This is becoming increasingly important, as English is becoming the de-facto working language for official statistics at the global level and is the language in which new statistical methods and standards are being developed. An issue identified in Belstat, as well as in statistical

organisations in other countries of the region, is the lack of networking opportunities for statistical and IT staff with peers in different countries. This limits the exchange of knowledge and good practices.

Recommendations

Belstat is encouraged to:

4. Pursue a human resource policy that promotes the horizontal transfer of professional skills within the organisation and more widely throughout the NSS; in particular, the policy should encourage greater internal mobility of specialists within Belstat and involve specialists from the Other Producers of Official Statistical Information in activities that increase statistical literacy and competence.
5. Continue and develop its audits of the existing skills of staff in conjunction with an assessment of future needs and to adjust training and recruitment policies accordingly.
6. Consider how training and staff development activities could be extended to facilitate to a greater extent the participation of staff employed by the Other Producers of Official Statistical Information.
7. Continue its current initiatives to modernise the IT infrastructure, including the introduction of new software, with a focus on free and open-source statistical tools.
8. Consider how to provide further opportunities for staff, particularly those in IT and related functions, to benefit from meeting and forming networks with their peers in other national statistical offices.
9. Continue and expand the existing provision of English language training to enable staff to engage more effectively in international statistical activities.

Principle 4 – Commitment to Quality

Belstat has introduced a comprehensive Quality Management System (QMS) at its central level, which is stipulated in several internal documents. It has also adopted and published a Quality Policy and Quality Guidelines. The policy and the guidelines deal with several quality aspects of official statistics and form a useful horizontal platform for more specific quality assurance of statistical processes and products. Quality Management (QM) is well formalised and institutionalised within Belstat, but this is not the case in its regional offices or in the Other Producers of Official Statistical Information.

The quality guidelines adopted on 1 April 2019 and derived from the Quality Management standard of the Republic of Belarus (STB ISO 9001-2015) include several elements, which are directly related to the statistical processes and products e.g. interaction with users, measurement of user satisfaction and user confidence, handling of pre-release errors, post-release error treatment, and sources of professional knowledge. The guidelines are inspired by the main stages of the statistical production process and require assessment of compliance with European and international standards throughout the whole Belarus National Statistical System. The document establishes the framework for general QM in Belstat and includes processes and indicators, which refer to quality aspects of official statistics.

Belstat conducts the self-assessments, which are based on the Quality Self-Assessment Questionnaire of the European Statistical System (DESAP) and assigns rating-based quality scores for its surveys. The Assessment Team would recommend that these initiatives be complemented with targeted audits of statistical methodologies, processes and outputs, including the use of benchmarking and the participation of external experts as appropriate.

Belstat is committed to following the Generic Statistical Business Process Model (GSBPM), but there is still need for further development and standardisation of quality assurance measures along the production process and in all statistical domains. Belstat uses some indicators that measure the quality of statistical output (product quality) but this is not done by the Other Producers of Official Statistical Information even though the principles of official statistics and the principal indicators established by Belstat are applicable for the whole National Statistical System (NSS).

A quality reporting system, desirably based on a relevant international standard, needs to be developed, implemented and integrated with the metadata system.

Since the use of administrative data for statistical purposes is increasing, a systematic assessment of administrative data is needed, as foreseen in the strategic plan for the NSS.

Recommendations

10. To implement the statistical Quality Management System more widely in the Belarus National Statistical System, Belstat is encouraged to enhance the transfer of its know-how, established practices and tools for statistical QM to the Other Producers of Official Statistical Information.
11. Belstat is encouraged to complement the existing DESAP based self-assessment of surveys and the International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO) related documentation audits with targeted audits of statistical methodologies, processes and outputs, including the use of benchmarking and the participation of external experts as appropriate. The results of these audits should be made public.
12. Belstat and the Other Producers of Official Statistical Information are encouraged to prepare a full range of producer- and user-oriented statistical quality reports, in line with international standards, and to disseminate them widely in Russian and English to meet the needs of internal and external users.
13. Belstat and the Other Producers of Official Statistical Information are encouraged to further develop and disseminate in Russian and English user-oriented quality indicators.
14. Belstat is encouraged to develop a systematic approach to the quality assessment of administrative data used for statistical purposes involving the Other Producers of Official Statistical Information.

Principle 5 – Statistical Confidentiality

Several articles of the LSS (Articles 5, 10, 11, 21 and explicitly 24) provide for various aspects of statistical confidentiality. However, the LSS provisions on statistical confidentiality seem to cover only primary statistical data. The GLOS provisions, on the other hand, cover all individual data relating to statistical units that are used by producers of official statistics (i.e. primary and non-primary data). The Assessment Team recommends that the LSS be revised so that its provisions on statistical confidentiality are aligned with those of the GLOS. In addition to the LSS, the Confidentiality Policy and the Principal State Statistics documents should be revised to make them more compatible with the corresponding provisions of the GLOS.

Recommendations

15. The Law on State Statistics should be revised so that its provisions on statistical confidentiality are applied by Belstat and the Other Producers of Official Statistical Information to all data obtained for statistical purposes, irrespective of the source (e.g. statistical surveys or other sources such as administrative data) of the data.
16. The provisions relating to statistical confidentiality in the Law on State Statistics (and in the Confidentiality Policy and Principal State Statistical Indicators documents) should be

revised to make them more compatible with the corresponding provisions of the Generic Law on Official Statistics.

Principle 6 – Impartiality and objectivity

The revised LSS, in force since 2016, aims at ensuring impartiality and objectivity in line with the United Nations (UN) Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics and the European Statistics Code of Practice. Policy documents on dissemination and revisions have been developed by Belstat and are published online. Statistical data are released online in accordance with a publicly accessible release calendar. Belstat stresses that its news releases and other publications are strictly statistical in nature and do not contain any statements of a political nature and there is no pre-release of its data.

The situation with the Other Producers of Official Statistical Information is less clear and it would appear that dissemination practices vary, particularly in regard to the pre-release of data. Belstat is encouraged to work with the Other Producers of Official Statistical Information to develop common and transparent dissemination practices and to agree on a uniform time for the release of all statistical outputs.

Recommendations

Belstat is encouraged to:

17. Support the Other Producers of Official Statistical Information in developing their dissemination policies so that any pre-release of the data, to either internal or external users, is clearly identified and made known to the public.
18. Support the Other Producers of Official Statistical Information in developing their release calendars and in setting a uniform time for publishing all statistical outputs.

Principle 7 – Sound Methodology

The legal foundation for compliance with international statistical standards and methodologies is solid in Belarus. According to the Statute of Belstat, approved by the President of the Republic, Belstat has to develop and apply scientifically sound statistical methodologies. Methodological work is guided by the Scientific and Methodological Council of Belstat. The Interdepartmental Council for Official Statistics approves the data collection questionnaires used throughout the National Statistical System.

Methodological documentation produced by Belstat is thorough and is made public. It might be noted that a uniform structure for methodological documentation is followed by Belstat and the adoption process is formalised. Whereas the methodological documents of the other national producers of official statistics are endorsed by Belstat, they are not formally adopted. The availability of official methodological documentation outside of Belstat could therefore be improved.

Methodological work in Belstat, and more generally in the NSS, is to a large extent decentralised, except for the centralised administrative process of adoption of methodology related technical regulatory acts. Consideration might therefore be given to the strengthening and pooling of horizontal methodological skills.

Belstat has developed a thorough system of vocational training to maintain and strengthen statistical capacity and it maintains a well rooted cooperation with the academic community.

Recommendations

Belstat is encouraged to:

19. Support the Other Producers of Official Statistical Information in preparing and publishing methodological documents and other metadata in line with best statistical practice. The system-wide methodological work carried out by the Scientific and Methodological Council of Belstat and the Interdepartmental Council for Official Statistics might also be given more public prominence.
20. Consider the strengthening and pooling of horizontal methodological skills.
21. Develop further the cooperation with the universities in the development of statistical methodology and in the vocational training of statisticians.

Principle 8 – Appropriate Statistical Procedures

The statistical data production process in Belarus is decentralised since there are several institutions involved and Belstat, in turn, has its regional offices, which play a very important role in data production. Such an organisational setup requires centrally established, implemented and monitored procedures. The comprehensive set of methodological documents, and the instructions for the organisation of surveys, describe sample selection, the calculation of weights and extrapolation and establish procedures for data collection, entry and coding, error-checks, editing and imputation. Belstat is in a position to influence the production rules applied by the Other Producers of Official Statistical Information by endorsing the methodologies, instructions and the data collection questionnaires.

Belstat standardises the production processes by linking to the Generic Statistical Business Process Standard (5.0) and has established a national version of it. It is further developing the Integrated Information System of State Statistics (IISSS), which enables increasing unification of procedures for the collection and processing of primary statistical data.

Belstat has 34 bilateral agreements with the owners of administrative data in force. Plans are in place to further exploit these sources and also to investigate the use of "big data" in the production of tourism, balance of payments and other relevant statistics.

Belstat and the National Bank of the Republic of Belarus provided good examples of data comparison practices with the Russian Federation and other countries of the Eurasian Economic Union for foreign trade and balance of payments statistics.

Recommendations

22. Belstat is encouraged to progress its plans for the exploitation of new data sources, notably in the context of "big data", in the production of tourism, balance of payments and other relevant statistics.
23. Belstat and the National Bank of the Republic of Belarus are encouraged to develop and expand the data comparison projects they currently undertake with the corresponding statistical authorities in neighbouring countries. These exercises are indispensable in improving the quality of statistics that involve international transactions (e.g. foreign trade statistics).

Principle 9 – Non-Excessive Burden on Respondents

The burden on enterprises in Belarus is noticeably influenced by the high share of exhaustive surveys, a number of which are conducted on a high frequency basis. It has been argued that the high share of government owned enterprises in the Belarus economy justifies the large

amount of surveys that require submission of questionnaires from all units. The share of large units is also a relevant factor in this context.

Article 5 of the LSS requires proportionality of response burden to be assessed against user needs as an underlying principle of official statistics. In addition, Belstat has a strategic objective of greater use of administrative data for statistical purposes in order to reduce its reliance on direct statistical surveys.

Belstat makes efforts to measure response burden but these initiatives do not apply for Other Producers of Official Statistical Information. Electronic questionnaires and the use of electronic response in general are significantly less developed by some Other Producers of Official Statistical Information compared to Belstat. Possibilities for the integration of accounting software used by enterprises and the statistical data collection applications developed by Belstat should be assessed.

Recommendations

Belstat is encouraged to:

24. Continue to optimise its statistical surveys with a particular focus on ensuring that statistical demands respect the principle of proportionality in regard to the burden they impose on respondents.
25. Continue to actively pursue its strategic objective of making greater use of administrative data for statistical purposes in order to reduce its reliance on direct statistical surveys.
26. Measure, in conjunction with the Other Producers of Official Statistical Information, the response burden on a consistent basis and, in consultation with the Interdepartmental Council for Official Statistics, set targets for its reduction.
27. Support the Other Producers of Official Statistical Information in adopting to a greater extent electronic data collection in their statistical surveys.
28. Continue to explore with suppliers of business accounting software opportunities for the integration of accounting and statistical data collection software.

Principle 10 – Cost Effectiveness

In general, Belstat and the National Statistical System of Belarus have procedures in place to ensure that resources are used in a cost-effective way. However, the Assessment Team noted that the principle of cost-effectiveness is not mentioned explicitly in the LSS and that a strategic reflection on the future allocation of resources between tasks and physical locations will be needed to maintain and improve current levels of cost-effectiveness.

Whilst the overall cost of statistical production by Belstat can be fairly easily calculated, it is not yet possible to calculate a consolidated cost for the whole National Statistical System. Furthermore, there is no standard way to provide costs of individual statistical activities or surveys, either in Belstat or elsewhere.

Recommendations

29. Belstat should continue to keep under review the extent which developments in technology, methodology and data sources could impact on the efficient allocation of resources within the organisation.
30. Belstat and the Other Producers of Official Statistical Information are encouraged to develop a methodology to estimate the cost of statistical production in a consistent way across the National Statistical System.

Principle 11 – Relevance

While not obliged by law to carry out specific user consultations, Belstat has a legal framework in place which clearly recognises the interests of users within the National Statistical System. Topics of relevance to the user communities are discussed in the Inter-Agency Council on State Statistics and in the Scientific and Methodological Council.

The current Strategy for the Development of State Statistics covers the years up until 2022. It includes a user interaction plan which foresees the establishment of a feedback channel for users, as well as regular user surveys to assess the credibility of official statistics and user satisfaction.

Recommendations

31. Belstat is encouraged, in consultation with the Inter-Agency Council on State Statistics, to continue to further improve the mechanisms for determining and assessing the needs of all users on a systematic and regular basis.

Principle 15 – Accessibility and clarity

Belstat's website contains a large amount of publicly accessible data in various formats, ranging from PDF publications and predefined tables to interactive database solutions. All statistics are accompanied by corresponding metadata, but not always in a unified format. Since the last Global Assessment in 2013, a specific Policy on the Dissemination of Official Statistics has been introduced, the Belstat website has undergone modernisation and an Interactive Information Analytical System for the Dissemination of Official Statistics has been launched. Further streamlining of the website to make it more accessible for users and continued development towards more use of interactive dissemination channels are encouraged.

Belstat maintains an "Information and Computing Centre" which provides customised statistics and analyses upon request and against payment. As regards ad-hoc requests from other government bodies, Belstat provides custom-designed analyses free of charge. These services are frequently based on mutually beneficial inter-agency agreements on information exchange. The Assessment Team recommends that such agreements should be publicly accessible, along with the actual analyses.

The Strategy for the Development of State Statistics until 2022 foresees a standard procedure for the dissemination of microdata for scientific research. The current provisions in the LSS granting access to microdata for research purposes are somewhat vague and the Assessment Team recommends that a specific policy on microdata access should set out in detail the conditions under which such data can be made available and the limitations on their use.

Belstat's releases are strictly descriptive and do not generally try to explain in plain language the factors underlying the statistical developments. A more analytical approach could contribute to making statistics more interesting and accessible for the media and the general public.

Recommendations

Belstat is encouraged to:

32. Continue developing its website to make it more accessible to users, particularly the less proficient users. Training of users in this regard should be continued and expanded.
33. Ensure, in line with the principle of equality of access, that tailor-made or other analyses provided regularly to government agencies, on the basis of inter-agency agreements outside the framework of the statistical programme, are accessible to all users.

34. Move, in line with international developments, towards more interactive database solutions in its dissemination practice, for both national and sub-national analyses, and to consider reducing the amount of printed publications correspondingly. Predefined tables on Belstat's website should also be presented in a unified format.
35. Continue developing and implementing its policy on facilitating greater microdata access for research purposes, with a particular focus on specifying in detail the conditions under which microdata can be made available and the limitations on the use of such data. Consideration might also be given to elaborating the provisions in the Law on State Statistics relating to microdata access for research purposes.
36. Expand its interactive database to include more data and linked metadata, and to further streamline its metadata in line with the Single Integrated Metadata Structure (SIMS) or other international standards.
37. Provide more statistical interpretation and context analysis when disseminating its statistical outputs.

Organisation of the National Statistical System

Organisation of Belstat

Belstat enjoys a high position in the public administration, directly subordinated to the President of the country, with a chairperson being a high-level official of the Republic.

Belstat is comprised of the central office in Minsk (the National Public Authority for State Statistics), 7 statistical departments of regions and the city of Minsk, and 113 statistics units in districts and cities (local state statistics bodies). The central office is mandated to pursue the state policy in the field of official statistics and, in this respect, has very strong regulatory and co-ordinating powers, particularly in regard to prescribing the methodologies and standards to be followed throughout the entire National Statistical System. The control of the National Statistical System is therefore quite centralised. On the other hand, the collection of data and the production and dissemination of statistics, which is largely undertaken through the network of regional and district offices, is highly decentralised. In the context of greater use of administrative data for statistical purposes and the adoption of more computer-based data collection, such as e-reporting, the long-term sustainability of such a structure must come into question.

The organigram of the headquarters reveals a traditional stove-pipe structure with departments grouped by thematic domains (transport, agriculture, social statistics) or by horizontal functions (human resources, finance etc.). While there is a commitment towards the greater adoption of the GSBPM, its impact on the organisational structure has been quite limited up to now.

Effective communications within such a large and decentralised organisation is vital and this could be improved through the establishment of an intranet for the sharing and storing of work-related information.

The legal basis for the activities of Belstat, and those of the Other Producers of Official Statistical Information, is set down in the LSS. The LSS was updated in 2016 to align it more closely with the GLOS, which had recently been adopted by the Conference of European Statisticians. On the basis of its review of compliance with the ESCoP, which is detailed above, the Assessment Team believes that there is still scope for further improvement through greater alignment with the GLOS.

Regional structure

The very large proportion of staff, over 1,400 out of a total complement of 1,700, working in district and regional offices is justified by Belstat on the basis of meeting the need for having

the staff working closer to local users and supervising the data collection at the source. It should be mentioned that such a decentralised structure, employing the vast majority of statistical staff outside the headquarters, is most likely generating high costs of data collection, which could be rationalised, especially in the era of electronic reporting and the automation of several processes in statistics.

Other subordinated bodies

There are two separate budgetary enterprises subordinated directly to Belstat: the Data Computing Centre (DCC) of the National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus and the Information Technology Centre (ITC) of the National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus.

The main task of the ITC is to ensure the development and maintenance of software for statistical purposes and the main task of the DCC is to sell statistical publications, provide tailor-made statistical services against payment and maintain hardware. Both centres in addition to providing services to Belstat have the right to sell their services outside. There are currently around 150 skilled IT staff employed between these two enterprises and it is estimated that between 30% and 50% of their work is accounted for by services provided to Belstat. The Other Producers of Official Statistical Information may contract independently to use the services of the two enterprises but there is no policy to actively promote such contracting. Accordingly, other parts of the National Statistical System may not benefit to the fullest extent from sharing processing etc. solutions developed by the two enterprises for Belstat.

Recommendations

Belstat is encouraged to:

38. Review the organisational structure of its headquarters in the context of the greater adoption of the Generic Statistical Business Process Model (GSBPM) as the framework for implementing its statistical processes.
39. Establish an intranet for sharing and storing work related information in order to improve communications and to foster greater sharing of knowledge within the organisation.
40. Review the Law on State Statistics (LSS) with a view to making it more compatible with the Generic Law on Official Statistics (GLOS).
41. Continue to analyse and rationalise its current regional organisation in the light of increasingly centralised electronic reporting and greater use of administrative data for statistical purposes.
42. Consider how the expertise developed by its subordinated bodies in developing statistical hardware and software solutions can be applied to a greater extent throughout the National Statistical System.

Coordination of the National Statistical System

The LSS differentiates between State Statistics bodies and Other Producers of Official Statistical Information (Article 8). The State Statistics bodies consist of Belstat and the seven regional and 113 local statistical authorities. In addition, the National Bank and ten Ministries have been designated as Other Producers of Official Statistical Information. Article 9(2) of the LSS states that Belstat shall exercise “regulation, control and coordination” of the activities of other government bodies and organisations. The role of Belstat as the coordinator of the entire National Statistical System thus has a firm legal basis.

Belstat exercises its coordinating role with the support of the Inter-Agency Council on State Statistics, which is established under Article 7 of the LSS as an advisory body to: coordinate

the activities of the state statistics bodies and Other Producers of Official Statistical Information; review the output of official statistics; and deal with selected issues pertaining to the organisation and conduct of statistical surveys. The Inter-Agency Council is chaired by the Chairperson of Belstat. The annual work programme and the multi-annual Strategy for the Development of State Statistics is discussed by the Inter-Agency Council prior to adoption by the Council of Ministers.

Overall, there are strong legal and other mechanisms for the coordination of the National Statistical System. Nevertheless, the Assessment Team proposes a number of measures as set down in the recommendations below in order to further strengthen the coordination and functioning of the NSS.

Recommendations

43. The Law on State Statistics and other legislation governing statistics should be reviewed in order to ensure that uniform and harmonised provisions are set down governing the interpretation and implementation of the statistical principles throughout the National Statistical System, particularly those covering statistical confidentiality, dissemination and response burden.
44. The Law on State Statistics should be amended to allow for the sharing of confidential data between Belstat and the Other Producers of Official Statistical Information where such sharing is necessary for the compilation of official statistics.
45. The Law on State Statistics should be amended to clearly distinguish between state organisations that produce and disseminate official statistics (i.e. Other Producers of Official Statistical Information) and those that only forward individual or aggregated data to Belstat for statistical purposes.
46. Belstat is encouraged to strengthen further its coordinating role in relation to Other Producers of Official Statistical Information, particularly in the areas of reducing response burden and adopting harmonised and uniform methods in relation to statistical confidentiality and dissemination.
47. Belstat and the Other Producers of Official Statistical Information should intensify their cooperation in sharing technologies and training opportunities for staff.

Coordination of international cooperation and donors

International cooperation undertaken by Belstat is regulated by the LSS and the Statute. Belstat participates in a number of different international activities and benefits from donor assistance from different international organisations. It is also engaged in cross-border and bilateral cooperation with regions and countries. Strategic policy and strong coordination of assistance is needed to benefit from the activities and assistance in an efficient way. In the longer run, a strengthening of the international cooperation team should be considered to cope with increasing tasks and challenges

Recommendations

48. Belstat is encouraged to take a more strategic and planned approach to seeking technical assistance and initiating projects funded by development partners. Top management should take the initiative in this regard and should consider strengthening its International Co-operation Department to assist it in coordinating donor activities and preparing strategic decisions on donor funded projects, using a top-down approach.

Sustainable development goals and indicators

Belstat has taken an active role in coordinating the production of statistics on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Belarus. Belstat representatives are engaged in national coordination mechanisms including the Council for Sustainable Development. Belstat has developed a national roadmap for statistics on the SDGs, based on the recommendations of the Conference of European Statisticians. This has included the creation of a national reporting platform, with support from the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). This platform contained information on 174 SDG indicators at the time of the first mission, with more being added as they become available. Future plans include greater use of geospatial information and the development of sub-national indicators.

Recommendations

Belstat is encouraged to:

49. Continue to develop statistics and indicators for the purposes of the SDGs in order to fill the remaining gaps, including for disaggregated data.
50. Engage with national and international statistical and geospatial organisations to develop its capacity to use geospatial information in the production and presentation of SDG indicators and statistics.
51. Use the SDGs as a catalyst and mechanism to increase its coordinating role in the provision of official statistics in the country and to international bodies.

Compliance with Eurostat Statistical Requirements Compendium

Macroeconomic Statistics:

National Accounts

From 1 January 2016, the System of National Accounts (SNA 2008) forms the methodological basis for national accounts in Belarus. Research and Development expenditure and military expenditure were recorded according to the SNA 2008 principles, rent of owner-occupied dwellings was introduced and the Financial Intermediation Services Indirectly Measured (FISIM) estimations refined. The time series of annual and quarterly indicators of national accounts were recalculated backwards to 2009.

During the implementation of the SNA 2008, several other improvements were undertaken: a new classification to properly allocate the units in the institutional sectors was developed and implemented, calculation of net taxes on products at constant prices and estimations of the non-observed economy were improved, the list of goods for the input-output tables increased and a Tourism Satellite Account (TSA) constructed for 2014 and 2016.

Belarus national accounts data are, therefore, to a large extent compliant with the SNA 2008 framework but implementation and publication of financial accounts and supply-use tables remain to be accomplished.

Belstat publishes extensive data at current prices and also quarterly data at constant prices whereas availability of annual data at constant prices is somewhat limited. Monthly production of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and Gross Regional Product (GRP) also needs to be carefully reconsidered, in consultation with the main users and assessed against the response burden and the statistical volatility of the estimates.

Recommendations

Belstat is encouraged to:

52. Continue to improve its approach towards the production and dissemination of macroeconomic statistics at constant prices, availing of the rich array of price indices already available.
53. Keep under review the continued need for the monthly GDP and GRP estimates in view of the burden imposed and the increasingly high volatility of such compound macroeconomic statistical measures and to focus instead on improving the timeliness of the higher quality quarterly GDP and related statistics.
54. Continue its efforts towards full implementation of SNA 2008 in accordance with its step-by-step strategy, focusing first, in cooperation with the relevant Other Producers of Official Statistical Information, on financial accounts.
55. Give continued priority to developing annual supply-use tables and apply these in reconciling GDP estimates produced in accordance with the production, expenditure and income approaches

Government Finance Statistics

Government Finance Statistics (GFS) are compiled by the Ministry of Finance (MoF) of Belarus. Reporting on the execution of national and local budgets and the use of the Social Security Fund form the main sources of information for the GFS. The transactions of the general government sector are to a large extent recorded on a cash basis and are used for the quarterly and annual accounts for the general government sector that are produced by Belstat. The MoF follows the Government Finance Statistics Manuals of the International Monetary Fund (GFSM 2001 and 2014). The data on revenues, expenditures, balance and debt for both the general and central government are published by the MoF following the International Monetary Fund (IMF) Special Data Dissemination Standard (SDDS) on a monthly and quarterly basis.

The main fiscal data are published based on the IMF SDDS on the fiscal data page of the MoF. The internationally widely used fiscal indicators (e.g. deficit/surplus to GDP, debt to GDP) can be found in semi-annual macro-economic snapshots of the MoF. Publication of these basic macroeconomic indicators, as well as the underlying GFS data, in the public statistical database of Belstat is highly recommended.

Recommendations

56. The Ministry of Finance is encouraged to continue work on the adoption of the accruals approach for recording Government Finance Statistics.
57. Belstat and the Ministry of Finance are encouraged to calculate the main internationally comparable fiscal indicators, such as the deficit and debt of the general government to GDP ratios, and to include them in their dissemination programmes.

External Trade Statistics

External trade statistics in Belarus are based on national legislation, on recommendations set out in UN manuals and on various legal acts including the customs code of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). Statistical data is used for intra-EAEU trade, while administrative (customs) data is used for trade with third countries. Belstat engages in data exchange with the other member states of the EAEU and some other countries and takes part in regular EAEU mirror exercises to sort out potential discrepancies.

Progress has been made in many areas in recent years, notably the implementation of the new EAEU commodity nomenclature and the introduction of an interactive foreign trade database which is subject to continuous development.

Recommendations

58. Belstat is encouraged to continue its cooperation with Belarus's main trading partners in carrying out mirror exercises and other projects of shared interest.

Balance of Payments Statistics (BoP)

According to the Banking Code of the Republic of Belarus, the balance of payments, international investment position and external debt statistics are produced and published by the National Bank of the Republic of Belarus (NBB).

The methodology used since 2011 is based on the sixth edition of the Balance of Payments and International Investment Position Manual (BPM) (IMF 2009), the SNA 2008, the 2013 External Debt Statistics (EDS) Guide (External Debt Statistics: Guide for Compilers and Users, IMF 2013) and other relevant international guidelines and instructions. The Balance of Payments, data on the international investment position and external debt for 1993 – 2011 are produced and published according to the fifth edition of the BPM.

The data and the methodological documentation are made available on a dedicated section of the NBB website, in Belarusian, Russian and English. The quarterly Balance of Payments and International Investment Position statements according to the BPM6 date back to year 2000. The NBB subscribes to the IMF Special Data Dissemination Standard (SDDS).

The Inter-Agency Working group on Macro-economic Statistics coordinates the relevant activities between the main producers of macro-economic statistics and the Assessment Team would recommend that its remit be strengthened to improve the comparability and coherence of external sector statistics and to develop new data sources.

Recommendations

59. Belstat is encouraged to further develop and expand as appropriate the remit of the Inter-Agency Working Group on Macro-economic Statistics to improve the comparability and coherence of external sector statistics and to develop new data sources.

Consumer Price Index (including Purchasing Power Parities – PPP – and house prices)

The Consumer Price Index (CPI) in Belarus has a solid legal and methodological basis. Extensive documentation on methodology and compilation is available and accessible to the public, and training of staff is given high priority. The decentralised structure of the National Statistical System in Belarus is reflected in the organisation of CPI production, with the seven regional offices playing a major role in data collection and validation, using standardised software. The number of staff involved is correspondingly high.

The Belarus CPI covers only cash expenditures by households. Practices to ensure adequate coverage of outlets and products seem to be in place. Although data collection is still based to a large extent on field work, Belstat is also looking into alternative approaches, like scanner data from cash registers. As transition from traditional data collection to new data sources can be a time-consuming process, efforts to look into such new sources should be encouraged.

Belstat is currently making preparations for participation in the 2020 round of the International Comparison Program (ICP).

Recommendations

Belstat is encouraged to:

60. Examine the use of new data sources for use in the compilation of the CPI, notably scanner data and data from internet platforms
61. Continue its preparations for the 2020 round of the International Comparison Program.

Business Statistics:

Statistical Business Register

Belstat maintains a Statistical Business Register (SBR), which is used as a sampling frame for business surveys, and a direct source for statistics on business demography. The business register is based mainly on administrative data, but also incorporates information from statistical surveys. The SBR follows international standards and classifications, though currently enterprises are directly equivalent to legal units. Individual entrepreneurs were added to the register in 2017, improving the coverage of smaller units. Future plans include publishing business demography statistics based on Eurostat / Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) methodology and introducing geographic coordinates for units in the register. This is necessary to facilitate the linking of SBR with other registers and datasets.

Recommendations

Belstat is encouraged to:

62. Study the international experience and good practices for the profiling of groups of legal entities to determine cases where two or more legal entities might be consolidated into one enterprise.
63. Continue with the planned introduction of geographic coordinates for units in the Statistical Business Register.

Structural Business Statistics

Belstat produces a range of Structural Business Statistics (SBS) indicators, which are in line with European Union standards and classifications. Different employment size-classes are used for national purposes, but statistics are also disseminated using the standard international definitions of small, medium and large enterprises. A mixture of quarterly and annual statistical surveys, together with administrative data are used. Most survey data are collected electronically, using Computer-Assisted Web Interviewing (CAWI) techniques. Future plans include reducing the burden for micro-enterprises, and further improvements in line with the relevant European Union Regulations.

Short-term Statistics (STS) (including Producer Price Index - PPI)

Belstat has an extensive data collection system in place for STS and is therefore able to provide a wide range of short-term indicators describing the short-term economic development. Belstat covers most variables in the STS regulation and made considerable progress over the recent years with the introduction of: Statistical classification of economic activities (NACE Rev. 2) and Statistical Classification of Products by Activity (CPA 2008); a sample approach according to the Probability Proportional to Size (PPS) principle for small and micro enterprises; and the introduction of chain-linking for STS indices. A drawback with some indicators is the lack of any seasonal or calendar adjustment of series. Furthermore, in line with earlier

recommendations concerning use of exhaustive data collection, Belstat should also consider widening the use of sample surveys in STS.

Recommendations

64. Belstat is encouraged to assess the seasonality of the STS indicators and to produce and disseminate calendar and seasonally adjusted series for all relevant indicators, e.g. retail trade and industrial production, exhibiting clear seasonal patterns.

Production of Manufactured Goods (PMG)

Belstat collects data on manufactured goods on an annual basis. This survey bears a resemblance to the Prodcom survey compiled in the European Statistical System (ESS); however, data are collected according to the national classification of industrial products (services) corresponding to the CPA 2008. The survey covers production volume and value, product cost as well as delivered goods in total and to the domestic market.

Belstat disseminates some data on production of manufactured goods and services, in particular for the main industrial products of Belarus. Otherwise the main use of such data is in the context of national accounts as well as compiling weights for some short-term indicators.

Social and Demographic Statistics:

Population Register

The population register of Belarus has been operational since 2013 and the Ministry of Internal Affairs responsible for managing the register considers the data in the register relatively complete since 2018. The register functions well for its main purpose which is to have an exhaustive up to date administrative register for the population of Belarus. However, individuals are not required to register changes to place of residence in the population register which provides some limitations on its statistical use. The Assessment Team therefore encourages Belstat to continue efforts to enable the use of the register for statistical purposes, especially in the context of the Population and Housing Census.

Recommendations

65. Belstat and the Ministry of Internal Affairs are encouraged to continue efforts to maximise the use of the population register for statistical purposes.
66. Belstat is encouraged to develop procedures for linking the population register at household level to the individual returns from the 2019 Population and Housing Census.

Demographic Statistics

Belstat produces the main population and demographic indicators. International classifications are used and the methodology for compiling indicators in this sector follows international methodological reference documents. A strength is Belstat's access to the electronic exchange of administrative data on births and deaths. Electronic exchange of data should be implemented for migration data as well. Migration statistics are relatively complete but Belstat could undertake further reconciliation of data based on different sources to improve the quality of the estimates.

Recommendations

67. Belstat is encouraged to continue its efforts to introduce electronic reporting of migration data and to consolidate and reconcile migration data from different sources.

Population and Housing Census

Belstat undertook a Population and Housing Census in October 2019. While the previous census in 2009 was conducted as a traditional enumeration, the 2019 census involved a stepwise enumeration using internet questionnaires followed by stationary enumeration in enumeration centres and finally enumeration at the place of residence using tablets. These developments represent major improvements in terms of cost-effectiveness and automatization of the data collection and processing. The Assessment Team considers that the census followed the main principles set down in international guidelines. The census also collected data for the first time on household agricultural activities, which will be used to improve the system of agricultural statistics. The Assessment Team welcomes Belstat plans for an extensive dissemination of the results in an interactive database and for the development of a geostatistical data-portal.

Labour Market Statistics

Belstat has made significant efforts to align the Labour Force Survey (LFS) with International Labour Organisation (ILO) recommendations in producing the core labour market indicators from the LFS. At the same time Belstat publishes labour market data based on comprehensive surveys of employers/businesses and administrative data on employment and registered unemployment. The Assessment Team considers that Belstat should continue to develop the LFS as the primary source for integrated information for the labour market. This includes continuing to align the LFS with the methodology provided by the ILO as well as continuously working on the sample. In particular, the Assessment Team would recommend that Belstat keep the sample size of the LFS under review and consider increasing it as necessary in the context of the survey becoming the primary source of reliable integrated information on the labour force and its components at both national and sub-national levels. Belstat draws attention to significant differences in concept in the measurement of employment and unemployment between the LFS and the other sources. However, no quantification or reconciliation of these differences are published on a regular basis. The Assessment Team would encourage Belstat to undertake and publish the results of such an analysis.

Recommendations

Belstat is encouraged to:

68. Continue its policy of ensuring full alignment of the Labour Force Survey with ILO recommendations and methodology.
69. Continue with its policy of establishing the Labour Force Survey as the primary source of integrated information on the labour market and its components.
70. Undertake and publish the results of an analysis to quantify and reconcile to the greatest extent differences in the estimates of employment and unemployment derived from the Labour Force Survey and from other surveys and administrative sources.
71. Keep the sample size of the LFS under review and consider increasing it as necessary in the context of the survey becoming the primary source of reliable integrated information on the labour force and its components at both national and sub-national levels.

Living Conditions Statistics

Through the Household and Living Standards Survey (HLSS) Belstat collects and disseminates household expenditure and living conditions statistics. The survey has been extended in recent years, and there are plans to further expand the survey with the inclusion of more thematic modules. Data are currently collected in the traditional manner using face-to-face interviews and paper questionnaires. In view of these developments, the Assessment Team supports the ongoing process of integrating the household surveys and considers Belstat should continue to consolidate the surveys. Furthermore, the introduction of Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI) technology is much needed.

Recommendations

Belstat is encouraged to:

72. Continue the ongoing process of integrating new topics and modules into the existing household survey, which has a primary focus on providing indicators on household income and living standards, and to continue consolidating and developing the sampling methodology.
73. Advance its plans to introduce CAPI and the Classification of Individual Consumption According to Purpose (COICOP) 2018 classification into the household survey.

Education Statistics

Belstat, in conjunction with the Ministry of Education, compiles and disseminates a comprehensive range of statistics relating to education at all levels. The International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED 2011) is consistently applied and international requirements for educational statistics are largely met.

Belarus is currently participating in a pilot United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) project to develop a Satellite Account for Education and Training while the Ministry of Education is developing an integrated register of students in educational institutions at all levels. The Assessment Team welcomes these developments and would encourage Belstat and the Ministry to continue their efforts in these areas.

Recommendations

74. Belstat and the Ministry of Education are encouraged to continue their development of education statistics, with a particular focus on the development of a Satellite Account on Education and Training and the provision of an integrated register of students in all educational institutions.

Health Statistics

Belarus has a comprehensive range of statistics on the state and functioning of the health system, including statistics on: health organisations and their activities; medical and para-medical staff by specialisation; morbidity; and persons registered as having a disability. Summary statistics on health expenditure are published by the Ministry of Health while Belstat undertook for the first time a household survey on disability in 2018 in line with international recommendations. Selected data on health status and health expenditure are also regularly collected in the sample household living standards survey.

The Assessment Team would encourage the Ministry of Health and Belstat to continue the development of health statistics in line with international recommendations. This might include the development of health satellite accounts, further household surveys on disability and the

expansion of the current questions on health status and expenditure to include other health related issues in the programme of household surveys.

Recommendations

75. The Ministry of Health and Belstat are encouraged to continue work on the development of health statistics with a particular focus on the improvement of the system of health accounts in line with international standards.

Agricultural Statistics:

Belstat has a well-developed and comprehensive system of statistics on agricultural production that meets the needs of users at national, regional and local levels. The statistics are well based as they are mainly derived from regular exhaustive surveys of 2,200 large agricultural organisations that control 90% of the land area and account for approximately 80% of agricultural production.

It is estimated that agricultural activity undertaken by households, mainly for own consumption, accounts for almost 20% of agricultural production. Information on this sector is based on a sample of 3,000 households that is drawn from the approximately 1 million rural households that are the registered owners of small plots. The 2019 Population and Housing Census included for the first time a questionnaire on agricultural activity that is based on the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO)'s World Programme for the Census of Agriculture guidelines. This is a very welcome development as it will provide a very comprehensive and accurate picture of the agricultural activities of households at national, regional and local levels. It will also provide a population frame for an improved methodology for conducting the regular surveys of agricultural activities in households.

Recommendations

76. The Assessment Team welcomes the inclusion of questions on agricultural activities in the 2019 Population and Housing Census, which will provide for the first time a comprehensive picture of the agricultural activities of households. Belstat is encouraged to develop this new source as the population frame for surveying households with agricultural activity on a regular basis.

Multi-Domain Statistics:

Transport Statistics

Belstat produces a range of statistics on different aspects of transport, in line with international standards. These statistics are based on surveys carried out by Belstat and the Ministry of Transport and Communication, as well as administrative data. Most surveys focus on companies, but individual entrepreneurs involved in the transport of goods by road are now included in sample surveys every fifth year. There are plans to introduce surveys of individual entrepreneurs involved in the transport of passengers by taxi, to fill a current data gap.

Recommendations

77. Belstat is encouraged to continue with current plans to extend the coverage of transport statistics in order to improve the coverage of the activities of individual entrepreneurs.

Tourism Statistics

Belstat publishes a range of statistical information on foreign and domestic tourism based on direct statistical surveys and administrative sources. The improvement of the module on tourism in the household survey to measure domestic tourism, and the development of tools for conducting frontier surveys to provide better information on international tourism flows, are required to complement the existing sources and provide a more comprehensive statistical picture. The further development of the methodology for the Tourism Satellite Account will also be important in improving the quality and coverage of the statistics.

Recommendations

78. Belstat is encouraged to continue its work in improving tourism statistics, with a particular focus on: developing surveys at the frontiers to measure the level of international tourism; and household surveys to measure domestic tourism.

Energy Statistics

Belstat produces a range of statistics on different aspects of energy, with a focus on energy balances and energy efficiency. These statistics are produced based on the methodology proposed by the United Nations and the International Energy Authority. The statistics are based on surveys carried out by Belstat and administrative data. New visualisation tools, including infographics, have been introduced to improve the dissemination and communication of energy statistics. Belstat participates in various international cooperation projects related to energy statistics and found the European Union funded INOGATE programme particularly useful. Future plans include developing a system of sustainable energy indicators and adapting energy balance methodology to reflect the introduction of nuclear power generation in Belarus. Some improvements are required to improve the data available on the consumption of energy by enterprises.

Recommendations

79. Belstat is encouraged to continue with its current plans to enhance energy statistics.

Environment Statistics

Environment statistics in Belarus are produced in partnership between Belstat, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment Protection, and the Ministry of Forestry. They are based on a mixture of surveys and administrative data. The main topics covered are the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting (SEEA), Indicators for the EU's Shared Environmental Information System (SEIS), and indicators on the SDGs, green growth and climate change. National methodologies are based on the relevant international standards and classifications. Belstat actively participates in various national inter-departmental working groups, and international forums on environment statistics.

Recommendations

80. Belstat is encouraged to continue with its current plans to further enhance the range of environmental indicators produced, in line with international standards.

Research and Development; Innovation Statistics

Belstat has a well-developed system for producing statistics on Research and Development and Innovation in line with international recommendations. The Assessment Team welcomes

Belstat's commitment to further harmonise these statistics with international standards and to promote greater use of the data through improved dissemination channels.

Recommendations

81. Belstat is encouraged to further develop its excellent work in the area of Research and Development and Innovation Statistics in line with international recommendations.

Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) statistics

A broad range of ICT statistics, in line with international recommendations, are produced and disseminated. The Assessment Team welcomes the fact that Belstat keeps the changing international requirements in this area under review and adjusts and develops its survey instruments to meet new demands.

Recommandations

82. The Assessment Team welcomes Belstat's work in this area and encourages it to further develop its household surveys and surveys of enterprises in line with international recommendations.

General assessment of principles, national statistical system and specific statistical domains

Chapter 1: P1 – Professional independence

General assessment

In the Global Assessment (GA), the extent to which Belstat is compliant with the principle of professional independence was assessed in detail by reference to the individual indicators for the principle set down in the European Statistics Code of Practice (ESCoP).

In general, the Assessment Team found that there is a good understanding of, and adherence in practice to, the principle throughout Belstat. However, the Team is of the opinion that the legal underpinning of the principle in the Law on State Statistics (LSS) and/or Statute of Belstat could be improved and aligned more closely with the relevant guidelines of the Generic Law of Official Statistics (GLOS) that were adopted by the Conference of European Statisticians in April 2016.

In particular, the Team would recommend that the professional independence of the Chairperson of Belstat should be explicitly provided for in the LSS and/or the Statute of Belstat. Furthermore, appropriate legal or other measures should be adopted to align the procedures for the appointment/dismissal of the Chairperson with the relevant recommendations in the GLOS and the ESCoP.

Assessment per indicator

ESCoP indicator 1.1: The independence of the National Statistical Institutes and Eurostat from political and other external interference in developing, producing and disseminating statistics is specified in law and assured for other statistical authorities.

The National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus (Belstat) was established by decree of the President of the Republic of Belarus (No. 445 of 26 August 2008) as the "*republican government authority in the field of statistics subordinate directly to the President of the Republic of Belarus*". Previously, the state statistical agency was the Ministry of Statistics and Analysis, which was part of the Government, and the placing of Belstat under the aegis of the President was a deliberate decision to enhance its independence in the production of official statistics.

From a legal perspective, Article 4 of the Law on State Statistics (LSS) states that statistical activities shall be undertaken in compliance with the principles of state statistics and these are defined in Article 5 of the LSS to include *"Independence in exercising state statistical activities".* Furthermore, Article 16 of the LSS explicitly prohibits "*interference by government bodies, other legal entities, officials or natural persons in statistical activities*". These legal provisions of the LSS apply not only to the statistical activities of Belstat and its subordinate local statistical bodies but also to other authorised producers of official statistical information (e.g. authorised Ministries and other State organisations). Finally, the Statute of Belstat, which was approved by the aforementioned Presidential decree No. 455, states clearly (paragraph 2) that Belstat is "*independent in executing state statistical activity".*

Overall, the Assessment Team concluded that there is a strong legal and institutional basis for ensuring that the production of official statistics in Belarus is undertaken in a professionally independent manner.

ESCoP indicator 1.2: The heads of the National Statistical Institutes and of Eurostat and, where appropriate, the heads of other statistical authorities have sufficiently high hierarchical standing to ensure senior level access to policy authorities and administrative public bodies. They are of the highest professional calibre.

The Chairperson of Belstat, who is appointed by the President of the Republic, reports directly to the President and is a member of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus. Accordingly, the Chairperson has the highest hierarchical standing and has ready senior access on statistical matters to policy authorities and administrative public bodies.

The procedures for appointing the Chairperson of Belstat are those followed more generally for top level public appointments and do not specifically take into account the professional competencies that might be recommended for the position. In practice, however, it would appear that persons of the highest professional calibre have been appointed.

ESCoP indicator 1.3: The heads of the National Statistical Institutes and of Eurostat and, where appropriate, the heads of other statistical authorities have responsibility for ensuring that statistics are developed, produced and disseminated in an independent manner.

Under the Statute of Belstat (paragraph 14.1) the Chairperson is mandated to manage the activities of Belstat and bears personal responsibility for the fulfilment of the tasks allotted to the Committee. Since the LSS requires that the statistical activities be undertaken in compliance with the principle of independence, it can be concluded from a legal perspective that Belstat complies in full with this indicator. The Assessment Team also noted many procedures and examples that confirmed that the Chairperson also exercises this role in practice.

ESCoP indicator 1.4: The heads of the National Statistical Institutes and of Eurostat and, where appropriate, the heads of other statistical authorities have the sole responsibility for deciding on statistical methods, standards and procedures, and on the content and timing of statistical releases.

While the Chairperson has the general mandate, assigned under paragraph 14.1 of the Statute of Belstat, to manage the activities of Belstat there is no explicit reference, in either the LSS or the Statute, to the role of the Chairperson in respect of responsibility for deciding on statistical methods, standards and procedures or on the content and timing of statistical releases. Indeed, the position of Chairperson is not referred to at all in the LSS and this may be seen as a shortcoming in respect of the alignment of the Law with the GLOS.

The Assessment Team would therefore recommend that consideration be given to addressing explicitly the professional independence of the Chairperson in the LSS and/or the Statute of Belstat in line with the GLOS and the ESCoP. The situation within the Other Producers of Official Statistical of Statistical Information in regard to how professional independence is ensured varies in practice and this might also be addressed in the context of any review of the statistical legislation.

ESCoP indicator 1.5 Statistical work programmes are published and periodic reports describe progress made.

Under Article 14 of the LSS, Belstat is required to develop, in conjunction with the Other Producers of Official Statistical Information, a five-year Strategy for the Development of State Statistics and to prepare an annual statistical work programme for adoption by the Council of Ministers. Both documents are published on the Belstat website. In addition, an annual report on its activities is prepared by Belstat and published on the website.

ESCoP indicator 1.6: Statistical releases are clearly distinguished and issued separately from political/policy statements.

A corporate logo and a uniform style and layout have been developed for the production of statistical releases and thus they can be clearly distinguished from other official releases. The statistical releases do not contain any political or policy related content and are released separately via the Belstat website. An annual release calendar is also prepared and published.

ESCoP indicator 1.7: The National Statistical Institute and Eurostat and, where appropriate, other statistical authorities, comment publicly on statistical issues, including criticisms and misuses of statistics as far as considered suitable.

Under the LSS, Article 10 paragraph 1.11, Belstat has the right to provide publicly clarifications regarding any matter relating to state statistics and to comment on the misuse and misinterpretation of official statistical information.

ESCoP indicator 1.8: The appointment of the heads of the National Statistical Institutes and Eurostat and, where appropriate, of other statistical authorities, is based on professional competence only. The reasons on the basis of which the incumbency can be terminated are specified in the legal framework. These cannot include reasons compromising professional or scientific independence.

There is no reference in either the LSS or the Statute of Belstat to the appointment or dismissal or to the tenure of office of the Chairperson of Belstat other than the general provision in the Statute that he or she is appointed and dismissed by the President of the Republic. The Assessment Team was informed that the more general procedures set down for top level positions in the Belarusian public service are followed. In short for appointments, a register is maintained by the Office of the President of high performing public servants, who are deemed suitable for appointment to top level positions. When a vacancy arises for a top-level position, such as that of chairperson, a candidate is recommended from this register for appointment by the President. A standard contract is signed by the appointee, which includes a term of office of no more than five years that may be renewed with the agreement of the parties and subject to the approval of the President.

A number of Presidential decrees and legal and other instruments govern the top-level appointment and dismissal procedures. The Assessment Team was informed that these measures largely address the relevant recommendations of the GLOS and the ESCoP. However, the Assessment Team believes that it would be desirable to reinforce the professional independence of the Chairperson through the adoption of appropriate legal or other measures, preferably through the amendment of the LSS and/or Statute of Belstat, that explicitly and transparently reflect the relevant recommendations of the GLOS and ESCoP.

Recommendations

1. The professional independence of the Chairperson of Belstat, and the heads of statistical production within the Other Producers of Official Statistical Information within the National Statistical System as appropriate, should be specifically addressed and reinforced in the Law on State Statistics in line with the recommendations of the Generic Law on Official Statistics and the European Statistics Code of Practice.
2. Legislative and/or other appropriate measures should be adopted for the appointment of the Chairperson of Belstat to take into account to the fullest extent the processes recommended in the Generic Law on Official Statistics for the appointment of the Chief Statistician of national statistical offices.

3. Legislative and/or other appropriate measures should be adopted to clearly specify, in line with the recommendations of the Generic Law on Official Statistics, that the term of office of the Chairperson of Belstat cannot be terminated before its expiry date for any reasons compromising statistical principles.

Chapter 2: P2 – Mandate for data collection

General assessment

Belstat has a very strong mandate for data collection that is specified in the LSS, which stipulates the rights and obligations of all stakeholders in the National Statistical System. Belstat has the right and power to give its permission for the organisation of statistical surveys and data collection by Other Producers of Official Statistical Information, impose the statistical methodology and check the compliance with statistical standards and norms. The use of administrative data for statistical purposes is also enabled under the LSS.

Assessment per indicator

ESCoP indicator 2.1: The mandate of the statistical authorities to collect and access information from multiple data sources for the development, production and dissemination of European Statistics is specified in law.

Chapter 2 of the LSS which covers "Parties to legal relations in state statistics, their rights and obligations" and, in particular, Article 10 "Rights and obligations of the state statistics bodies" provides a clear mandate to Belstat for collecting and using information from multiple data sources for the development, production and dissemination of official statistics. The Statute of Belstat also details the main tasks, rights and responsibilities of Belstat (Chapter 2) giving it a clear mandate to collect and access information from multiple data sources for the development, production and dissemination of data.

ESCoP indicator 2.2: The statistical authorities are allowed by law to access administrative data, promptly and free of charge, and use them for statistical purposes. They are involved from the beginning in the design, development and discontinuation of administrative records, in order to make them more suitable for statistical purposes.

Under the LSS, Article 10, paragraph. 1.1 stipulates that statistics bodies "*receive from government bodies and other organisations, free of charge, the information, including administrative data, required for the purposes of state statistical surveys and compilation of official statistical information*". Belstat has informed the Assessment Team that it has the power to impose statistical methodology on Other Producers of Official Statistical data including in the design of administrative records.

ESCoP indicator 2.3: On the basis of a legal act, the statistical authorities may compel response to statistical surveys.

Under the LSS Article 12 "Rights and obligations of respondents", paragraph 2 states that respondents "*shall have the obligation to provide, free of charge, primary statistical data in the course of state statistical surveys as prescribed by the national public authority for state statistics".* Furthermore, Article 23 of the LSS states that officials and other authorised persons and individual entrepreneurs shall be liable under legislative acts, for *"untimely submission, non-submission and misreporting of state statistical reporting data".*

Chapter 3: P3 – Adequacy of resources

General assessment

In general, Belstat, and the National Statistical System of Belarus, seem to be adequately resourced for their current tasks.

As there is only one indicator for this Principle, please see the assessment of that indicator below for more details.

Assessment per indicator

ESCoP indicator 3.1: Staff, financial and computing resources, adequate both in magnitude and in quality, are available to meet current statistical needs.

Regarding human resources, the numbers and skills of the current staff seem to be sufficient at present. There are around 1,700 people working for Belstat in the central, regional and local offices.

Recruitment and retention of suitably qualified staff does not seem to be a problem. There are close links with relevant universities, which mean that students are already aware of Belstat before they enter the labour market. Salary levels across government increased significantly in 2017, as a result of a new government policy. They are now seen as sufficiently attractive to prevent a high turnover of staff. There did not seem to be much internal mobility within Belstat, with many specialists staying in the same area for long periods. Although there were some examples of mobility between the different agencies comprising the National Statistical System, this also seemed to be rather low in comparison to other countries.

The main consequence of limited mobility is that the potential for skills transfer across the National Statistical System is rather limited. This can be mitigated to some extent by more contacts between staff in different areas and organisations, such as through more frequent training courses run for participants across the National Statistical System.

The skills needed by any statistical organisation can be expected to change over time, due to changes in technology and methodology. Over the next few years, greater digitalisation of statistical production, and of society as a whole, means that new skills will be needed in areas such as data science, the use of new data sources, and the greater use of digital technologies for dissemination of statistics. To prepare for this, Belstat (like any other statistical organisation) needs to reflect on the skills it will need, compare these with the existing skills of staff, and develop a strategy to fill the gaps, either through recruitment or training, or a combination of both. This should be done in cooperation with Other Producers of Official Statistical Information, to the extent possible.

Belstat currently encourages staff to undertake language training, particularly in English. This is becoming increasingly important, as English is becoming the de-facto working language for official statistics at the global level and is the language in which new statistical methods and standards are being developed. More widespread knowledge of English will enable Belstat staff to engage more in international statistical activities, resulting in a better knowledge of international good practices.

Regarding financial resources, Belstat had an annual budget for 2019 of around 22 million Euros, which equated to around 0.04% of GDP. Approximately 96% of the budget came from the state, 2% was support from international organisations, and almost 2% was from sponsorship or donations, for example for the population census. It is not currently possible to

provide consolidated figures for the whole of the National Statistical System. Overall, the financial resources available seem to be sufficient for current needs.

Regarding information technology, Belstat seems to have sufficient resources to meet current needs. There are around 2,000 personal computers for a workforce of around 1,700 staff, and around 60% of these are less than five years old. Networks, servers and other IT infrastructures are also sufficient for current needs. An "Integrated Information System of the State Statistics of the Republic of Belarus" was put in place in 2013, and automates the collection, processing, storage and transfer of statistical data. An "Information-Analytical System of Dissemination of Official Statistical Information" has been put in place recently for statistical dissemination via the Internet.

Software is mostly developed in-house or bought from Belarusian companies. Belstat recently started investigating the use of free and open source software and had a training course in the "R" programming language from a United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO)'s expert.

The Population and Housing Census will provide an opportunity to introduce new IT tools that can later be used for other areas of statistical production. An example is the development of Geographic Information systems for the census, which can later be used for the SBR and for statistics on the Sustainable Development Goals.

An issue identified in Belstat, as well as in statistical organisations in other countries of the region, is the lack of networking opportunities for statistical IT staff in different countries. This limits the exchange of knowledge and good practices.

Recommendations

Belstat is encouraged to:

4. Pursue a human resource policy that promotes the horizontal transfer of professional skills within the organisation and more widely throughout the National Statistical System (NSS); in particular, the policy should encourage greater internal mobility of specialists within Belstat and involve specialists from the Other Producers of Official Statistical Information in activities that increase statistical literacy and competence.
5. Continue and develop its audits of the existing skills of staff in conjunction with an assessment of future needs and to adjust training and recruitment policies accordingly.
6. Consider how training and staff development activities could be extended to facilitate to a greater extent the participation of staff employed by the Other Producers of Official Statistical Information.
7. Continue its current initiatives to modernise the IT infrastructure, including the introduction of new software, with a focus on free and open-source statistical tools.
8. Consider how to provide further opportunities for staff, particularly those in IT and related functions, to benefit from meeting and forming networks with their peers in other national statistical offices.
9. Continue and expand the existing provision of English language training to enable staff to engage more effectively in international statistical activities.

Chapter 4: P4 – Commitment to quality

General assessment

Belstat has introduced a comprehensive Quality Management System (QMS) at its central level, which is stipulated in several internal documents. It has also adopted and published a Quality Policy and Quality Guidelines. The policy and the guidelines deal with several quality aspects of official statistics and form a useful horizontal platform for more specific quality assurance of statistical processes and products. Quality management (QM) is well formalised and institutionalised within Belstat, but this is not the case in its regional offices or in the Other Producers of Official Statistical Information.

Belstat is committed to follow the Generic Statistical Business Process Model (GSBPM), but there is still need for further development and standardisation of quality assurance measures along the production process and in all statistical domains. Belstat uses some indicators that measure the quality of statistical output (product quality) and processes but this is not done by Other Producers of Official Statistical Information even though the principles of official statistics and the principal indicators established by Belstat are applicable for the whole National Statistical System (NSS). In addition, Belstat conducts the assessment of the quality of state statistical surveys by means of a rating method. Its Quality Assessment Questionnaire is developed on the basis of the Quality Self-Assessment Questionnaire of the European Statistical System (DESAP).

A quality reporting system, desirably based on a relevant international standard, needs to be developed, implemented and integrated with the metadata system.

Since the use of administrative data for statistical purposes is increasing, a systematic assessment of administrative data is needed, as foreseen in the strategic plan for the NSS.

Assessment per indicator

ESCoP indicator 4.1: Quality policy is defined and made available to the public. An organisational structure and tools are in place to deal with quality management.

After the previous Global Assessment in 2013, Belstat has put in place a generic QMS, which is built on the adopted quality policy and guidelines and is supplemented by more detailed documented procedures. The "Strategy for the Development of State Statistics of the Republic of Belarus until 2022" (Strategy 2022) provides a clear reference to the internationally recognised fundamental principles of official statistics such as the United Nations Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics (UNFPOS) and the European Statistics Code of Practice (ESCoP). The quality policy is captured in a public and concise document, which is reviewed on an annual basis and was for the last time revised on 24 December 2019. It establishes the main measures to ensure quality of official statistics: application of a scientifically sound methodology and international standards; observance of the principles of official statistics established by the Law on State Statistics; development and application of contemporary information technologies; improving the dissemination tools; development of partnership with international organisations; and compliance with the requirements of the Quality Management standard of the Republic of Belarus (STB ISO 9001-2015). It also places user needs at the centre of quality considerations.

It is important to mention that the ISO standard determines to a very significant extent the overall nature and the process of the QM and that the respective certification is set as a strategic activity in Strategy 2022 of Belstat. As a universal standard, it deals with the core and support functions of an organisation. For a statistical office, the production process and output quality

assurance are of the utmost importance. From this perspective, the quality policy could more visibly point to quality assurance of statistical processes and products.

The Belstat quality guidelines, revised on 1 April 2019 and derived from STB ISO 9001-2015, determine and describe horizontal QM processes with the indicators and target values. The document includes several elements that are directly related to the statistical processes and products e.g. interaction with users, measurement of user satisfaction and user confidence, handling of pre-release errors, post-release error treatment, and sources of professional knowledge. The guidelines are inspired by the main stages of the statistical production process and require assessment of compliance with European and international standards throughout the whole Belarus National Statistical System.

The QM approach is recognisable in the organisation of Belstat. The responsibility for implementation, operation and continuous improvement of the QMS is unambiguously allocated to the Belstat top-management level. According to the decree of the Chairperson from 22 May 2018, the Management Representative for Quality is appointed. In wider terms, he or she is responsible for the QMS in Belstat, coordinates and controls the functioning and development of the QMS within Belstat and chairs the Coordination Council for QM. This council involves the statistical subject matter units. More specifically, the Management Representative shall ensure alignment of the quality policy with the strategic directions of Belstat, follow the principle of user orientation, plan and control QM related activities and resource allocation and coordinate the internal audits. The Main Office for the Coordination and Development of the Statistical System, the seven internal auditors and the statistical subject matter units of Belstat also play important roles and bear responsibility for implementation of the QMS. Belstat has invited external specialists dealing with generic QM to conduct training, through a seminar and workshop, for its employees. Internal auditors underwent advanced training courses on audit of QMS.

The QMS is operational in Belstat headquarters. At present, within the framework of the implementation of activities under the Strategy 2022, preparatory work is being carried out for the implementation of the QMS in the regional offices. It is recommended that Belstat continues to transfer its experience of statistical data Quality Management to Other Producers of Official Statistical Information in order to improve QM within the whole National Statistical System.

ESCoP indicator 4.2: Procedures are in place to plan and monitor the quality of the statistical production process.

The QMS of Belstat is based on the National Model of Production of Official Statistical Information, developed on the basis of GSBPM (version 5.0). It covers all stages of statistical production and includes nine processes, including collection, processing and analysis of input data (primary statistical and administrative data). The process standards are documented. Indicators for assessment of the performance of the QMS and its processes (25 indicators) have been developed. There are good examples of indicators measuring process quality such as response rate, quality coefficient of primary statistical data (share of forms that needed to be corrected) and share of electronic forms. Responsible executives and process owners (within the scope of their competence) prepare reports on monitoring and evaluation of QMS process performance, which contain the values of the relevant indicators. The results of monitoring and measurements are included in the summary report on the functioning of the QMS and are discussed at the Coordination Council meeting.

The producers of official statistics have a strong legal mandate to use administrative data for statistical purposes. Belstat uses and intends to expand the use of administrative data (including electronic collection) and to create a special database for this purpose by 2020. In this context, the planned development of a methodology and procedures for administrative data QM between

2020 and 2022, involving the Other Producers of Official Statistical Information, is fully relevant. Tools to assess administrative data quality should be developed in consideration that these tools could also be used by administrative data owners while respecting the statistical confidentiality principle.

ESCoP indicator 4.3: Product quality is regularly monitored, assessed with regard to possible trade-offs, and reported according to the quality criteria for European statistics.

Relevance, timeliness, objectivity, accessibility and comparability belong to the underlying principles of official statistics (LSS Article 5) and are supported by the respective indicators (Belstat decree 12 June 2017). These principles and indicators are binding for all producers of official statistics in Belarus who should regularly produce and publish them. Yet, this is currently not the case.

Belstat has developed several indicators that relate to the quality of statistical output. Indicators on user satisfaction and user confidence (web-based user questionnaire is in place for these indices); visits to the Belstat website; coverage of the questionnaires sent to the international organisations; and coverage of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) indicators with the respective target values are included in the Strategy 2022. Annex G of the Belstat quality guidelines includes the same indicators, whilst making a specific reference to the relevance of official statistics and providing useful descriptions, computing frequencies and formulas.

The quality guidelines require that data shall not be disseminated before the quality assessment is accomplished. The decision on the release of statistical information is made by the Belstat management.

At present, quality reports are not produced systematically either by the Other Producers of Official Statistical Information or by Belstat. Publication of quality reports in accordance with international recommendations is specified in the Action Plan on Implementation of the Strategy 2022, which makes the aim binding for all producers. Belstat has already adopted a concrete schedule for 2019 - 2023 for its statistical domains, which is complemented by a separate assessment on response burden. As regards the standard of quality reports, compliance with the technical guidance on the Eurostat Single Integrated Metadata Structure (SIMS) is foreseen. The way of integrating these documents within the overall metadata system should also be decided upon.

ESCoP indicator 4.4: There is a regular and thorough review of the key statistical outputs using also external experts where appropriate.

In 2011, Belstat developed a Self-Assessment Questionnaire (revised in 2018), which is based on the Quality Self-Assessment Questionnaire of the European Statistical System (DESAP). The questionnaire monitors the quality of statistical outputs as well as processes and covers specific quality aspects (e.g. sampling errors, non-sampling errors, response rates, imputations, etc.). In 2019, the following statistical domains were surveyed: foreign trade in goods, foreign trade in services, small areas, population, transport, telecommunication activities, postal and courier activities, information and communication technologies. In 2019, the questionnaires were also completed by the Other Producers of Official Statistical Information.

In the Self-Assessment Questionnaire, Belstat uses a rating method to describe the degree of compliance of every conducted state statistical survey, and the respective data, with the key quality criteria (relevance, accuracy, reliability, timeliness, comparability, consistency). It is the understanding of the Assessment Team that these ratings are not made public.

At present, Belstat plans to conduct internal audits taking into account the activities and functions of the structural units subject to audit, as well as the results of previous audits. In the

first year of operation of the QMS, internal audits were carried out in all structural units, including all statistical domains. Subsequently, based on the validity of the ISO certificate (2018-2021) and the recommendations of the certification authority, Belstat planned to conduct internal audits in the structural units using sampling. The audits aim at assessing the compliance of the Belstat QMS processes in its structural units with the requirements of ISO 9001-2015. This approach seems to put greater focus on the QM process and administrative matters whereas less attention may be paid to soundness of statistical methodology, quality of specific statistical production processes and outputs.

Belstat's own internal auditors conduct these audits whereas the certification authority carries out an inspection on the functioning of the QMS in Belstat on an annual basis. Yet, international reviews on demographic statistics, national accounts, price statistics and business statistics were conducted during the recent years. Short summaries on the Belstat website provide a general information on the international reviews.

Belstat confirmed that the internal audit documents are accessible in the internal "Database of QMS documents" within the electronic document management system, but they are not accessible for the wider audience.

Recommendations

10. To implement the statistical Quality Management System more widely in the Belarus National Statistical System, Belstat is encouraged to enhance the transfer of its know-how, established practices and tools for statistical QM to the Other Producers of Official Statistical Information.
11. Belstat is encouraged to complement the existing DESAP based self-assessment of surveys and the ISO related documentation audits with targeted audits of statistical methodologies, processes and outputs, including the use of benchmarking and the participation of external experts as appropriate. The results of these audits should be made public.
12. Belstat and the Other Producers of Official Statistical Information are encouraged to prepare a full range of producer- and user-oriented statistical quality reports, in line with international standards, and to disseminate them widely in Russian and English to meet the needs of internal and external users.
13. Belstat and the Other Producers of Official Statistical Information are encouraged to further develop and disseminate in Russian and English user-oriented quality indicators.
14. Belstat is encouraged to develop a systematic approach to the quality assessment of administrative data used for statistical purposes involving the Other Producers of Official Statistical Information.

Chapter 5: P5 – Statistical confidentiality

General assessment

Several articles of the LSS (Articles 5, 10, 11, 21 and explicitly 24) provide for various aspects of statistical confidentiality. However, the LSS provisions on statistical confidentiality seem to cover only primary statistical data. The GLOS provisions, on the other hand, cover all individual data relating to statistical units that are used by producers of official statistics (i.e. primary and non-primary data). Non-primary data or secondary statistical data refers to data on statistical units obtained by producers of official statistics data indirectly from public and other authorities for statistical purposes (e.g. administrative data, which was collected for other – non-statistical – purposes). Accordingly, the Assessment Team recommends that the LSS be revised so that its provisions on statistical confidentiality are aligned with those of the GLOS.

Belstat informed the Assessment Team that all staff dealing with primary statistical data sign legal confidentiality forms. They are instructed on how to handle sensitive data.

Although penalties for the breach of confidentiality are referred to in the LSS, they are not explicitly stipulated. Instead, reference is made to "legislative acts". Belstat explained that this is a reference to a general law on individual data protection binding for all administrative procedures and on all administrative bodies.

All statistical questionnaires contain a confidentiality clause at the top of the front page. The confidentiality policy is published on the Belstat website.

The existence of strict procedures for facilitating access to statistical microdata for research purposes was confirmed by scientists and researchers participating in meetings with the Assessment Team, who explained that they have to lodge their requests in writing with a justification for the requests and the description to which purposes the data will be used. They also sign the confidentiality clause.

Assessment per indicator

ESCoP indicator 5.1: Statistical confidentiality is guaranteed in the law.

Article 5 of the LSS explicitly states that one of the principles of state statistics is the confidentiality of primary statistical data.

Under the LSS Article 10 "Rights and obligations of state statistics bodies" it is stated that the state statistics bodies shall have the obligation to ensure confidentiality of primary statistical data and use thereof for the purpose of statistics (paragraph 2.5).

Under the LSS Article 11 "Rights and obligations of other producers of official statistical information" states that "*Other producers of official statistical information shall have the obligation to ensure confidentiality of primary statistical data*" (paragraph 2.9).

Under the LSS Article 21 "Confidentiality of primary statistical data" reads as follows:

"*1. Primary statistical data, except primary statistical data the access to, dissemination and (or) provision of which is not restricted under the legislative acts, shall be confidential and shall be used in state statistical activities.*

2. Primary statistical data may be disseminated upon written consent of the respondent who provided these data.

3. Request of primary data from state statistics bodies and other producers of official statistical information by government bodies and other legal entities, officials and other natural persons

without written consent of respondent shall be prohibited, except the following cases of primary data request:

3.1. anonymised data and data not allowing for identification of respondent, for research purposes;

3.2. in respect to subordinate (incorporated) state organisations as well as organisations whose equities (shares in statutory fund) are owned by the Government and are placed under management;

3.3. primary data of a legal entity requested by regulatory (supervisory) body undertaking control of the compliance with the procedure of state statistical reports submission; by criminal prosecution authority or court on cases in charge.

4. The procedure of dissemination and (or) provision of primary statistical data by state statistics bodies in accordance with paragraphs 2 and 3 of the present Article as well as of their storage, protection and use shall be established by the national public authority for state statistics.

5. The officials of government bodies and other legal entities who have received primary statistical data as well as individuals who, by virtue of office or occupation, have had access to primary statistical data, may not disclose or disseminate primary statistical data to third parties without written consent of respondent, except for cases stipulated by the present Law, and may not use these data for the purposes not directly associated with their work and/or office duties".

ESCoP Indicator 5.2: Staff sign legal confidentiality on appointment.

Belstat informed the Assessment Team that all employees sign a confidentiality commitment on appointment.

ESCoP Indicator 5.3: Penalties are prescribed for any wilful breaches of statistical confidentiality.

A reference is made in the LSS to "legislative acts" on individual data protection, but no specific penalties are mentioned in the LSS.

Under the LSS Article 24 "Liability for breach of confidentiality of primary statistical data" states that: "*Officials and other employees of state statistics bodies and other producers of official statistical information, officials of government bodies and other legal entities who have received primary statistical data, as well as other persons who by virtue of office or occupation have had access to primary statistical data shall be liable, under legislative acts, for their loss or disclosure."*

ESCoP Indicator 5.4: Guidelines and instructions are provided to staff on the protection of statistical confidentiality throughout the statistical processes. The confidentiality policy is made known to the public.

Belstat informed the Assessment Team that guidelines and instructions are provided to the staff on the protection of statistical confidentiality. Confidentiality is mentioned in the job description forms.

A confidentiality clause is printed on the front page of each questionnaire, and the policy on ensuring the confidentiality of primary statistical data is posted on the official website of Belstat. The Law on State Statistics and the Statute of Belstat containing confidentiality provisions are published on the website. The User Survey on the website also contains the confidentiality clause.

ESCoP Indicator 5.5: The necessary regulatory, administrative, technical and organisational measures are in place to protect the security and integrity of statistical data and their transmission, in accordance with best practices, international standards, as well as European and national legislation.

Article 21 of the LSS "Confidentiality of primary statistical data" contains provisions for the handling, storage and protection of primary data. Belstat informed the Assessment Team that the appropriate procedures are in place.

ESCoP Indicator 5.6: Strict protocols apply to external users accessing statistical microdata for research purposes.

According to Belstat, as well as the scientists and researchers participating in the meetings with the Assessment Team, researchers must submit written requests in advance and sign the confidentiality clause before obtaining access to microdata. The written request has to contain the justification for access and the information on the use of the data.

Recommendations

15. The Law on State Statistics should be revised so that its provisions on statistical confidentiality are applied by Belstat and the Other Producers of Official Statistical Information to all data obtained for statistical purposes, irrespective of the source (e.g. statistical survey or other sources such as administrative data) of the data.
16. The provisions relating to statistical confidentiality in the Law on State Statistics (and in the Confidentiality Policy and Principal State Statistical Indicators documents) should be revised to make them more compatible with the corresponding provisions of the Generic Law on Official Statistics.

Chapter 6: P6 – Impartiality and objectivity

General assessment

The revised Law on State Statistics (LSS), in force since 2016, aims at ensuring impartiality and objectivity in line with the United Nations (UN) Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics and the European Statistics Code of Practice. Policy documents on dissemination and revisions have been developed and are published online. A professional code of practice for civil servants is in place. Statistical data are released online in accordance with a publicly accessible release calendar. Belstat stresses that its news releases and other publications are strictly statistical in nature and do not contain any statements of political nature.

In certain areas, modifications of current policies or routines would be desirable in order to further align Belstat with international best practices. Notably, there is some lack of clarity as to whether practices related to pre-release access apply to other state bodies producing official statistics. Belstat is encouraged to work with the Other Producers of Official Statistical Information to develop common and transparent dissemination practices and to agree on a uniform time for the release of all statistical outputs.

Assessment per indicator

ESCoP Indicator 6.1: Statistics are compiled on an objective basis determined by statistical considerations.

The LSS (Article 5) defines objectivity as one of the principles of State statistics. Several other policy documents, notably on dissemination and revision policies, provide a framework for maintaining impartiality and objectivity in the development, production and dissemination of official statistics. Indicators have been developed to monitor compliance with the principles and are shared with all staff within the National Statistical System.

Belstat subscribes to a code of professional conduct for civil servants which also applies to other producers of official statistical information. Relations with external contractors – mostly in the IT domain – are regulated in the law on public procurement and the corresponding dossiers are available online.

ESCoP Indicator 6.2: Choices of sources and statistical methods as well as decisions about the dissemination of statistics are informed by statistical considerations.

The structural subdivisions of Belstat decide on data sources on an "as needed" basis. The potential availability of administrative data must be investigated before any new data collection is introduced. Belstat maintains a Scientific and Methodological Council which provides advice on proposed methodological changes in all statistical domains. Data sources and methods are described in various documents published online.

Assessments to validate data collection and methodological practices are carried out internally in each division and during the annual review of questionnaires, as well as in the framework of Belstat's cooperation with international organisations.

ESCoP Indicator 6.3: Errors discovered in published statistics are corrected at the earliest possible date and publicised.

Errors that significantly impact on published indicators are dealt with in a predefined manner as laid down in the revisions policy. A special revision is then carried out as soon as possible, with prior notification to users.

ESCoP Indicator 6.4: Information on the methods and procedures used is publicly available.

Official statistical releases disseminated by Belstat are accompanied by publicly accessible metadata to ensure their correct interpretation. The Interactive Information Analytical System for the Dissemination of Official Statistics also contains metadata for each indicator. The dedicated methodology section on Belstat's website contains documentation on compiling and calculating statistical indicators, instructions for organising and conducting statistical surveys, and methodological regulations.

ESCoP Indicator 6.5: Statistical release dates and times are pre-announced.

A release calendar for the entire year is available online, specifying the date of each statistical release. New data are normally released at 4 o'clock in the afternoon. Any deviation from the scheduled release date is notified to users at least one business day in advance.

ESCoP Indicator 6.6: Advance notice is given on major revisions or changes in methodologies.

Scheduled revisions are carried out on a regular basis in accordance with the Statistical Work Programme. Besides, information on scheduled revisions of official statistical information, including the timing of revisions, as well as the timing of production of preliminary and final data, is specified in the methodologies for the compilation and calculation of individual statistical indicators and in methodological provisions for individual statistical domains. Information on scheduled revisions of the official statistical methodology is also contained in the plan of scientific and methodological work available on Belstat's website. The statistical publications state that statistical data are presented on the basis of current reporting, are preliminary and can be revised.

Special revisions are undertaken whenever deemed necessary due to changes in data sources or methodology. The revision policy states that users are informed accordingly.

ESCoP Indicator 6.7: All users have equal access to statistical releases at the same time. Any privileged pre-release access to any outside user is limited, controlled and publicised. In the event that leaks occur, pre-release arrangements are revised so as to ensure impartiality.

In order to ensure equal access for all users, Belstat's statistical releases are published online and emailed to users at a fixed point in time on the date preannounced in the online release calendar. There is no specific policy on pre-release access, and no formal agreements on early access are in place in Belstat. However, given the organisational structure of the other government bodies producing official statistics, issues about pre-access for individuals in certain positions may occur. The Assessment Team hence recommends that Belstat supports the Other Producers of Official Statistical Information in developing their dissemination policies so that any pre-release of the data, to either internal or external users, is clearly identified and made known to the public.

ESCoP Indicator 6.8: Statistical releases and statements made in press conferences are objective and non-partisan.

News releases on Belstat's website have a standardised format and do not contain any statement of a political nature. The details are set out in the Guide on the Preparation of Statistical Publications.

Press conferences are held in order to highlight significant statistical work, to inform about international statistical cooperation and to popularise official statistics among the public.

Belstat adheres to the Professional Code of Conduct for Civil Servants and United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) recommendations on holding press events.

Recommendations

Belstat is encouraged to:

17. Support the Other Producers of Official Statistical Information in developing their dissemination policies so that any pre-release of the data, to either internal or external users, is clearly identified and made known to the public.
18. Support the Other Producers of Official Statistical Information in developing their release calendars and in setting a uniform time for publishing all statistical outputs.

Chapter 7: P7 – Sound methodology

General assessment

The legal foundation for compliance with international statistical standards and methodologies is solid in Belarus. According to the Statute of Belstat, approved by the President of the Republic, Belstat has to develop and apply scientifically sound statistical methodologies. Methodological work is guided by the Scientific and Methodological Council of Belstat. The Interdepartmental Council for Official Statistics approves the data collection questionnaires used throughout the National Statistical System.

Methodological documentation produced by Belstat is thorough and is made public. It might be noted that a uniform structure for methodological documentation is followed by Belstat and the adoption process is formalised. Whereas the methodological documents of the other national producers of official statistics are endorsed by Belstat, they are not formally adopted. The availability of official methodological documentation outside of Belstat could be improved.

The national and statistical classifications and the Statistical Business Register in Belstat constitute strong elements of statistical infrastructure. The classifications are harmonised with the international analogues or taken over directly for national use. The Statistical Business Register has a sound legal base and appropriate updating processes. It benefits from the good system of unique identifiers implemented in Belarus.

Methodological work in Belstat, and more generally in the NSS, is to a large extent decentralised, except for the centralised administrative process of adoption of methodology related technical regulatory acts. Belstat has developed a thorough system of vocational training to maintain and strengthen statistical capacity and it maintains a well rooted cooperation with the academic community.

Assessment per indicator

ESCoP indicator 7.1: The overall methodological framework used for European Statistics follows European and other international standards, guidelines, and good practices.

According to the Articles 4, 10 and 11 of the LSS, official statistical methodology shall be compliant with the international statistical standards. Belstat order No. 84 of 12 June 2017 on the approval of the state statistical principal indicators requires that its Scientific-Methodological Council shall ensure conformity of the official statistical methodology with the international standards.

Belstat confirms that official statistics methodology is generally consistent with international standards. When preparing a technical regulatory act, which usually includes methodological aspects, international requirements are taken into account. Some objective deviations may derive from the divergences in national legislation and are highlighted in the notes to the indicators in completed international questionnaires.

ESCoP indicator 7.2: Procedures are in place to ensure that standard concepts, definitions and classifications are consistently applied throughout the statistical authority.

In institutional terms and at the national level, the Scientific and Methodological Council of Belstat ensures coordinated decision making on the methodologies applied. Thus, it oversees the methodologies for all official statistical surveys. The work of the Interdepartmental Council for Official Statistics also helps to ensure the application of standard concepts and applications when approving the new or amended state statistical questionnaires. The meeting documents of the two councils are not publicised.

According to the LSS Article 11 (paragraph 2.4) and the Statute of Belstat item 9.7, Belstat provides methodological guidance to the Other Producers of Official Statistical Information. According to the Belstat order of 28 November 2016 No. 188, documents on the methodology and organisation of the surveys conducted by the Other Producers of Official Statistical Information are subject to endorsement by Belstat, but final approval is a matter for the individual producers. It means that formally, for statistical methodology and production procedures, senior management of a ministry etc. has the last word.

In total, 66 detailed methodological documents for centralised (i.e. conducted by Belstat) statistical surveys are published on the Belstat website in a dedicated section. Additionally, general methodological provisions for 30 statistical areas and the detailed instructions on the organisation of Belstat sample surveys are published. The set of methodological documents on the Belstat website is complemented by a common glossary of terms containing approximately 800 items. The methodological section of the Belstat website also contains general methodological provisions on statistical areas, which are the responsibility of the Other Producers of Official Statistical Information. The Assessment Team was told, however, that some producers of official statistics have not developed and published methodological documents even if there is no directly applicable international methodology in use.

The preparation and adoption of methodological documents and updates, the survey questionnaires and the relevant instructions applied by Belstat, and by the Other Producers of Official Statistical Information, are based on a well-formalised procedure. The subject matter departments within Belstat are responsible for defining the statistical methods and for implementing, monitoring and validating them.

Belstat has a central annual work plan for scientific-methodological work. For 2019, for instance, it contains 23 activities covering changes of classifications and methodologies for the new surveys (employment, business demography, alcohol consumption, tourism, water use). The Main Office for the Coordination and Development of the Statistical System in Belstat plans and monitors the scientific and methodological work and organises the adoption of the statistical methodologies and national statistical classifications.

Bearing in mind the rapid technological developments that significantly drive change in statistical data processing, standardisation of these processes, development of new databases and data processing applications, Belstat could review its methodological functions, study the experience of other national statistical systems and consider strengthening and pooling of horizontal methodological skills.

ESCoP indicator 7.3: The business register and the frame for population surveys are regularly evaluated and adjusted if necessary, in order to ensure high quality.

Article 20 of the LSS forms a strong legal mandate for Belstat for maintaining the Statistical Business Register (SBR). Belstat has also a solid annually updated frame for conducting the household surveys - the population census data adjusted by administrative data from different sources. The national classification on “Types of Economic Activities (OKED)” (harmonised with European Union’s Statistical classification of economic activities - NACE Rev. 2) is used in the SBR.

Technically, there is the administrative part of the SBR that is updated daily and the statistical part, within the Integrated Information System of State Statistics (IISSS), which is updated monthly. Taken together the administrative registers (register of legal entities, register of taxpayers etc.) and the primary statistical surveys constitute the data sources for the SBR. The unique registration codes of statistical units (code assigned by registration authorities, the

taxpayer's number, the number assigned by statistical authorities) greatly facilitate the functioning of the SBR.

The procedure for the design and maintenance of the administrative part of the SBR, the procedure for the design and maintenance of the SBR of the IISSS, the annual production plan for statistical work as well as the Methodological Provisions for the Statistical Register form a comprehensive set of internal SBR related methodologies and rules in Belstat.

Altogether six employees in headquarters and fourteen at the regional level are in charge of the SBR. Very recently, a new software for the SBR was implemented. Based on the SBR data, the business demography statistics were introduced. The Assessment Team is impressed by the planned next steps involving the introduction of geo-information modules in the SBR.

ESCoP indicator 7.4: Detailed concordance exists between national classifications systems and the corresponding European systems.

According to the state statistical principal indicators (12.06.2017), statistical and national classifications used in statistical activities shall be harmonised with international and European classifications. For instance, based on the Classification of Economic activities in the European Community (NACE, Rev. 2), the national classification (OKED) was developed and harmonised at the four-digit level. Similarly, different analogue statistical classifications on products are harmonised with the Statistical Classification of Products by Activity (CPA 2008) at the six-digit level. In 2019, the Classification of Wastes and the Classification of Forms and Kinds of Ownership were adopted. The former is harmonised with the European Waste List at the six-digit level.

The following international classifications have been taken over without developing a national version: Classification of the Functions of Government (COFOG), Classification of Individual Consumption According to Purpose (COICOP 1999), International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED 2011), International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems (ICD), Classification of the Purposes of Non-Profit Institutions Serving Households (COPNI), International Classification of Status in Employment (ICSE-93), Classification of Environmental Protection Activities (CEPA 2000), Classification by Broad Economic Categories (BEC Rev. 4).

Some national classifications are based on the national law, e.g. the System of designations for components of administrative and territorial division and settlements (SOATO) and the Organisational and legal statuses (OKOPF). An example of an interstate (regional) classification is the Commodity Nomenclature of external economic activities of the Eurasian Economic Union, which is used in the production of external sector statistics. It complies with the European Union (EU) Combined Nomenclature (CN 2017) at the eight-digit level and the UN Harmonised Commodity Description and Coding System of the World Customs Organisation at the six-digit level.

The national and statistical classifications relevant for official statistics are published on the Belstat website and referred to under the metadata in the Interactive Information Analytical System for the Dissemination of Official Statistics. They are accompanied by auxiliary information and transition keys (correspondence tables). By 2022, Belstat intends to upgrade and introduce six new versions of different classifications from which two are already completed.

ESCoP indicator 7.5: Graduates in the relevant academic disciplines are recruited.

Belstat human resources policy and practices are based and fully dependent on the wider public sector framework, which is applicable in Belarus. The job descriptions contain adequate

qualifications requirements for the positions (e.g. university graduates often with a combination of mathematics/statistics and a relevant subject matter discipline) and very specific job duties.

When recruiting specialists, both the human resources department and the respective subject matter unit are involved. Employment in a governmental agency is highly valued in Belarus, particularly outside of the capital city Minsk, and hence there is a good supply of qualified candidates for vacancies.

ESCoP indicator 7.6: Statistical authorities implement a policy of continuous vocational training for their staff.

Continuous professional development of staff is one of Belstat's main strategic activities (according to the Strategy 2022). It has developed guidelines on the organisation of vocational education and personnel development (Belstat order of 20 September 2017), which established the procedure for identifying the personnel training needs and planning the budget funds for training.

Annually, taking into account the needs of employees in Belstat and its regional offices, a plan of advanced training and seminars of managerial personnel and specialists for the coming calendar year is adopted. The periodicity of training of managerial personnel is at least once every three years, of specialists every five years.

The Personnel Management Department of Belstat bears the responsibility for professional training and development of staff in the headquarters and the regional offices.

Belstat has good cooperation with the Belarus State Economic University, the Minsk State Linguistic University and other academic institutions, which conduct advanced training courses for Belstat employees. The Belarus State Economic University, for instance, organised in 2019 classes on information technology, business statistics and basics of the international financial reporting standards. The 2019 plan for advanced trainings contained also IT- related classes for managers and specialists conducted by the BSUIR Institute for IT. The regional offices cooperate also with regional educational institutions.

According to Belstat's own opinion, the main skill gaps are related to the statistical data processing (ability to work with specific statistical software) and to the knowledge of English. It is important to underline, however, that Belstat organises foreign language training for employees on a continuing basis (training in the Minsk State Linguistic University and private courses in Belstat).

Monthly internal training classes in the structural units of Belstat and joint training sessions on relevant topics of statistical production are held for relevant employees. For 2019 the following joint sessions were held: working with the Interactive Information Analytical System for the Dissemination of Official Statistics; preparation for the evaluation of the QMS; information security and preparation and conduct of the 2019 Population and Housing Census.

Belstat cooperates with the Academy of Public Administration under the aegis of the President of the Republic in sending managerial personnel, as well as persons included in the reserve lists, for training, retraining and advanced training.

As regards maintaining and developing statistical capacity within the whole NSS, representatives of the Other Producers of Official Statistical Information participate in the bilateral or multilateral methodological discussions and at the roundtables with Belstat but are usually not invited to the statistical training events organised by Belstat.

ESCoP indicator 7.7: Co-operation with the scientific community is organised to improve methodology, the effectiveness of the methods implemented and to promote better tools when feasible.

Belstat has a well-established partnership with the national universities. The representatives of academia strongly value the existing cooperation.

The above mentioned Scientific and Methodological Council of Belstat, consisting of twelve members from Belstat and two scientific institutions, was established to improve the coordination of methodology and to ensure concordance with international standards. According to the Belstat decree from 17 April 2015, it is a consultative body, but it shall review the proposals of new methodological approaches of Belstat and all methodologies applied by the Other Producers of Official Statistical Information. The committee is entitled to adopt conclusions and recommendations on statistical methodologies. The meetings shall take place as a minimum twice a year.

Similarly, academia is represented in the Interdepartmental Council for Official Statistics, but the level of representation is relatively low – two members from the scientific community out of nineteen members of this council.

Cooperation with the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries is institutionalised through different standing committees: Statistical Council of the Republic of Belarus and Russian Federation (since 1996); Interstate Statistical Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States and its Scientific Council and the Advisory Committee on Statistics at the Board of the Eurasian Economic Commission. All these bodies deal with coordination of methodological activities. Additionally, Belstat has numerous bilateral cooperation agreements and memoranda in place.

The Republic of Belarus is active at the global statistical fora: it is a member of the UN Statistical Commission 2017-2020, and as a member of two Inter-Agency Expert Groups (on SDG indicators and Violence against Children) it represents the CIS region in the Governing Board of the International Comparison Programme (ICP). It participates actively at the sessions of the UN Statistical Commission, plenary sessions of the Conference of European Statisticians and meetings of experts from national statistical offices. In 2018, for instance, it participated in 79 international events.

Several methodological developments are underpinned by the EU-funded Technical Assistance and Information Exchange Instrument of the European Commission (TAIEX) and Twinning projects and also by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) technical assistance programmes. The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) partly financed the 2019 Population and Housing Census.

Benefiting from a good geographical position, Belarus has hosted several international statistical meetings and conferences in Minsk (e.g. seminars on System of Environmental-Economic Accounting – SEEA, System of National Accounts – SNA 2008, High Level Seminar for the Eastern European, Caucasus and Central Asian Countries – EECCA, etc.).

Recommendations

Belstat is encouraged to:

19. Support the Other Producers of Official Statistical Information in preparing and publishing methodological documents and other metadata in line with best statistical practice. The system-wide methodological work carried out by the Scientific and

Methodological Council of Belstat and the Interdepartmental Council for Official Statistics might also be given more public prominence.

20. Consider the strengthening and pooling of horizontal methodological skills.
21. Develop further the cooperation with the universities in the development of statistical methodology and in the vocational training of statisticians.

Chapter 8: P8 – Appropriate statistical procedures

General assessment

The statistical data production process in Belarus is decentralised since there are several institutions involved and Belstat has its regional offices, which play a very important role in data production. Such an organisational setup requires centrally established, implemented and monitored procedures. The comprehensive set of methodological documents and the instructions for the organisation of surveys describe sample selection, the calculation of weights and extrapolation and establish procedures for data collection, entry and coding, error-checks, editing and imputation. However, these statistical procedures are to a large extent designed independently by the separate statistical domains of Belstat.

Belstat is in a position to influence the production rules applied by the Other Producers of Official Statistical Information by endorsing the methodologies, instructions and the data collection questionnaires. However, it does not have the last decisive word.

Belstat standardises the production processes by relying on the Generic Statistical Business Process Standard and it has established a national version of the standard. It is further developing the IISSS, which enables increasing unification of procedures for the collection and processing of primary statistical data.

Belstat has 34 bilateral agreements with the owners of administrative data. Bilateral interaction facilitates this cooperation, but the legal provisions do not require the data owners to ask for the consent of national statistical authorities when the administrative data systems are changed.

Assessment per indicator

ESCoP Indicator 8.1: When European statistics are based on administrative data, the definitions and concepts used for the administrative purposes are a good approximation to those required for statistical purposes.

The statistical outputs produced by Belstat are based on both primary survey data and administrative data. The Assessment Team was told that a large majority of official statistics are based on administrative data provided by 34 suppliers involving more than 400 datasets. According to Belstat, the quality of administrative data is often acceptable but not ideal.

When developing methodology for the production of a new statistical output, changing an existing one or implementing new survey instruments (e.g. questionnaires), the procedure described under ESCoP indicator 7.2 applies to Belstat subject matter units and also to the other producers. This procedure requires an analysis of the availability of administrative data and usability of these data. To date, each subject matter unit and the Other Producers of Official Statistical Information apply their own methodologies and validation rules for checking the usability and quality of administrative data. The knowledge on availability, usability, quality, the methodological applicability and processes related to administrative data is therefore dispersed across the Belstat statistical matter units.

As stated under Chapter 4, Belstat intends to develop a system for administrative data quality assessment. Bearing in mind that the statistical data processing is being standardised in Belstat, integration of administrative data flow into the standard process needs to be done.

Taking into account the digitalisation of economies and the Belarus national initiatives in this respect, Belstat and the Other Producers of Official Statistical Information, where relevant, need to explore, plan and develop completely new ways of statistics production by using existing and the rapidly growing “big data” administrative data sources data held by private entities (e.g.

telecom operators, big retail stores). Progress made in some countries refer to new opportunities for tourism statistics, balance of payments and other statistical areas.

ESCoP Indicator 8.2: In the case of statistical surveys, questionnaires are systematically tested prior to the data collection.

Belstat order No. 178 of 17 April 2015 forms the basis for a regular review of statistical tools within Belstat. It lays down good objectives (unification and simplification of instruments, use of required classifications) and requires that three to five respondents shall test new questionnaires. In practice, the data collection questionnaires are reviewed annually.

The Scientific-Methodological Council may also review new or amended questionnaires prior to the top-management and the Interdepartmental Council for Official Statistics adopting them. Before launching electronic data collection questionnaires, they are tested, including the control formulas (i.e. logical controls, computing of sub-totals).

Belstat resolution No. 188 of 28 November 2016 establishes the endorsement rules also for the decentralised data collection questionnaires (i.e. questionnaires by Other Producers of Official Statistical Information). But it does not require any prior testing and validating from the Other Producers of Official Statistical Information.

ESCoP Indicator 8.3: Survey designs, sample selections and estimation methods are well based and regularly reviewed and revised as required.

As described under Chapter 7, the statistical subject matter units of Belstat and the Other Producers of Official Statistical Information are in charge of the development of the methodologies falling under their competence, subject to adherence to international statistical standards. Nevertheless, available data sources, data collection and the subsequent data processing modes must take into account the national circumstances and choices. This requires high proficiency from national statistical authorities.

In the case of sample surveys, the formalised adoption of methodologies and instructions for the organisation of surveys and the work of the Scientific and Methodological Council of Belstat is aimed at coordination and ensuring adherence to scientifically sound official statistical methodology. Additionally, and as indicated under Chapter 7, pooled methodological resources may also provide uniform guidelines, recommend appropriate methodologies and periodically examine the methods used for survey sampling, sample selections and estimation methods.

The methodological documents and the instructions for the organisation of Belstat surveys describe the survey and sample designs in a detailed manner, while the frames for the sample surveys are solid.

ESCoP Indicator 8.4: Data collection, data entry and coding are routinely monitored and revised as required.

The comprehensive public set of methodological documents and the general methodological provisions accompanied by instructions on the organisation of surveys contain detailed rules for data collection and further processing.

Approaches applied to the organisation of statistical production at all levels (district, regional and national) are uniform.

The survey-specific general methodological provisions and instructions aim at strengthening accuracy and reliability of data. The general requirements (i.e. applicable also to the territorial offices of Belstat) are stipulated in the Belstat order No. 229 of 19 September 2012 on the procedure for organising and conducting the reliability checks of primary statistical data. The

means for error reduction are often incorporated in the data processing applications, which are used by all Belstat territorial offices, and may cover different quality assurance functions such as monitoring the survey process and non-response; data inquiry process; different comparative, logical and arithmetic checks; and handling of outliers and missing values. Electronic data collection facilitates primary data error checking at the respondents' side and contributes significantly to the overall efficiency of the statistical system. It is, however, important to underline that Belstat procedures and tools are not applied by the Other Producers of Official Statistical Information.

Electronic data collection has increased significantly, and, for Belstat surveys, the share has reached 95%, considerably reducing the workload of data entry and manual quality control. The rate of non-response in business surveys is low.

Belstat is introducing gradually new modes of modern data collection, such as Computer-Aided Personal Interviews (CAPI), Computer-Aided Web interviews (CAWI) (both methods were used for the 2019 Population and Housing Census) and data collection on consumer prices using smart devices. Data collection from households is guided by the survey manuals for interviewers and supported by trainings.

Because of Belstat's decentralised structure, the district and regional offices are in charge of data entry (paper-based primary data only), primary data quality check at the micro-level, handling non-response and data editing. The IT applications support these operations and reduce the current workload of the regional and district offices. Electronic data is directly recorded in the central database.

Data collection and processing by the Other Producers of Official Statistical Information are organised independently by the producers themselves and the processes and technical means can vary considerably.

ESCoP Indicator 8.5: Appropriate editing and imputation methods are used and regularly reviewed, revised or updated as required.

Editing and imputation methods and rules are also developed by the statistical subject matter units of Belstat and may vary, depending on each statistical domain. Micro-level editing and control can be performed in Belstat at all three organisational levels (district, region, headquarters) while macro-level editing and imputation is undertaken at the regional and the headquarters levels. The instructions on the organisation of surveys cover this part of the statistical production process unevenly.

The calculation of weights and the extrapolation algorithms for the sample surveys are adequately described in the survey instructions.

Belstat and the National Bank of the Republic of Belarus provided good examples of data comparison practices with Russian Federation and other countries of the Eurasian Economic Union for foreign trade and balance of payments statistics.

ESCoP Indicator 8.6: Revisions follow standard, well-established and transparent procedures.

The revision policy of Belstat deals with the principles applicable for revisions of disseminated data. It covers both regular and special revisions and it is made public. Not all of the Other Producers of Official Statistical Information have adopted and published revision policies and more specific rules for revisions and treatment of errors.

ESCoP Indicator 8.7: Statistical authorities are involved in the design of administrative data in order to make administrative data more suitable for statistical purposes.

The formal procedure mentioned under indicator 8.3 and Chapter 7 involves analyses of availability, usability and statistical potential of administrative data sources. It involves also thorough work on the content, definitions, structure and timeliness of the existing administrative data sets to be conducted by the subject matter units of Belstat. However, this process does not automatically mean an ex-ante involvement of statistical authorities when administrative data systems are being developed or reviewed. Strictly speaking, there is no such requirement established in the law. In practice, however, Belstat is involved when administrative data forms are amended. Moreover, the bilateral agreements referred to under indicator 8.8 specify the procedure for data modification.

ESCoP Indicator 8.8: Agreements are made with owners of administrative data which set out their shared commitment to use of these data for statistical purposes.

Belstat has currently 34 bilateral agreements with administrative data owners. The agreements specify the structure and formats of administrative data to be provided.

ESCoP Indicator 8.9: Statistical authorities co-operate with owners of administrative data to ensure data quality.

Where written agreements are in place, the owners of administrative data are well aware of the use of these data. Belstat's subject matter units liaise with their respective counterparts in governmental agencies and hold common meetings.

Belstat gives feedback to the administrative data holders when quality problems are detected, but this arrangement is highly dependent on the practices rooted in the Belstat subject matter units. A more systematic approach should be developed in the course of establishing the administrative data quality assessment system.

Recommendations

22. Belstat is encouraged to progress its plans for the exploitation of new data sources, notably in the context of "big data" in the production of tourism, balance of payments and other relevant statistics.
23. Belstat and the National Bank of the Republic of Belarus are encouraged to develop and expand the data comparison projects they currently undertake with the corresponding statistical authorities in neighbouring countries. These exercises are indispensable in improving the quality of statistics that involve international transactions (e.g. foreign trade statistics).

Chapter 9: P9 – Non-excessive burden on respondents

General assessment

The burden on enterprises in Belarus is noticeably influenced by the high share of exhaustive surveys, a number of which are conducted on a high frequency basis. It has been argued that the high share of government owned enterprises in the Belarus economy justifies the large amount of surveys that require submission of questionnaires from all units. The share of large units is also a relevant factor in this context.

Article 5 of the LSS requires proportionality of response burden to be assessed against user needs as an underlying principle of official statistics. All in all, the statistical authorities should consider carefully the trade-offs between the quality aspects of official statistics.

There are sample surveys in place in Belstat and rotation of survey modules between respondents is practiced. The procedures for adoption of methodological documents and data collection questionnaires also require response burden to be taken into account.

Belstat makes efforts to measure response burden but these initiatives do not apply to Other Producers of Official Statistical Information. Electronic questionnaires and the use of electronic response in general are significantly less developed by some Other Producers of Official Statistical Information compared to Belstat.

Assessment per indicator

ESCoP indicator 9.1: The range and detail of Official Statistics demands is limited to what is absolutely necessary.

Considering the high share of state enterprises in the Belarus economy, very detailed data collection based on exhaustive statistical surveys is practiced. The Assessment Team was told that the resulting high quality of data and reduced sampling errors is of great value for this effort. Yet, Belstat considers extending the sample surveys of enterprises to reduce response burden.

The Strategy 2022 of the NSS highlights the importance of meeting user needs, and users ask for detailed regional breakdowns. This aspect determines the level of respondent burden. Besides Article 5 of the LSS, Belstat repeats the principle of proportionate burden in its order No. 84 of 12 June 2017 on the approval of state statistical principal indicators and lists 12 measures for balancing and mitigating response burden.

The Interagency Council deals with optimisation of data collection and reviews the questionnaires regularly as described under indicator 8.2.

Belstat conducts a sample-based assessment of response burden by measuring the time use every 5 years and it foresees under its strategic action plan a study and analysis of response burden by 2022. Nevertheless, this indicator cannot be found in the set of indicators of Strategy 2022, i.e. there is no wider monitoring of response burden in the NSS. Several Other Producers of Official Statistical Information have not introduced similar monitoring.

ESCoP indicator 9.2: The reporting burden is spread as widely as possible over survey populations.

A systematic coordination of samples of business surveys is not in place in Belstat. In addition to the general measures aimed at reducing burden (e.g. expanding the use of administrative data and regular optimisation of data collection instruments), Belstat is also reducing the burden for small- and micro-enterprises by extending the use of sample surveys and by rotating the survey modules between respondents.

ESCoP indicator 9.3: The information sought from businesses is, as far as possible, readily available from their accounts and electronic means are used where possible to facilitate its return.

Whilst Belstat is successfully increasing electronic data collection, the share of electronic data collection by the Other Producers of Official Statistical Information is significantly lower. The reason is partly related to the fact that a far lower share of questionnaires has been prepared by them in electronic format. Belstat has developed an on-line data submission portal and maintains also the offline applications (dedicated software). A web-calendar containing the electronic data submission deadlines is available for enterprises.

The Action Plan of Strategy 2022 contains an activity on the development of an electronic format for primary statistical data provision for the non-centralised state statistical surveys and the Other Producers of Official Statistical Information have been made responsible for this activity. The experience of Belstat and possibly also its technical means could be used to the optimal extent to benefit the Other Producers of Official Statistical Information.

Possibilities for the integration of accounting software used by enterprises and the statistical data collection applications developed by Belstat should be assessed.

ESCoP indicator 9.4: Administrative sources are used whenever possible to avoid duplicating requests for information.

As stated above, the producers of official statistics have a strong legal mandate to use administrative data for statistical purposes, and Belstat has a strong internal process for adoption of methodologies and instruments that require a thorough analysis of administrative data availability and usability. Strategy 2022 includes developing quality assessment system and a dedicated database for administrative data.

ESCoP indicator 9.5: Data sharing within statistical authorities is generalised in order to avoid multiplication of surveys.

The technical infrastructure and the processes for data sharing within Belstat (i.e. between the headquarters and the regional offices) are adequate. The intergovernmental system for data exchange between Belstat and the Other Producers of Official Statistical Information is also well established.

Microdata are stored in the Belstat data archives and in the local data storages at the Other Producers of Official Statistical Information. Belstat employees are granted access to Belstat microdata bases following the internal confidentiality policy and procedures.

Microdata sharing between the producers of official statistics is not practiced. The necessary legal base would need to be established as described under Chapter 14.

ESCoP indicator 9.6: Statistical authorities promote measures that enable the linking of data sources in order to reduce reporting burden.

The unique identifiers of statistical units provide a good basis for data linking in Belarus, and in practice the linking of data from different surveys and from administrative data is possible and practiced.

Recommendations

Belstat is encouraged to:

24. Continue to optimise its statistical surveys with a particular focus on ensuring that statistical demands respect the principle of proportionality in regard to the burden they impose on respondents.

25. Continue to actively pursue its strategic objective of making greater use of administrative data for statistical purposes in order to reduce its reliance on direct statistical surveys.
26. Measure, in conjunction with the Other Producers of Official Statistical Information, the response burden on a consistent basis and, in consultation with the Interdepartmental Council for Official Statistics, set targets for its reduction.
27. Support the Other Producers of Official Statistical Information in adopting to a greater extent electronic data collection in their statistical surveys.
28. Continue to explore with suppliers of business accounting software opportunities for the integration of accounting and statistical data collection software.

Chapter 10: P10 – Cost-effectiveness

General assessment

In general, Belstat, and the National Statistical System of Belarus, have procedures in place to ensure that resources are used in a cost-effective way. However, the Assessment Team noted that the principle of cost-effectiveness is not mentioned explicitly in the LSS and that a strategic reflection on the future allocation of resources between tasks and physical locations will be needed to maintain and improve current levels of cost-effectiveness.

Assessment per indicator

ESCoP indicator 10.1: Internal and independent external measures monitor the statistical authority's use of resources.

Internal financial management and control is exercised by the central office of Belstat, and the Belstat Board reviews the planned and actual use of financial resources. The Board also reviews the quality and use of human resources on an annual basis and can reallocate staff across the structural sub-divisions if needed. Staff are assessed in accordance with cross-government rules and practices and can be required to undergo further training if needed.

Whilst costs relating to Belstat can be fairly easily calculated, it is not yet possible to calculate a consolidated cost for the whole National Statistical System, and there is no standard way to provide costs of individual statistical activities or surveys.

The Ministry of Finance and the state treasury bodies conduct external audits of budgets and programme implementation.

The development of IT resources is included in the "Strategy 2022" for the Development of Official Statistics in Belarus.

A major challenge for the future will be to consider how new developments relating to areas such as technology, methodology and data sources will have an impact on resource use and allocation. Other countries have found a need to re-balance resource allocations between central and regional statistical bodies due to changes such as the greater use of electronic reporting. This point is covered further in Chapter 13.2.

ESCoP indicator 10.2: The productivity potential of information and communications technology is being optimised for data collection, processing and dissemination.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, several major IT developments have taken place in recent years to facilitate and standardise statistical production and dissemination, including an "Integrated Information System of the State Statistics of the Republic of Belarus" and an "Information-Analytical System of Dissemination of Official Statistical Information".

The centralised IT department facilitates the identification of ways to modernise statistical production. The creation of a centralised methodology department might also be considered in this context.

ESCoP indicator 10.3: Proactive efforts are being made to improve the statistical potential of administrative data and to limit recourse to direct surveys.

There is a growing use of administrative data for the production of official statistics in many statistical domains in Belarus (See also Chapter 9). Belstat is obliged to check the availability of administrative data before initiating new statistical surveys. A process has been put in place to establish agreements for the provision of administrative data. These agreements are signed by the Chairperson of Belstat and the head of the body providing the data.

ESCoP indicator 10.4: Statistical authorities promote and implement standardised solutions that increase effectiveness and efficiency.

Standardised information systems and methodologies are implemented via internal directives. UNECE's Generic Statistical Business Process Model (GSBPM) is used as a tool to standardise statistical production processes and identify areas for improvement.

Compliance with international statistical standards is required in all statistical domains, whilst other standards, such as those of the International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO) are used in areas such as QM and software maintenance.

Recommendations

29. Belstat should continue to keep under review the extent to which developments in technology, methodology and data sources could impact on the efficient allocation of resources across the organisation.
30. Belstat and the Other Producers of Official Statistical Information are encouraged to develop a methodology to estimate the cost of statistical production in a consistent way across the National Statistical System.

Chapter 11: P11 – Relevance

General assessment

The Law on State Statistics (LSS) under Article 8 includes users as one of the "parties to legal relations in State statistics", along with state statistics bodies, Other Producers of Official Statistical Information, and respondents. Users are defined as government bodies, other legal entities, citizens of Belarus and other countries including individual entrepreneurs, and foreign and international organisations. The law guarantees the users' right to equal access to statistical information and methodology, and to request and receive statistical information. While not obliged by law to carry out specific user consultations, Belstat has a legal framework in place which clearly recognises the interests of users within the National Statistical System. Topics of relevance to the user communities are discussed in the Inter-Agency Council on State Statistics and in the Scientific and Methodological Council.

Assessment per indicator

ESCoP Indicator 11.1: Processes are in place to consult users, monitor the relevance and utility of existing statistics in meeting their needs, and consider their emerging needs and priorities.

The LSS does not provide for a specific obligation to carry out consultations with users. However, the main institutional users are represented in the Inter-Agency Council on State Statistics and the Scientific and Methodological Council, which includes heads and deputy heads of the structural subdivisions of various State bodies as well as representatives of non-governmental organisations, businesses, academia and media. The needs of users are taken into account during the preparation of the Annual Programme of Statistical Works.

The current Strategy for the Development of State Statistics covers the years up until 2022. It includes a user interaction plan which foresees the establishment of a feedback channel for users, as well as regular user surveys to assess the credibility of official statistics and user satisfaction.

ESCoP Indicator 11.2: Priority needs are being met and reflected in the work programme.

The Annual Programme of Statistical Works is a comprehensive document outlining in detail the expected output of State statistics during the calendar year. It includes statistics produced by Belstat and other government bodies. The programme is developed by Belstat and discussed with the Inter-Agency Council on State Statistics prior to formal approval by the Council of Ministers.

ESCoP Indicator 11.3: User satisfaction is monitored on a regular basis and is systematically followed up.

Aside from the formal consultations in the Inter-Agency Council on State Statistics and the Scientific and Methodological Council, Belstat has developed a user questionnaire and published it on its official website in order to encourage user feedback. Although there is no way to assess whether the replies are representative of the wider user community, they are analysed at regular intervals and recommendations forwarded to the heads of Belstat's structural subdivisions and the main regional offices so that they can potentially be taken into account.

Recommendations

31. Belstat is encouraged, in consultation with the Inter-Agency Council on State Statistics, to continue to further improve the mechanisms for determining and assessing the needs of all users on a systematic and regular basis.

Chapter 12: P15 – Accessibility and clarity

General assessment

Belstat's website contains a large amount of publicly accessible data in various formats, ranging from PDF publications and predefined tables to interactive database solutions. All statistics are accompanied by corresponding metadata, but not always in a unified format. Since the last Global Assessment in 2013, a specific Policy on the Dissemination of Official Statistics has been introduced, the Belstat website has undergone modernisation and an Interactive Information Analytical System for the Dissemination of Official Statistics has been launched. Further streamlining of the website to make it more accessible for users and continued development towards more use of interactive dissemination channels are encouraged.

Assessment per indicator

ESCoP Indicator 15.1: Statistics and the corresponding metadata are presented, and archived, in a form that facilitates proper interpretation and meaningful comparisons.

A specific Policy for the Dissemination of Official Statistics has been in place since 2017. It is available online and stresses the need to comply with uniform standards, concepts, definitions and classifications. Belstat's statistical releases are accompanied by corresponding metadata. Objectives related to improvements in data dissemination are set out in the Strategy for the Development of State Statistics until 2022.

Official statistics compiled in accordance with the Annual Programme of Statistical Works are published on Belstat's official website, in line with the principle of equal access for all users. If requested, the same information can be provided on paper or via email. Belstat's dissemination practice is under continuous review and gradually moving towards more interactive dissemination channels. Training courses for users on the interpretation of statistical data and on working with statistical databases are organised regularly. Every year, representatives of Belstat give lectures on the dissemination of official statistical information at the Institute of Public Administration of the Academy of Public Administration under the aegis of the President of the Republic of Belarus. Measures to improve statistical literacy are also included in the Strategy for the Development of State Statistics until 2022.

Belstat's releases are very much confined to providing the basic statistical data and indicators and do not generally include contextual text to try, for example, to explain in plain language the factors underlying developments in the statistics presented. A more analytical approach, while keeping strictly to statistical facts, could contribute to making the statistical releases more interesting and accessible for the media and the general public

ESCoP Indicator 15.2: Dissemination services use modern information and communication technology and, if appropriate, traditional hard copy.

Belstat and the regional statistical bodies use a number of dissemination channels, ranging from traditional news releases, printed publications and predefined online tables to interactive database solutions and releases via social media. The Interactive Information Analytical System for the Dissemination of Official Statistics was introduced recently and enables the user to download, visualise and analyse statistics in .xls or .html format. The system should be refined and expanded, hence enabling Belstat to further reduce its reliance on printed publications and predefined tables.

ESCoP Indicator 15.3: Custom-designed analyses are provided when feasible and the public is informed.

Belstat maintains an "Information and Computing Centre" which provides customised statistics and analyses upon request and against payment. As regards ad-hoc requests from other government bodies, Belstat provides custom-designed analysis free of charge. These services are frequently based on mutually beneficial inter-agency agreements on information exchange (cf. Chapter 14.1). The Assessment Team recommends that such agreements be publicly accessible, along with the actual analyses.

ESCoP Indicator 15.4: Access to microdata is allowed for research purposes and is subject to specific rules or protocols.

Belstat allows the distribution of impersonal and non-identifiable microdata for research purposes against payment. Microdata are delivered to the customer by courier or electronic media. The Strategy for the Development of State Statistics until 2022 foresees a standard procedure for the dissemination of microdata for scientific purposes. The Assessment Team recommends that a specific policy on microdata access should set out in detail the conditions under which such data can be made available and the limitations on their use. The current provisions in the LSS granting access to microdata for research are somewhat vague and consideration might also be given to elaborating them in support of a more developed access policy.

ESCoP Indicator 15.5: Metadata are documented according to standardised metadata systems.

Belstat subscribes to the International Monetary Fund (IMF)'s Special Data Dissemination Standard (SDDS), last certified in 2019[2]. Statistics accessible through the Interactive Information Analytical System for Dissemination of Official Statistics are accompanied by metadata adhering to a unified structure. The methodology section on Belstat's website contains documentation on the design and calculation of statistical indicators, instructions for the organisation and implementation of statistical surveys, a brief glossary of statistical terms, and methodological provisions for the various statistical domains. All dissemination channels provide users with documentation in order to facilitate correct interpretation and analysis.

ESCoP Indicator 15.6: Users are kept informed about the methodology of statistical processes including the use of administrative data.

In line with the Policy for the Dissemination of Official Statistics, users are notified in advance of any significant changes in official methodology.

ESCoP Indicator 15.7: Users are kept informed about the quality of statistical outputs with respect to the quality criteria for Official Statistics.

Quality reports specifically aimed at the user community are currently published for some statistical domains. However, the Strategy for the Development of State Statistics until 2022 stresses the need for an efficient QMS taking user requirements into account.

Recommendations

Belstat is encouraged to:

32. Continue developing its website to make it more accessible to users, particularly the less proficient users. Training of users in this regard should be continued and expanded.

[2] https://dsbb.imf.org/Content/pdfs/AnnualReports/2018/BLR_SDDS_AR2018.pdf

33. Ensure, in line with the principle of equality of access, that tailor-made or other analyses provided regularly to government agencies, on the basis of inter-agency agreements outside the framework of the statistical programme, are accessible to all users.
34. Move, in line with developments internationally, towards more interactive database solutions in its dissemination practice, for both national and sub-national analyses, and consider reducing the amount of printed publications correspondingly. Predefined tables on Belstat's website should be presented in a unified format.
35. Continue developing and implementing its policy on facilitating greater microdata access for research purposes, with a particular focus on specifying in detail the conditions under which microdata can be made available and the limitations on the use of such data. Consideration might also be given to elaborating the provisions in the LSS relating to microdata access for research purposes.
36. Expand its interactive database to include more data and linked metadata, and further streamline its metadata in line with the Single Integrated Metadata Structure (SIMS) or other international standards.
37. Provide more statistical interpretation and context analysis when disseminating its statistical outputs.

Chapter 13: Organisational and structural aspects

13.1 Organisation of the National Statistical Institute

General assessment

The National Statistical Institute, Belstat, enjoys a high position in the public administration and is directly subordinated to the President of the country, with a chairperson being a high-level official of the Republic.

Belstat is comprised of the central office in Minsk (the National Public Authority for State Statistics), 7 statistical departments of regions and the city of Minsk, and 113 statistics units in districts and cities (local state statistics bodies).

The central office is mandated to pursue the state policy in the field of official statistics and, in this respect, has very strong regulatory and co-ordinating powers, particularly in regard to prescribing the methodologies and standards to be followed throughout the entire National Statistical System. The control of the National Statistical System is therefore quite centralised. On the other hand, the collection of data and the production and dissemination of statistics, which is largely undertaken through the network of regional and district offices, is highly decentralised. In the context of greater use of administrative data for statistical purposes and the adoption of more computer-based data collection, such as e-reporting, the long-term sustainability of such a structure must come into question.

The legal basis for the activities of Belstat, and those of the Other Producers of Official Statistical Information, is set down in the Law on State Statistics (LSS). The LSS was updated in 2016 to align it more closely with the Generic Law on Official Statistics (GLOS), which had recently been adopted by the Conference of European Statisticians. On the basis of its review of compliance with the ESCoP, which is detailed above, the Assessment Team believes that there is further scope for further improvement through greater alignment with the GLOS.

Description

LSS Article 9 “System of state statistics bodies” provides for a two-level central system made of the national public authority for state statistics (headquarters - Belstat) and the local state statistics bodies. The local level is further divided into two levels (regional and district).

Belstat is subordinated directly to the President of the Republic of Belarus, who appoints and dismisses the Chairperson of Belstat.

Belstat, managed by the Chairperson with the support of four deputy chairpersons, consists of 21 structural units and constitutes the national level. The second layer of the organisation, the regional level, consists of the statistical departments of the regions and Minsk City (7 units). The lowest level is the district level, which consists of 113 units in districts and cities (see Chapter 13.2). The system is completed by two state organisations subordinated to Belstat (see Chapter 13.3).

At the national level, strategic planning, coordination and the development of methodology, statistical tools and software is undertaken for the entire organisation. The headquarters is also responsible for: maintaining the system of classifications and the statistical register; international cooperation; and for providing official statistics at the national level.

At the local level, data are collected, processed and checked. The local offices in their territory are responsible for the preparation and dissemination of printed publications and their electronic versions, staff training, working with users and preparing analytical reports.

The whole system of Belstat employs approximately 1,700 persons, of which slightly more than 270 persons work in the headquarters and 1,460 persons in the local state statistics bodies.

The total funding from the state budget, including for census costs in 2019, is estimated at 21.5 million euro (of which, the census accounts for 0.5 million euro).

The organigram of the headquarters reveals a traditional stove-pipe structure with departments grouped by thematic domains (transport, agriculture, social statistics) or by horizontal functions (human resources, finance etc.). While there is a commitment towards the greater adoption of the GSBPM, its impact on the organisational structure has been quite limited up to now.

The internal network is used for storing selected administrative documents and other materials but seems not to be used for active communication with the staff.

Despite the updating of the Law on State Statistics in 2016 to take into account the recommendations set down in the GLOS adopted by the Conference of European Statisticians in 2016, the Assessment Team believes that there is scope for further improvement through greater alignment, in both scope and structure, with the GLOS. In particular, the Assessment Team would recommend:

- a more explicit recognition and underpinning of the professional independence of the Chairperson of Belstat;
- greater transparency around his/her recruitment and/or dismissal;
- an unambiguous clarification (in both the LSS and the Confidentiality Policy of Belstat) that the principle of statistical confidentiality applies to all data obtained by statistical agencies for statistical purposes, irrespective of source; and
- the adoption of further provisions to promote greater collaboration (e.g. sharing of confidential data) within the National Statistical System.

13.2 Regional structure

General assessment

The very large proportion of staff working in district and regional offices is justified by Belstat on the basis of meeting the need for having the staff working closer with local users and supervising the data collection at the source. The highly regionalised structure supports a very detailed statistical coverage, which is considered necessary to satisfy the needs of the users, but nevertheless Belstat should keep under review the need for rationalisation. It should be mentioned that such a decentralised structure, employing the vast majority of statistical staff outside the headquarters, is most likely generating high costs of data collection, which could be rationalised, especially in the era of electronic reporting and the automation of several processes in statistics.

Description

As indicated above the second layer of the organisation, the regional level, consists of statistical departments of regions and the Minsk City (7 units). The lowest level is the district level, which consists of 113 units in districts and cities. Belstat representatives informed that some of the smallest units in districts and cities consist of 2-3 staff, often hosted in the premises of the regional offices.

13.3 Other subordinated bodies

General assessment

As the two centres (Data Computing Centre - DCC - and Information Technology Centre - ITC) subordinated to Belstat constitute separate bodies and provide services to external customers they are likely to accumulate specific experience. Other Producers of Official Statistical Information can contract independently to use these services but there seems to be no policy to actively promote such contracting. Belstat might consider reviewing the efficiency and rationality of such an organisational arrangement and the ways in which the experience of the staff of both centres could be shared with the Other Producers of Official Statistical Information.

Description

There are two state organisations subordinated directly to Belstat: the Data Computing Centre (DCC) of the National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus and the Information Technology Centre (ITC) of the National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus. They have been established to support the functioning and maintenance of information systems, to disseminate official statistical information on a paid basis, to provide publishing services, to print publications and other functions.

The main task of the ITC is to ensure the development and maintenance of software for statistical purposes and the main task of the DCC is to sell statistical publications, provide tailor-made statistical services against payment and maintain hardware. Both centres, in addition to providing services to Belstat, have the right to sell their services externally. There are currently around 150 skilled IT staff employed by these two enterprises and it is estimated that between 30% and 50% of their work is accounted for by services provided to Belstat. The Other Producers of Official Statistical Information may contract independently to use the services of the two enterprises but there is no policy to actively promote such contracting. Accordingly, other parts of the National Statistical System may not benefit to the fullest extent from sharing processing etc. solutions developed by the two enterprises for Belstat.

Recommendations

Belstat is encouraged to:

38. Review the organisational structure of its headquarters in the context of the greater adoption of the GSBPM as the framework for implementing its statistical processes.
39. Establish an intranet for sharing and storing work related information in order to improve communications and to foster greater sharing of knowledge within the organisation.
40. Review the Law on State Statistics with a view to making it more compatible with the Generic Law on Official Statistics.
41. Continue to analyse and rationalise its current regional organisation in the light of increasingly centralised electronic reporting and greater use of administrative data for statistical purposes
42. Consider how the expertise developed by its subordinated bodies in developing statistical hardware and software solutions can be applied to a greater extent throughout the National Statistical System.

Chapter 14: Coordination

14.1 Coordination of the National Statistical System

General assessment

The Law on State Statistics (LSS) differentiates between *state statistics bodies* and O*ther Producers of Official Statistical Information* (Article 8). The state statistics bodies consist of Belstat and the seven regional and 113 local statistical authorities. The regional and local authorities are mainly involved in data collection, surveys and relations with respondents, providing data to Belstat for further processing and dissemination.

Article 9(2) of the LSS states that Belstat shall exercise "regulation, control and coordination" of the activities of other government bodies and organisations. The role of Belstat as the coordinator of the entire National Statistical System thus has a firm legal basis.

The Other Producers of Official Statistical Information, as listed in the Strategy for the Development of State Statistics until 2022, include the following:

- The National Bank of the Republic of Belarus (banking, money and credit, financial market, balance of payments, international investment position, gross external debt and financial sustainability statistics);
- the Ministry of Finance (government finance statistics);
- the Ministry of Architecture and Construction (statistics on prices in construction);
- the Ministry of Health (health statistics);
- the Ministry of Culture (culture statistics);
- the Ministry of Forestry (statistics on husbandry and use of forest resources);
- the Ministry of Education (education statistics);
- the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection (environmental and natural resource statistics);
- the Ministry of Communications and Informatics (post and telecommunications statistics);
- the Ministry of Transport and Communications (transport statistics);
- the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection (statistics on labour conditions and safety, unemployment and social protection).

It is sometimes not explicitly specified whether these Other Producers of Official Statistical Information are actually in charge of the entire production and dissemination process, or simply providers of data/statistics to Belstat for further processing and dissemination. The establishment of unambiguous criteria for the definition of "Other Producers of Official Statistical Information" would thus be desirable.

The LSS establishes an Inter-Agency Council on State Statistics (Article 7) which consists of representatives of Belstat and the Other Producers of Official Statistical Information, as well as users, respondents and academia. The Inter-Agency Council is an advisory body set up with the aim to coordinate the activities of the state statistics bodies and Other Producers of Official Statistical Information, and to review the output of official statistics and deal with selected issues pertaining to the organisation and conduct of statistical surveys. The Inter-Agency Council is chaired by the Chairperson of Belstat.

In cooperation with the Other Producers of Official Statistical Information, Belstat develops a five-year Strategy for the Development of State Statistics (Article 14). Based on this multi-annual strategy, the annual statistical work programme is elaborated and presented for

discussion in the Inter-Agency Council of State Statistics prior to approval by the Council of Ministers. The annual statistical work programme covers the activities of both the state statistics bodies and the Other Producers of Official Statistical Information.

Further coordination mechanisms exist in the form of 34 bilateral agreements creating mutual rights and obligations between Belstat and other government agencies. These agreements typically give Belstat access to administrative data from the partner agency while the other party receives certain data from Belstat. The information provided by Belstat under these agreements is finally compiled and ready for release as official statistical information.

Overall, there are strong legal and other mechanisms for the coordination of the National Statistical System. Nevertheless, the Assessment Team proposes a number of measures as set down in the recommendations below in order to further strengthen the coordination and functioning of the NSS.

Recommendations

43. The Law on State Statistics and other legislation governing statistics should be reviewed in order to ensure that uniform and harmonised provisions are set down governing the interpretation and implementation of the statistical principles throughout the National Statistical System, particularly those covering statistical confidentiality, dissemination and response burden.
44. The Law on State Statistics should be amended to allow for the sharing of confidential data between Belstat and the Other Producers of Official Statistical Information where such sharing is necessary for the compilation of official statistics.
45. The Law on State Statistics should be amended to clearly distinguish between state organisations that produce and disseminate official statistics (i.e. Other Producers of Official Statistical Information) and those that only forward individual or aggregated data to Belstat for statistical purposes.
46. Belstat is encouraged to strengthen further its coordinating role in relation to Other Producers of Official Statistical Information, particularly in the areas of reducing response burden and adopting harmonised and uniform methods in relation to statistical confidentiality and dissemination.
47. Belstat and the Other Producers of Official Statistical Information should intensify their cooperation in sharing technologies and training opportunities for staff.

14.2 Coordination of international cooperation and donors

General assessment

International cooperation undertaken by Belstat is regulated by the LSS and the Statute. Belstat participates in a number of different international activities and benefits from donor assistance from different international organisations. It is also engaged in cross-border and bilateral cooperation with regions and countries. Strategic policy and strong coordination of assistance is needed to benefit from the activities and assistance in an efficient way. In the longer run, a strengthening of the international cooperation team should be considered to cope with increasing tasks and challenges.

Description

The participation of Belstat in international cooperation is regulated under the LSS Articles 6 and 10. Belstat is very active in international statistical cooperation, participating in international structures and initiatives such as the United Nations Statistical Commission (2017-

2020), ICP Governing Board, Inter-Agency Expert Group on Violence against Children and Inter-Agency Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goals Indicators. It also takes part in several EU-funded regional projects: EU4Energy, Shared Environmental Information System (SEIS), II East and "Make It Match" experts' network.

Belstat is preparing for the implementation of an EU twinning project in statistics and participates in EU statistical cooperation activities dedicated to the Eastern Partnership (EaP) such as the High-Level Seminars for the top management of the Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA) countries, training courses in statistics and the Statistics Through Eastern Partnership (STEP) programme.

It benefits from a number of international technical assistance projects provided by various organisations: UNFPA and UNICEF (gender-relevant information), World Bank, UNICEF, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and Government of Russian Federation (situation of children, women and persons with disabilities), UNDP and UNICEF (Platform for the SDGs) and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) (support for the 2019 Population and Housing Census). It uses the EU's TAIEX instrument for selected methodological issues (e.g. construction of the SEEA water physical accounts and development of the Quality Management System).

Belstat hosts international statistical events and participates in a number of international events abroad (in 2018 it took part in 79 such events). It provides statistical data to major organisations (EU, UN and its agencies, Commonwealth of Independent States - CIS, etc.) and is involved in bilateral and cross-border cooperation established on the basis of dedicated memoranda of understanding and agreements with selected countries and regions.

It took part in the World Health Organisation (WHO) supported innovative pilot project on developing the methodology for the estimation of the individual alcohol consumption by the society. Other donor supported pilot surveys (concerning labour market and disability) were later on included into the regular programme of Belstat surveys.

Such diverse activity requires appropriate strategic approach and planning in order to use the donor assistance in an efficient way and ensure sustainable results. Discussions with representatives of international organisations revealed that Belstat is very much committed to the cooperation. Diverse international cooperation activities require also appropriate resources. At present there are four staff members dealing with international cooperation within a department dealing also with other issues and assisting not only the top managers, but other organisational units. In view of the rapidly extending scope of international cooperation, especially with the EU (twinning, STEP programme) it would be justified to consider creating a separate cooperation unit with a clear mandate for cooperation situated close to the top decision makers for better strategic planning of the cooperation and donor coordination.

Recommendations

48. Belstat is encouraged to take a more strategic and planned approach to seeking technical assistance and initiating projects funded by development partners. Top management should take the initiative in this regard and should consider strengthening its International Co-operation Department to assist it in coordinating donor activities and preparing strategic decisions on donor funded projects, using a top-down approach.

14.3 Sustainable Development Goal Indicators

General Assessment

Belstat has taken an active role in coordinating the production of statistics on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Belarus. Belstat representatives are engaged in national coordination mechanisms including the Council for Sustainable Development. Belstat has developed a national roadmap for statistics on the SDGs, based on the recommendations of the Conference of European Statisticians. This has included the creation of a national reporting platform, with support from UNICEF and UNDP. This platform contained information on 174 SDG indicators at the time of the first mission, with more being added as they become available. Future plans include greater use of geospatial information and the development of sub-national indicators.

Description

Belstat is active both at the national and international level regarding the development of statistics for the SDGs. In Belarus there are currently around 26 data producers involved in providing the data needed for the SDGs. Belstat has taken a coordinating role, which strengthens its position as coordinator of the National Statistical System. There are plans to integrate the management of SDG indicators with the state information system to automate data exchange.

Civil society organisations in Belarus are involved in the SDG indicator process, including through representation in the steering council. The use of non-government data for SDG indicators is possible in theory. A recent survey on violence against women by one Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) was felt to have too small a sample size to guarantee the required level of quality, so Belstat is launching a much larger survey. However, the NGO survey was seen as very useful as a pilot exercise.

Regional SDG indicators are being developed in partnership between Belstat headquarters, region and district offices and local administrations. Some of these are common across all regions, and some are specific to individual regions. The national reporting platform will be expanded to cover regional indicators from 2020.

Work is going on to increase the number of indicators for which data are available disaggregated by gender, age and other variables, including through a current multi-indicator cluster survey (MICS).

At the international level, Belarus has been a member of the global Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators since 2017, representing other countries in the Eastern Europe region. This membership has now been confirmed for a second term. Belstat is also involved in a pilot exercise with the International Labour Organisation (ILO) regarding the transfer of data using the Statistical Data and Metadata eXchange (SDMX) standard.

There is strong interest in the greater use of geospatial information for SDG indicators, and a cross-governmental group is currently considering this. There is a clear need for further capacity development in this area.

Recommendations

Belstat is encouraged to:

49. Continue to develop statistics and indicators for the purposes of the SDGs in order to fill the remaining gaps, including for disaggregated data.

50. Engage with national and international statistical and geospatial organisations to develop its capacity to use geospatial information in the production and presentation of SDG indicators and statistics.
51. Use the SDGs as a catalyst and mechanism to increase its coordinating role in the provision of official statistics in the country and to international bodies.

Chapter 15: Macroeconomic statistics

Macroeconomic statistics are described by category as follows:

- National accounts
- Government finance statistics
- External trade statistics
- Balance of payment statistics
- Consumer Price Index (CPI), including purchasing power parities and housing prices

15.1 National accounts

General assessment

From 1 January 2016, SNA 2008 forms the methodological basis for national accounts in Belarus. Research and Development expenditure and military expenditure are recorded according to the SNA 2008 principles, rent of owner-occupied dwellings has been introduced and the Financial Intermediation Services Indirectly Measured (FISIM) estimations refined. The time series of annual and quarterly indicators of national accounts have been recalculated back to 2009.

During the implementation of the SNA 2008, several other improvements were undertaken: a new classification to properly allocate units to institutional sectors was developed and implemented, calculation of net taxes on products at constant prices and estimations of the non-observed economy were improved and the list of products for the input-output tables increased, Tourism Satellite Account (TSA) for 2014 and 2016 and a pilot Satellite Account for Education and Training (SAET) for 2016 were developed.

Belarus national accounts data are to a large extent compliant with the SNA 2008 framework, but implementation and publication of financial accounts and supply-use tables remain to be accomplished. In consultation with users, the need for monthly GDP and GRP should be kept under continued review and assessed against the strain on resources and the statistical volatility of the estimates.

Description

The main department of national accounts of Belstat produces the national accounts statistics in Belarus. The 36 employees allocated to this work are divided between the central (22) and the regional levels (14). Production of national accounts relies on Belstat's own primary statistical data, but also on data produced by other public authorities, including the Other Producers of Official Statistical Information (e.g. the National Bank of the Republic of Belarus and the Ministry of Finance). This work is coordinated through the Inter-Agency Working Group on Macroeconomic Statistics.

The institutional sector accounts are produced according to the SNA 2008. The underlying classifications for national accounts are the national classification "Types of Economic Activities (OKED)" which is harmonised with EU NACE Rev. 2, the national "Classification of products by economic activity" (CPA 2008), COICOP, COFOG, the statistical classification "Institutional units by sectors of economy" and others.

Since 1994 and 2011 respectively, Belstat publishes monthly GDP and GRP in line with the production approach. These aggregates are based on primary statistical data collected monthly from the enterprises. The Assessment Team was told that the existing practice is based on the great interest in monthly GDP and GRP estimates shown by key users. The monthly updates of

GDP and GRP are published on the 17th-18th day of the month following the reference month, with cumulative estimates and year-on-year comparisons in constant prices published instead of estimates for the discrete monthly periods.

It should be taken into account that such monthly aggregates can have rather limited value for policy making and economic and monetary analyses, as they are exposed to seasonal and calendar impact, like the quarterly aggregates. A greater focus on monthly and quarterly sectoral indicators (e.g. industrial output, retail trade, construction, external trade of goods and services) could provide a firmer basis for meeting users' needs for short-term economic indicators.

For the calculation of GDP and some of its components in constant prices, Belstat uses the chain linking method. It publishes the quarterly GDP including the sub-elements of the expenditure approach in constant prices with accompanying deflators and the information on seasonal adjustment on its website. The availability of annual data in constant prices on the Belstat website is, however, limited.

Quarterly GDP and GRP are produced by using the production, expenditure and income approaches. The level of detail is high: 69 sections of economic activities are calculated for the country as a whole and seven regions under the production approach, and for the country as a whole under the income approach. Since different data sources are used, statistical discrepancies appear and Belstat uses balancing items under the expenditure and income approaches. The use of supply and use tables would enhance the quality of the reconciliation of all three approaches.

First estimates of quarterly GDP are published on the 17th-18th day and second estimates on the 90th day after the end of the reference quarter. Belstat increases step-by step the availability of the quarterly GDP/GRP data in its interactive public database, while static tables are available in the national accounts section of the website. It can be said that the static tables on quarterly national accounts devote too much attention to figures on the internal structure of the GDP, something that is more relevant for the annual national accounts.

Belstat has been producing and publishing annual input-output tables at current prices since 2003, first distinguishing 31 products and since 2016 for 83 products. Supply-use tables are not produced, mainly due to the unavailability of data on the use-side.

Belstat does not produce financial accounts, but the Strategy 2022 foresees implementation of this part of the national accounts.

Belstat publishes its national accounts tables at detailed level in the interactive public database (about 50 time series of indicators starting from 1990) and in paper-based publications, which are downloadable for free in the pdf-format. These publications contain very good methodological descriptions, besides the methodological documents, which Belstat publishes on its website. However, and very importantly, the publications contain a vast number of tables at current prices and only very few of them in constant prices. Moreover, some professional users told the Assessment Team that Belstat should refrain from printing the plain tables and decisively use the electronic publications of national accounts data in the interactive database.

In the interactive database the time series may contain different units, due to the nominal reform of the national currency unit in 2016. This approach makes interpretation of data more difficult, notably when using the diagram feature of the database.

Recommendations

Belstat is encouraged to:

52. Continue to improve its approach towards the production and dissemination of macroeconomic statistics at constant prices, availing of the rich array of price indices already available.
53. Keep under review the continued need for the monthly GDP and GRP estimates in view of the burden imposed and the increasingly high volatility of such compound macroeconomic statistical measures and to focus instead on improving the timeliness of the higher quality quarterly GDP and related statistics.
54. Continue its efforts towards full implementation of SNA 2008 in accordance with its step-by-step strategy, focusing first, in cooperation with the relevant Other Producers of Official Statistical Information, on financial accounts.
55. Give continued priority to developing annual supply-use tables and apply these in reconciling GDP estimates produced in accordance with the production, expenditure and income approaches.

15.2 Government finance statistics

General assessment

Government Finance Statistics (GFS) are compiled by the Ministry of Finance of Belarus. Reporting on the execution of national and local budgets and the use of the Social Security Fund form the main sources of information for the GFS. The transactions of the general government sector are to a large extent recorded on a cash basis and are used for the quarterly and annual accounts for the general government sector that are produced by Belstat. The Ministry of Finance (MoF) follows the Government Finance Statistics Manuals of the International Monetary Fund (GFSM 2001 and 2014). The data on revenues, expenditures, balance and debt for both the general and central government are published by the MoF following the IMF SDDS standard on a monthly and quarterly basis.

Description

The formal basis for production and dissemination of GFS is the Statute of the Ministry of Finance. The GFS are mainly based on the administrative data collected by the MoF in the course of budget execution process. The MoF is one of the Other Producers of Official Statistical Information in Belarus. A dedicated GFS unit employs five people, publishes GFS data on the MoF website and submits data directly to the international organisations. Prior to publication, the data are approved by the senior ministerial management.

The interaction between the MoF and Belstat is well established and formalised in a bilateral agreement. The MoF is a member of the standing Inter-Agency Working Group on Macroeconomic Statistics where interrelated topics are discussed. The Assessment Team was told that an alignment exercise is undertaken by the respective producers by comparing the GFS, sectoral accounts and the Balance of Payments data, but the underlying procedure and the regularity seems not to be firmly established.

Since the GFS are mainly based on the budget accounting, national specificities as for allocation of units to the institutional sectors and recording of transactions may apply. Yet, according to the annual work programme of the NSS, the MoF is obliged to produce the data on government operations (i.e. flow data) and on debt (part of stock data) according to the IMF SDDS.

GFS are to a major extent based on a cash recording method (revenue and expenses are recorded when cash is received or disbursed) and not on accrual basis (at the time the transaction occurs). This results in corresponding recording of general government expenditure in national accounts as well. The general government sector accounts at constant prices are compiled by extrapolating of values at current prices.

The statistical classification "Institutional units by economic sector" and the principles established in the SNA 2008 and the GFSM 2014 are used for sectoral delineation of statistical units. The allocation of units is automated where feasible. A dedicated group consisting of representatives of the MoF, the National Bank of the Republic of Belarus, and government agencies also deals with concrete cases of sectoral allocation.

Compilation of financial accounts by institutional sectors as described in Chapter 15.1. is of significant importance for coherent and consistent presentation of GFS. As also mentioned above, the action plan for implementation of the Strategy 2022 includes development and implementation of financial accounts.

The main fiscal data are published based on the IMF SDDS on the fiscal data page of the MoF. The internationally widely used fiscal indicators as part of the main economic indicators (e.g. deficit/surplus to GDP, debt to GDP) can be found in semi-annual macro-economic snapshots of the MoF. Publication of these basic macroeconomic indicators, as well as the underlying GFS data, in the public statistical database of Belstat is highly recommended.

The data on operations of the central government (revenues, expenditures, balance, source of financing) are published by the MoF monthly and the same data of the general government quarterly. The quarterly data is released within 65 days, i.e. earlier than required in the EU. The release deadlines for annual GFS data (10 months following the reference year) differ to only minor extent from those laid down in the EU. The central government debt data are published on a monthly basis. The GFS data are accompanied by metadata.

Quarterly data on the split of tax revenues, social expenditures and the annual detailed breakdown of government expenditures according to the COFOG classification are also published by the MoF.

Recommendations

56. The Ministry of Finance is encouraged to continue work on the adoption of the accruals approach for recording Government Finance Statistics.
57. Belstat and the Ministry of Finance are encouraged to calculate the main internationally comparable fiscal indicators, such as the deficit and debt of the general government to GDP ratios, and to include them in their dissemination programmes.

15.3 External Trade Statistics

General assessment

External trade statistics in Belarus are based on national legislation, on recommendations set out in UN manuals and on various legal acts including the customs code of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). Statistical data are used for intra-EAEU trade, while administrative (customs) data are used for trade with third countries. Belstat engages in data exchange with the other member states of the EAEU and some other countries and takes part in regular EAEU mirror exercises to sort out potential discrepancies.

Initial processing of both statistical and customs data are carried out by the State Customs Committee (SCC) which provides Belstat with a database of external trade data for further

processing. Further quality checks are carried out at Belstat, including time series analyses of volumes and prices and with specific partner countries, identification of outliers and comparisons with other statistical surveys.

Progress has been made in many areas in recent years, notably the implementation of the new EAEU commodity nomenclature and the introduction of an interactive foreign trade database which is subject to continuous development.

Description

The legal basis for the production of external trade statistics is the Law on State Statistics, the Statute of Belstat and the customs code and various legal acts of the EAEU. Belstat's Department of Foreign Trade Statistics and the SCC are the responsible authorities in charge of collecting, processing and disseminating external trade statistics. The Department of Foreign Trade Statistics has 10 staff members. In addition, personnel at the regional offices and in the SCC are involved.

Methodologies are based on United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) manuals and on guidelines applicable to the member states of the EAEU. Extensive documentation is available on Belstat's website in the form of Belstat regulations, in particular regulation No. 107 of 5 November 2019. The most important international classifications are the EAEU commodity nomenclature (based on the Harmonised System - HS 2017), Standard International Trade Classification (SITC) and a national adaptation of NACE Rev. 2.

External trade statistics use data from three sources. For trade with the other member states of the EAEU, declarations from exporters and importers collected specifically for statistical purposes are used. Trade with all other countries is recorded via regular goods declarations provided by the SCC. In addition, monthly reports from enterprises are used for certain categories of goods (petrol, gas condensate, electricity, potassium and nitrogen fertiliser). These reports are collected by Belstat as part of the regular statistical reporting process. Administrative data are used for private individuals' import of vehicles and for the export of certain agricultural crops. Imputations are made for non-observable trade in certain specific goods like clothing, shoes and tobacco products.

The initial processing of data from both the statistical and goods declarations is carried out by the SCC. The processing steps include arithmetic and logical checks, completeness checks, verification of compliance with classifications and checks against statistical registers and the taxpayer register. The SCC subsequently prepares the customs statistics database and forwards it to Belstat. Data collected through the regular statistical reporting procedure are validated by Belstat or at regional level.

Further quality checks are carried out at Belstat, including time series analyses of volumes and prices and with specific partner countries, identification of outliers down to the ten-digit level of the EAEU commodity classification, and comparisons with other statistical surveys. If any errors are detected, these are dealt with by either Belstat or the SCC, depending on the source.

Preliminary annual data for the preceding year are published on 20 February and final annual data on 30 June. Monthly data are published in the month following the reporting period. All releases are pre-announced in the release calendar. Statistics are published in the form of news releases and predefined tables and charts, in printed publications and in an interactive foreign trade database which will be developed further in the future.

Planned revisions of annual and monthly data are taking place monthly for the previous months of the current year, and annually in order to adjust the annual and monthly figures for the

previous year. Special revisions are carried out in line with Belstat's general revision policy whenever required due to changes in methods or classifications.

The Eurasian Economic Commission organises an annual mirror exercise among the EAEU member states. In addition, Belstat exchanges data with Azerbaijan, Georgia, Lithuania, Slovenia, Tajikistan and Ukraine on a regular basis.

Recommendations

58. Belstat is encouraged to continue its cooperation with Belarus's main trading partners in carrying out mirror exercises and other projects of shared interest.

15.4 Balance of Payments

General assessment

According to the Banking Code of the Republic of Belarus, the balance of payments, international investment position and external debt statistics are produced and published by the National Bank of Belarus (NBB).

The methodology used since 2011 is based on the sixth edition of the Balance of Payments and International Investment Position Manual (BPM) (IMF 2009), the SNA 2008, the 2013 External Debt Statistics (EDS) Guide (External Debt Statistics: Guide for Compilers and Users, IMF 2013) and other relevant international guidelines and instructions. The Balance of Payments, data on the international investment position and external debt for 1993 – 2011 are produced and published according to the fifth edition of the BPM.

The data and the methodological documentation are made available on a dedicated section of the NBB website, in Belarusian, Russian and English. The quarterly Balance of Payments and International Investment Position statements according to the BPM6 date back to year 2000. The NBB subscribes to the IMF Special Data Dissemination Standard (SDDS).

The Inter-Agency Working Group on macro-economic statistics coordinates the relevant activities between the main producers of macro-economic statistics.

Description

Balance of payments, international investment position and external debt statistics constitute just one pillar of the NBB statistical system, which includes also banking and financial statistics, statistics on resilience of the financial system and monetary statistics. A department of thirteen people is in charge of the external sector and banking statistics.

The balance of payments is produced for five institutional sectors where the data sources vary sector by sector. For the financial sector, the NBB applies the system of bank reporting. On the non-financial sector, Belstat, the State Customs Committee, the Ministry of Finance and other government authorities collect and submit data to compile balance of payments, international investment position and external debt data. Belstat collects data on international trade in goods and services, the external liabilities of non-financial organisations against the rest of the world, foreign investments in Belarus and investments abroad by its residents. Additionally, the NBB gets data from different administrative sources, state owned enterprises, the statistical authorities of the partner countries and international organisations. Data are collected on a monthly or quarterly basis. Belarus compiles bilateral balances of payments with the Russian Federation and Ukraine. There are also bilateral data collection agreements in place for data on portfolio and direct investments.

The new phenomena in international trade (e.g. internet trade), financial transactions and active cross-border trade pose challenges for external sector statistics in all national statistical systems. For this reason, the NBB has compiled several ad-hoc surveys to better cover non-observed flows of fuels, cars, internet sales, etc. In 2014, an Inter-Agency Working Group was established to deal with complementary measures beyond the conventional data collection and the NBB continues actively to explore new potential data sources and methods.

The classifications used for balance of payments statistics are in line with the IMF recommendations.

Statistics produced by the NBB are clear and easily accessible on its website. Data are accompanied by general metadata and the description of methodology. The NBB follows the dissemination policy established by Belstat. The data release calendar is available for users. Moreover, the central indicators of the external sector statistics are published on the National Summary Database operated by Belstat.

Important international dissemination channels are the statistical publications of international organisations, e.g. the IMF's international financial statistics and annual balance of payments, the external debt data of the World Bank, the annual release on international trade of goods and services of the United Nations. IMF states in its assessment under Article IV Consultation (January 2019) that "*the coverage and methodological soundness of the external sector statistics are fully in line with international standards".*

Recommendations

59. Belstat is encouraged to further develop and expand as appropriate the remit of the Inter-Agency Working Group on Macro-economic Statistics to improve the comparability and coherence of external sector statistics and to develop new data sources.

15.5 Consumer Price Index (including Purchasing Power Parities - PPP - and house prices)

General assessment

The Consumer Price Index (CPI) in Belarus has a solid legal and methodological basis. Extensive documentation on methodology and compilation is available and accessible to the public, and training of staff is given high priority. The decentralised structure of the National Statistical System in Belarus is reflected in the organisation of CPI production, with the seven regional offices playing a major role in data collection and validation, using standardised software. The number of staff involved is correspondingly high.

The Belarus CPI covers only cash expenditures by households. Practices to ensure adequate coverage of outlets and products seem to be in place. Although data collection is still based to a large extent on field work, Belstat is also looking into alternative approaches, like data from cash registers. As transition from traditional data collection to new data sources can be a time-consuming process, efforts to look into such new sources should be encouraged.

Description

In addition to the Law on State Statistics and the Statute of Belstat, the Law on the indexation of population income of 21 December 1990 forms the legal basis for the production of the CPI in Belarus. The law establishes the measurement of inflation for indexation purposes as the main purpose of the CPI. This implies that the CPI coverage is limited to household cash expenditure only. CPI production is based on the IMF Consumer Price Index Manual (2004)

and on national manuals on CPI methodology and compilation. The CPI is produced and disseminated in line with the Classification of individual consumption by purpose (COICOP). Preparations for the introduction of COICOP 2018 have been initiated.

The CPI team in Belstat's price statistics department consists of five staff, with a further 95 staff working full-time on price statistics in the regional offices. Staff at the regional offices are mainly involved in price collection and validation. They have to undergo training and pass a test on theoretical aspects and the use of relevant software before they are allowed to do actual field work.

Data are collected in a selection of 31 towns throughout the country, covering 50% of the population. However, the weights applied in the calculation of the overall CPI refer to all households. Belstat does not regard this a significant bias. The selection of retail outlets, based on the volume of sales and on information from surveys on household expenditure, includes large organisations like department stores and supermarkets, medium-sized and small shops, markets, and service providers.

Sales volumes and household expenditure data are also used in order to determine the composition of the product sample, which is revised annually. The total number of goods and services is 473, of which approximately 35% are food products, 50% non-food products, and 15% services. Approximately 67,000 prices are collected each month. Registration of prices is carried out using tablets. While still mostly relying on traditional data collection methods, Belstat is also looking into alternative approaches, notably access to data from cash registers.

The weights structure is based on household expenditure data with additional information from other statistical sources.

The initial validation of the primary data is carried out in the regional offices, applying checks of completeness of goods and services and of outlets, performing arithmetic and logical controls and ensuring compliance with classifications. Each regional office subsequently prepares a database of validated data and submits it to Belstat, which produces an aggregate database comprising data from all regions.

Belstat undertakes further validation steps, including the analysis of time series at national and regional level, verification of the range of values of average prices by region, and comparing the results with other statistical surveys like the Producer Price Index. Prices for goods that are temporarily unavailable due to e.g. seasonality are imputed using similar goods as a proxy. Both explicit and implicit methods of quality adjustment are applied.

Elementary indices are calculated at regional level and aggregated into a consolidated CPI using Laspeyres-type index formula.

The CPI at national and regional level is released on the 9th or 10th day following the reporting period, as pre-announced in the release calendar. CPI data are published on Belstat's interactive data portal (annual data only) and in the form of predefined tables or downloadable files in .doc or .xls-format. Belstat also disseminates detailed price data for e.g. food and housing, as well as a "core inflation" CPI which does not include goods and services that are influenced by administrative or seasonal factors.

Recommendations

Belstat is encouraged to:

60. Examine the use of new data sources for use in the compilation of the CPI, notably scanner data and data from internet platforms.

61. Continue its preparations for the 2020 round of the International Comparison Program (ICP).

Chapter 16: Business statistics

Business statistics categories are described as follows:

- Statistical business register
- Structural business/business demography statistics
- Short-term statistics
- Production of manufactured goods

16.1 Statistical Business Register (SBR)

General Assessment

Belstat maintains a Statistical Business Register, which is used as a sampling frame for business surveys, and a direct source for statistics on business demography. The business register is based mainly on administrative data, but also incorporates information from statistical surveys. The SBR follows international standards and classifications, though currently enterprises are directly equivalent to legal units. Individual entrepreneurs were added to the register in 2017, improving the coverage of smaller units. Future plans include publishing business demography statistics based on Eurostat / Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) methodology and introducing geographic coordinates for units in the register. This is necessary to facilitate the linking of SBR with other registers and datasets.

Description

Belstat has developed a comprehensive SBR based on a range of sources including statistical surveys and administrative data from the Single State Register of Legal Entities and Individual Entrepreneurs, tax records, and various other sources. A range of consistency and coverage checks are carried out to improve quality and reduce duplication. Over-coverage of units that have ceased their activities is not seen as a major issue, because businesses are required to inform authorities within five days if they cease trading.

Administrative units are converted into three statistical units, the enterprise and local unit broadly follow international definitions, whilst the third unit, "Asset holder" is a purely national unit reflecting a part of an enterprise in a specific location that compiles separate accounts. At present, enterprises are equivalent to legal units, and there is no profiling of groups of legal units. Given the plans to introduce business demography statistics, it is important that the definition of the enterprise is fully applied for the data to be internationally comparable, so profiling of groups of legal units will need to be considered.

There are plans to introduce geographic codes for units in the SBR, starting from 2020, in cooperation with the National Cadastral Agency. This will include standardising the format of addresses, in line with the format used by the cadastral agency.

Recommendations

Belstat is encouraged to:

62. Study the international experience and good practices for the profiling of groups of legal entities to determine cases where two or more legal entities might be consolidated into one enterprise.
63. Continue with the planned introduction of geographic coordinates for units in the Statistical Business Register.

16.2 Structural Business Statistics (SBS)

General Assessment

Belstat produces a range of Structural Business Statistics indicators, which are in line with European Union standards and classifications. Different employment size-classes are used for national purposes, but statistics are also disseminated using the standard international definitions of small, medium and large enterprises. A mixture of quarterly and annual statistical surveys, together with administrative data are used. Most survey data are collected electronically, using computer-assisted web interviewing (CAWI) techniques. Future plans include reducing the burden for micro-enterprises, and further improvements in line with the relevant European Union Regulations.

Description

Belstat's SBS are based on a range of sources including exhaustive annual surveys for large, medium and small enterprises. For micro-enterprises (15 persons or less employed) a sample survey is used, with a sample size of around 20%. However, every three years an exhaustive survey is also conducted for these enterprises. Large and medium enterprises (more than 100 persons employed) are also subject to exhaustive quarterly surveys. Response rates are high – from 96% for micro-enterprises to 100% for large and medium enterprises.

Administrative data from the Ministry of Taxes and Duties, and the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection are used as additional sources, particularly for micro-enterprises.

Since electronic data collection was introduced in 2013, the take-up rates by businesses have grown to around 83% for micro-enterprises and up to 100% for large and medium enterprises, greatly reducing the volume of paper forms to be processed.

SBS are released in July of the following year and follow European Union standards for data and metadata.

There are plans to reduce response burdens for micro-enterprises by moving to an exhaustive survey once every five years, rather than every three years as at present.

16.3 Short-term Statistics (STS) including Producer Price Index (PPI)

General assessment

Belstat has an extensive data collection system in place for STS and is therefore able to provide a wide range of short-term indicators describing the short-term economic development. Belstat covers most variables in the STS regulation and made considerable progress over the recent years with the introduction of: NACE Rev. 2 and CPA 2008; a sample approach according to the Probability Proportional to Size (PPS) principle for small and micro enterprises; and the introduction of chain-linking for STS indices. A drawback with some indicators is the lack of any seasonal or calendar adjustment of series. In line with earlier recommendations concerning use of exhaustive data collection, Belstat could also consider widening the use of sample surveys in STS.

Description

Belstat introduced samples in STS for small and micro enterprises whereas data on large and medium enterprises are collected exhaustively. Industry data are collected exhaustively for large and medium enterprises on a monthly basis, whereas data for small enterprises are collected through sample surveys. In addition, data on micro enterprises are collected through

an annual sample survey. Construction data are collected exhaustively for large and medium enterprises on a monthly basis, whereas small and micro enterprises are collected through quarterly sample surveys. For retail and wholesale trade, large, medium and small enterprises are covered exhaustively on a monthly basis, whereas micro units are sampled. To cover individuals engaged in retail and wholesale trade, administrative data are used. In order to obtain information on the structure of goods sold by individual entrepreneurs and individuals in the markets, interviewers carry out a quarterly sample survey of the volume of retail sales of goods by the specified group of sellers. In general, the sample methodology for small and micro enterprises follows the PPS principle.

Thanks to the extensive data collection in place, Belstat collects most of the variables in the STS regulation, including annex A: industry, annex B: retail trade, annex C: construction and annex D: other services. Furthermore, Belstat collects and compiles several financial indicators on a monthly basis, which is organised through the system of STS.

The introduction of the new national classification of types of economic activities as well as the classification of products by economic activity was completed for the STS in 2016. The activity classification corresponds to NACE revision 2 on four-digit level and the product classification corresponds to CPA 2008 at six-digit level. Belstat plans to introduce COICOP for retail trade statistics.

Chain linking is applied to indices for industrial production, retail trade as well as the PPI. Based on UNIDO recommendations the industrial production index is a monthly chain linked Laspeyres type index. Weights are updated yearly based on structural industry data. A Laspeyres type index was introduced in the PPI starting in 2018 and the methodology for the PPI is provided by the IMF Producer Price Index Manual. Indices are compiled for products sold to the domestic and export markets and for the total production/PPI. Some methods for adjusting for quality change are applied to price observations. The weights of the PPI are updated every 5 years.

STS data are disseminated in the interactive database on Belstat's webpage and the various indicators follow a predetermined revision schedule. Industry indicators are revised twice before final estimates are provided twelve months following the reference period. Construction, wholesale and retail trade indicators are revised on a fixed date in the year following the reference period, and the PPI is revised when the following month's preliminary estimates are disseminated. Calendar and seasonally adjusted statistics are not estimated.

Recommendations

64. Belstat is encouraged to assess the seasonality of the STS indicators and to produce and disseminate calendar and seasonally adjusted series for all relevant indicators, e.g. retail trade and industrial production, exhibiting clear seasonal patterns.

16.4 Production of Manufactured Goods (PMG)

Belstat collects data on manufactured goods on a monthly and annual basis. This survey bears a resemblance to the Prodcom survey compiled in the European Statistical System (ESS); however, data are collected according to the national classification of industrial products (services) corresponding to the CPA 2008. The survey covers production volume and value, as well as delivered goods in total and to the domestic market.

Belstat disseminates some data on production of manufactured goods and services, in particular for the main industrial products of Belarus. Otherwise the main use of such data is in the context of national accounts as well as compiling weights for some short-term indicators.

Chapter 17: Social and demographic statistics

17.1 Population Register

General assessment

The population register of Belarus has been operational since 2013 and the Ministry of Internal Affairs responsible for managing the register considers the data in the register relatively complete since 2018. The register functions well for its main purpose which is to have an exhaustive up to date administrative register for the population of Belarus. However, individuals are not required to register changes to place of residence in the population register which provides some limitations on its statistical use. The Assessment Team therefore encourages Belstat to continue efforts to enable the use of the register for statistical purposes, especially in the context of the Population and Housing Census.

Description

The population register of Belarus is managed by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and relies on various ministries and other public authorities to enter and maintain variables in the register. Updating is performed continuously based on primary accounting documents for the concerned variables. A unique personal identifier is assigned at birth, when registering residency in Belarus or abroad or when obtaining a passport.

The population register is considered an administrative tool, with the main purpose of registering the population. Individuals are required to register at their place of permanent or temporary place of residence, but not when changing place of residence, which places some limitations on the use of the population register for statistical purposes. Changes in addresses are managed and recorded by an address bureau. Addresses in Belarus are also standardised. In preparation for the Population and Housing Census Belstat verified the addresses of dwellings, to be used in the enumeration.

Recommendations

65. Belstat and the Ministry of Internal Affairs are encouraged to continue efforts to maximise the use of the recently established population register for statistical purposes.
66. Belstat is encouraged to develop procedures for linking the population register at household level to the individual returns from the 2019 Population and Housing Census.

17.2 Demographic statistics

General assessment

Belstat produces the main population and demographic indicators. International classifications are used and the methodology for compiling indicators in this sector follows international methodological reference documents. A strength is Belstat's access to and electronic exchange of administrative data. Electronic exchange of data should be implemented for migration data as well. Migration statistics are relatively complete but Belstat could undertake further reconciliation of data based on different sources to fully complete migration statistics.

Description

Demographic statistics in Belarus cover population statistics, vital statistics and migration statistics. These include main variables on population size: the main demographic indicators

such as fertility and mortality rates, infant mortality rates, life expectancy, births, deaths, marriages and divorces, causes of death; as well as migration flows.

The data collection is based on administrative data collected via several ministries and the supreme court. For population variables, data are collected by district offices receiving copies of vital records from registration offices on vital events, marriages and divorces, and regional offices receive data on divorces from the supreme court. Data are transferred from other authorities and between Belstat and its subordinated offices electronically, except for migration records where the transfer to district and regional offices are still on paper.

Belstat applies the International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems (ICD) for the classification of causes of death.

Data received electronically are subject to some logical controls and processed in the district, regional and central offices. Results from the Population and Housing Censuses are used to recalculate annual population data, and derived demographic indicators, retrospectively.

Regarding migration statistics, Belstat considers data on international migration quite complete. Data on immigrants cover permanent residence permits and temporary residence permits, which effectively include migrants staying more than one year in Belarus. Data on emigrants cover individuals seeking permanent residence abroad and expired temporary residence permits. The international migration thus relates to migration for a period of twelve months or longer. A possible gap comes from the lack of recording migration to and from Russia due the customs union (and open frontier). Internal migration is not explicitly recorded in Belarus; however, individuals are required to register residence when changing region of residence. Furthermore, individuals are required to register with local authorities when benefiting from public services and internal migration is in effect based on such registration.

The main publication is a demographic yearbook, but there are also annual and quarterly thematic releases. Belstat does not publish any population projections as this is done by the Ministry of Economy together with the Ministry of Labour.

Recommendations

67. Belstat is encouraged to continue its efforts to introduce electronic reporting of migration data and to consolidate and reconcile migration data from different sources.

17.3 Population and Housing Census

General assessment

While the previous census was conducted with a traditional enumeration, the 2019 census involved a stepwise enumeration in the period 4-18 October 2019 using internet questionnaires, enumeration in stationary and mobile enumeration centres, and enumeration at the place of residence using tablets. These developments represented major improvements in terms of cost-effectiveness and automatization of the data collection and processing. The Assessment Team considers that the census followed the main principles set down in international guidelines. The census also collected data for the first time on household agricultural activities, which will be used to improve the system of agricultural statistics. The Assessment Team welcomes Belstat plans for an extensive dissemination of the results in an interactive database and for the development of a geostatistical data-portal.

Description

The general legislation for the Population and Housing Census is given by the Law on the Population Census from 2006. The implementation of the 2019 Population and Housing Census is further regulated by a set of decrees and resolutions which contain the overall census plan, its organisation as well as measures to be undertaken to ensure protection of personal information in the census data. The census is financed by the national budget and some additional sources.

The Assessment Team noted that preparations were well advanced at the time of the first country visit in June 2019. Belstat conducted a pilot census from 2 to 13 October 2017 in one selected district of the Minsk region, which enabled testing the enumeration with tablets and its software. About 30% of respondents in the pilot census preferred using the internet questionnaire. Part of the preparations of cartographic materials together with verifying local addresses was conducted in 2018. Belstat used the population register combined with the address register and resolved discrepancies between the two sources. In addition, Belstat engaged temporary census staff to verify addresses and check dwellings.

The enumeration was performed in the period 4-30 October 2019. Whereas the previous census used traditional face-to-face interviews and paper questionnaires, which were subsequently scanned, the 2019 Population and Housing Census used a combined approach with internet questionnaires and mobile enumerators for the period 4-18 October, stationary enumeration centres for the whole enumeration period and finally enumeration at the place of residence by interviewers using tablets from 21 to 30 October. Belstat noted that this approach significantly improved the cost-efficiency compared to the traditional census methods in the previous censuses. At the same time, the approach required a good and updated administrative register for monitoring progress in the households being enumerated.

Belstat engaged 12,500 temporary enumeration staff to conduct the enumeration. The approximate distribution of households enumerated through the different modes was: 21% through internet questionnaire, 29% through mobile and stationary enumeration centres and 50% through face to face interviews. For the internet questionnaire individuals identified themselves using a system of bank-id, or as an alternative personal id from passport together with a code received by SMS. The electronic questionnaire was partly pre-filled with data from the population register based on the identification provided. For the face to face interviews, the enumerators received tablets with preloaded maps containing addresses and dwellings in their enumeration areas and, similarly, some information was prefilled from the population register thus reducing the interview time. Some logical controls were also introduced in the questionnaires.

The coverage will be evaluated through a Post Enumeration Survey (PES) with a substantial sample of 10% of addresses, which was conducted in the period 1 to 6 November 2019. Belstat prepared methodological documents based on the Eurostat/UNECE Conference for European Statisticians (CES) recommendations for the 2020 census round and other regional methodological references (CIS and the Committee of European Economic Co-operation - CEEC). The concept of usual residence, which was already introduced in the 2009 census, was retained as the basis for the enumeration.

Belstat plans to disseminate the census results in a dedicated interactive database similar to the one used for the 2009 census results. Furthermore, a geostatistical portal, which includes thematic maps with census data, will be introduced. An anonymised micro-dataset consisting of 10% of the households will also be made available. The preliminary results will be disseminated in February 2020 and final results are planned to be published within one year of

the enumeration period. The Assessment Team welcomes Belstat plans for an extensive dissemination of the results and the development of a geostatistical data-portal.

17.4 Labour Market Statistics

General assessment

Belstat has made significant efforts to align the Labour Force Survey (LFS) with the International Labour Organisation (ILO) recommendations in producing the core labour market indicators from the LFS. At the same time Belstat publishes labour market data based on comprehensive surveys of employers/businesses and administrative data on employment and registered unemployment. The Assessment Team considers that Belstat should continue to develop the LFS as the primary source for integrated information for the labour market. This includes continuing its policy of aligning the LFS with the methodology provided by the ILO as well as continuously working on the sample. Belstat draws attention to significant differences in concept in the measurement of employment and unemployment between the LFS and the other sources. However, no quantification or reconciliation of these differences are published on a regular basis. The Assessment Team would encourage Belstat to undertake and publish the results of such an analysis.

Description

Belstat collects labour market and wage data through a combination of statistical surveys of employers/businesses, a quarterly LFS as well as some administrative data sources. The statistical surveys of businesses follow several periodicities ranging from monthly to a five-yearly exhaustive data collection. The LFS has been carried out on a continuous basis since 2012. The current sample size is 0.7% of households (29,200 households per year) with 25% being subject to annual rotation. The sample frame is a list of households from the Population and Housing Census. Administrative data are also received from tax authorities and the social protection fund with monthly, quarterly and annual periodicity. Such data include data on entrepreneurs, number of hires and terminations in micro and small enterprises and employees in newly created organisations and more.

In general, data are collected electronically, with some exceptions for micro organisations. Belstat started using tablets for household interviews in the LFS in 2019.

In terms of methodology and provision of labour market indicators, the LFS follows broadly the principles of the ILO recommendations and Belstat has a policy for continuously updating the LFS methodology according to ILO recommendations. Some advancements were introduced in recent years, with the conduct of a modular survey on external labour migration, the introduction of variables on lifelong learning and decent work and, most recently, variables concerning underemployment in terms of working time, labour underutilisation, potential labour force and production of goods and services for own use, as recommended by the 19th ILO Conference of Labour Statisticians.

The extensive collection of data in this sector also provides wide dissemination opportunities. Based on the LFS, Belstat disseminates basic indicators such as labour force participation rate, unemployment and unemployment rates, causes for unemployment and a wider range of variables on an annual basis. Information on the labour market is also disseminated based on the surveys of employers.

In view of the recent advances in methodology and provision of labour market indicators, the Assessment Team considers that Belstat should continue to develop the LFS as the primary source for integrated information on the labour market. This includes continuing its policy of

aligning the LFS with ILO recommendations. Belstat draws attention to significant differences in concept in the measurement of employment and unemployment between the LFS and the other sources in the regular publications for labour market statistics. However, no quantification or reconciliation of these differences are published on a regular basis. The Assessment Team would encourage Belstat to undertake, and publish the results, of such an analysis.

Another point which the Assessment Team considers important is to keep the sample under review and to consider increasing it as necessary in the context of the survey becoming the primary source of reliable integrated information on the labour force and its components on both national and sub-national levels. A first update of the sample frame for the LFS will become available from the completion of the 2019 Population and Housing Census.

Recommendations

Belstat is encouraged to:

68. Continue its policy of ensuring full alignment of the Labour Force Survey with ILO recommendations and methodology.
69. Continue with its policy of establishing the Labour Force Survey as the primary source of integrated information on the labour market and its components.
70. Undertake and publish the results of an analysis to quantify and reconcile to the greatest extent differences in the estimates of employment and unemployment derived from the Labour Force Survey and from other surveys and administrative sources.
71. Keep the sample size of the LFS under review and to consider increasing it as necessary, in the context of the survey becoming the primary source of reliable, integrated information on the labour force and its components at both national and sub-national levels.

17.5 Living Condition Statistics

General assessment

Through the Household and Living Standards Survey (HLSS) Belstat collects and disseminates household expenditure and living conditions statistics. The survey has been extended in recent years, and there are plans to further expand the survey with the inclusion of more thematic modules. Data are currently collected in the traditional manner using face-to-face interviews and paper questionnaires. In view of these developments, the Assessment Team supports the ongoing process of integrating the household surveys and considers that Belstat should continue to consolidate the surveys. Furthermore, the introduction of Computer Assisted Personal Interview (CAPI) technology is much needed.

Description

Living condition statistics are collected through the Household and Living Standards Survey. Participation in the survey is voluntary and respondents receive a compensation for their participation, which is probably the reason for the very low non-response rate of just 0.3%. 207 interviewers are employed to collect the data. In addition, Belstat conducted some one-time surveys serving more ad-hoc needs such as the Time Use Survey (TUS), a survey on disability and the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS).

6,000 households are sampled, and 50% of the sample is rotated every year. Respondents normally participate in the survey for one to two years. Data is collected on a quarterly basis and respondents provide a two-week diary covering household expenditures every quarter. The data is collected through interviews and the expenditure diaries, but Belstat plans to modernise

the data collection by introducing CAPI. Considering the success of collecting data with CAPI in the LFS and some of the one-time household surveys, as well as the plans to further integrate household surveys, this development would be highly fitting and needed considering the scope of the data collected in the current HLSS.

Through the HLSS Belstat can cover variables on household expenditure, living conditions as well as several other variables describing household characteristics. Therefore, it functions as both a Household Budget Survey (HBS) and an income and living condition survey. Recent additions to the permanent data collection include variables on material deprivation, material well-being, Information and Communication technology (ICT) access and more. Belstat considers that some indicators are aligned with definitions in the European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC), and further alignment is foreseen, for example through the calculation of the multidimensional poverty index.

Belstat plans to continue integrating the HLSS with several more modules of questions in the coming years. This approach is indeed supported by the Assessment Team. Such an integration of household surveys together with the introduction of more modern data collection methodology may also have an impact on the organisation of the work, data collection process as well as the data processing. At the same time, the response burden should be carefully considered in this integration process.

Recommendations

Belstat is encouraged to:

72. Continue the ongoing process of integrating new topics and modules into the existing household survey, which has a primary focus on providing indicators on household income and living standards, and to continue consolidating and developing the sampling methodology.
73. Advance its plans to introduce CAPI and the COICOP 2018 classification into the household survey.

17.6 Education Statistics

General Assessment

Belstat, in conjunction with the Ministry of Education, compiles and disseminates a comprehensive range of statistics relating to education at all levels. The International Standard Classification of Education, ISCED 2011, is consistently applied and international requirements for educational statistics are largely met.

Belarus is currently participating in a pilot UNECE project to develop a Satellite Account for Education and Training while the Ministry of Education is developing an integrated register of students in educational institutions at all levels. The Assessment Team welcomes these developments and would encourage Belstat and the Ministry to continue their efforts in these areas.

Description

The Main Information and Analytical Centre of the Ministry of Education compiles extensive statistical information on the functioning of educational institutions at all levels based on a combination of statistical surveys and administrative data. Belstat regularly includes questions on educational attainment in its household surveys and has also undertaken modules on lifelong learning. Information on educational expenditure is provided by the Ministry of Finance.

Belstat publishes extensive annual statistics, based on these sources, in electronic and hardcopy formats, including the annual yearbook "Education in the Republic of Belarus" (most recent year 2019). The Main Information and Analytical Centre of the Ministry of Education also publishes a comprehensive range of statistics.

Pursuant to the Strategy for the Development of State Statistics up to 2022, Belstat is exploring the development of a Satellite Account for Education and Training, in line with international recommendations, while the Ministry of Education is developing an integrated register of students in educational institutes at all levels.

Recommendations

74. Belstat and the Ministry of Education are encouraged to continue their development of education statistics, with a particular focus on the development of a Satellite Account on Education and Training and the provision of an integrated register of students in all educational institutions.

17.7 Health Statistics

General Assessment

Belarus has a comprehensive range of statistics on the state and functioning of the health system, including statistics on: health organisations and their activities; medical and para-medical staff by specialisation; morbidity; and persons registered as having a disability. Summary statistics on health expenditure are published by the Ministry of Health, while Belstat undertook for the first time a household survey on disability in 2018 in line with international recommendations. Selected data on health status and health expenditure are also regularly collected in the sample household living standards survey.

The Assessment Team would encourage the Ministry of Health and Belstat to continue the development of health statistics in line with international recommendations. This might include the development of health satellite accounts, further household surveys on disability and the expansion of the current questions on health status and expenditure to include other health related issues in the programme of household surveys.

Description

The Ministry of Health collects a broad range of data from hospitals, clinics and other health organisations on their staffing, infrastructure and activities. In addition, administrative data and data from a number of health-related databases (e.g. tuberculosis register, register of people affected by the Chernobyl disaster, cancer registry, disability registers etc.) are used in the compilation of health and disability statistics.

Belstat publishes extensive annual statistics, based on these sources, in electronic and hardcopy formats. International classifications such as the International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems, tenth revision (ICD-10) and the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) are used as appropriate. The Ministry of Health publishes summary statistics on health expenditure by source (public/private) and purpose.

Belstat undertook, for the first time, a household survey on disability in 2018. The survey questionnaire was based on the standard questionnaires developed by the Washington Group on Disability Statistics established by the United Nations Statistical Commission. A question on subjective health status is included in the ongoing Living Conditions Survey and estimates

of health expenditure by households are also derived from this source. No questions on disability or health status will be included in the 2019 Population and Housing Census.

The creation of a single electronic medical databank for recording all cases of medical care and the introduction of an Integrated Electronic Medical Record, covering the medical history of each person, is expected to enable the development of further health indicators.

Recommendation

75. The Ministry of Health and Belstat are encouraged to continue work on the development of health statistics with a particular focus on the improvement of the system of health accounts in line with international standards.

Chapter 18: Agricultural Statistics

General Assessment

Belstat has a well-developed and comprehensive system of statistics on agricultural production that meets the needs of users at national, regional and local levels. The statistics are well based as they are derived from regular exhaustive surveys of 2,200 large agricultural organisations that control 90% of the land area and account for approximately 80% of agricultural production.

It is estimated that agricultural activity undertaken by households, mainly for own consumption, accounts for almost 20% of agricultural production. Information on this sector is based on a sample of 3,000 households that is drawn from the approximately 1 million rural households that are the registered owners of small plots. The 2019 Population and Housing Census included for the first time a questionnaire on agricultural activity that is based on the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO)'s World Programme for the Census of Agriculture guidelines. This is a very welcome development as it will provide a very comprehensive and accurate picture of the agricultural activities of households at national, regional and local levels. It will also provide a population frame for an improved methodology for conducting the regular surveys of agricultural activities in households.

Description

Agriculture accounts for around 8% of GDP and employment in Belarus and is thus an important component of the economy. Unlike in some neighbouring countries, agricultural production is still heavily concentrated, with approximately 2,200 large agricultural organisations controlling 90% of the agricultural land and accounting for 80% of agricultural output. There are approximately 2,700 private farms that account for just 2% of total output while the remaining 18% of output is accounted for by a large number of households (approximately 1 million in rural areas) that engage in agricultural activity, mainly for own consumption. Household plots are particularly important in the growing of potatoes (over 80% of total production) and vegetables (two thirds of production).

All large agricultural organisations are surveyed monthly (four inquiries each month) and annually (eight inquiries) while all the private farms are surveyed annually (three inquiries). A sample of approximately 3,000 households, based on the ownership of land plots in rural areas, are surveyed four times a year using a combination of direct interviews and self-completion questionnaires. A register of large agricultural organisations and private farms is maintained, and this includes information on: agricultural land area; livestock and poultry numbers; and, from 2019, revenues from the sale of agricultural products.

A comprehensive range of statistics on agricultural activity is produced by Belstat to meet the needs of users at national, regional, local and international levels. The statistics include extensive data on agricultural areas, livestock numbers, crops produced, use of agricultural products (balance sheets), agricultural prices and agricultural accounts. The statistics are disseminated, in hardcopy and electronic formats, using a combination of sources ranging from summary rapid releases to detailed yearbooks.

The 2019 Population and Housing Census included, for the first time, a questionnaire on agricultural activities. This questionnaire has been developed in line with the FAO's World Programme for the Census of Agriculture 2020 guidelines. The objectives of the agricultural census are:

- the compilation of a database on the main features and structure of agricultural activities in households;

- the establishment of a population frame for the regular survey of agricultural activity in households;
- the improvement of the sample survey methodology;
- the provision of detailed information on farming activity by households at regional and district levels; and
- the calculation of factors to enable the production of more accurate estimates of overall agricultural activity in intercensal years.

It is anticipated that revisions will be necessary to the current system of agricultural indicators, at national and sub-national levels, when the results of the agricultural census become available and algorithms will be developed for this purpose.

Recommendations

76. The Assessment Team welcomes the inclusion of questions on agricultural activities in the 2019 Population and Housing Census, which will provide for the first time a comprehensive picture of the agricultural activities of households. Belstat is encouraged to develop this new source as the population frame for surveying households with agricultural activity on a regular basis.

Chapter 19: Multi-domain Statistics

Multi-domain statistics are described following the categories as shown:

- Transport statistics;
- Tourism statistics;
- Energy statistics;
- Environment statistics;
- Research and Development; Innovation Statistics;
- ICT statistics.

19.1 Transport Statistics

General Assessment

Belstat produces a range of statistics on different aspects of transport, in line with international standards. These statistics are based on surveys carried out by Belstat and the Ministry of Transport and Communication, as well as administrative data. Most surveys focus on companies, but individual entrepreneurs involved in the transport of goods by road are included in a sample survey carried out once every five years. In the years when the survey of individual entrepreneurs is not conducted, Belstat makes monthly imputations of the volumes of freight transportation and freight turnover. There are plans to introduce surveys of individual entrepreneurs involved in the transport of passengers by taxi, to fill a current data gap.

Description

A range of statistical information on transport is produced and disseminated by Belstat. The main sources are:

- Monthly, quarterly and annual statistical surveys by Belstat of companies involved in transport activities. Most of these are effectively censuses, though sampling has been introduced for smaller companies in some cases.
- Monthly, quarterly and annual surveys by the Ministry of Transport and Communication, mostly on urban public transport and transport of goods by road. Administrative sources, including information on railway transport from the Ministry of Transport and Communication, road traffic accidents and deaths from the Ministry of Internal Affairs, number of individual entrepreneurs engaged in freight and passenger transportation, passenger transportation by taxicabs from the Ministry of Taxes and Duties.

The main areas where development work is underway or planned include the greater use of administrative sources to reduce response burden, improved sampling of individual entrepreneurs transporting goods and passengers in non-scheduled buses (in cooperation with the Ministry of Transport and Communication) and the inclusion of individual entrepreneurs providing taxi services.

Recommendations

77. Belstat is encouraged to continue with current plans to extend the coverage of transport statistics with a view to improving the surveying of activities of individual entrepreneurs.

19.2 Tourism Statistics

General Assessment

Belstat publishes a range of statistical information on foreign and domestic tourism based on direct statistical surveys and administrative sources. The improvement of the module on tourism in the household survey to measure domestic tourism, and the development of tools for conducting frontier surveys to provide better information on international tourism flows, are required to complement the existing sources and provide a more comprehensive statistical picture. The further development of the methodology for the Tourism Satellite Account will also be important in improving the quality and coverage of the statistics.

Description

A range of statistical information on foreign and domestic tourism is produced and disseminated by Belstat. The main sources are:

- Quarterly and annual statistical surveys of accommodation providers to collect information on capacity available and its use, visitors by country and length of stay and revenue from accommodation services.
- Annual surveys of organisations providing tourism services (e.g. tour operators and travel agencies) to obtain information on services provided to visitors to Belarus and to Belarus residents.
- A module on tourism in the quarterly sample household living standards surveys to collect information on tourist trips, expenditure on tourism activities and on the number of visitors hosted by the households.
- Administrative sources, including: information on frontier crossings from the State Border Committee; data on ecotourism from the Ministry of Taxes and Duties; financial data on the value of import and export tourism services from the National Bank (compiled as part of the Balance of Payments); data on visas issued from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and data from the ad-hoc monitoring of inbound and outbound tourism by the Ministry of Sports and Tourism at the transport infrastructure facilities engaged in departure and/or reception of tourists in hotels and similar accommodation facilities.

A pilot TSA, following international guidelines, was prepared in respect of 2014. Starting with tables for 2016, the TSA is now being constructed with biennial periodicity.

Recommendation

78. Belstat is encouraged to continue its work in improving tourism statistics, with a particular focus on: developing surveys at the frontiers to measure the level of international tourism; and household surveys to measure domestic tourism.

19.3 Energy Statistics

General Assessment

Belstat produces a range of statistics on different aspects of energy, with a focus on energy balances and energy efficiency. These statistics are produced based on methodology from the United Nations and the International Energy Authority. They are based on surveys carried out by Belstat and administrative data. New visualisation tools, including infographics, have been introduced to improve the dissemination and communication of energy statistics. Belstat

participates in various international cooperation projects related to energy statistics and found the EU-funded programme INOGATE particularly useful. Future plans include developing a system of sustainable energy indicators and adapting energy balance methodology to reflect the introduction of nuclear power generation in Belarus.

Description

Belstat produces a growing range of energy statistics based on monthly, quarterly and annual surveys, as well as administrative data from the Ministry of Energy and the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection.

There have been a number of developments in recent years, covering all stages of the production process from collection to dissemination, including the introduction, in 2015, of a module on energy use as part of the general household survey. A system of sustainable energy indicators is being developed.

A strong point for energy statistics in Belarus is the existence of an Inter-Agency Working Group on Energy Statistics, comprising Belstat, several ministries and the Academy of Sciences. This Working Group meets twice per year and advises on methodology and user needs.

Recommendations

79. Belstat is encouraged to continue with its current plans to enhance energy statistics.

19.4 Environment Statistics

General Assessment

Environment statistics in Belarus are produced in partnership between Belstat, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment Protection, and the Ministry of Forestry. They are based on a mixture of surveys and administrative data. The main topics covered are the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting (SEEA), Indicators for the EU's Shared Environmental Information System (SEIS), and indicators on the SDGs, green growth and climate change. National methodologies are based on the relevant international standards and classifications. Belstat actively participates in various national inter-departmental working groups, and international forums on environment statistics.

Description

Belstat, and its partners in the National Statistical System, produce a wide and growing range of environment statistics. These statistics are based on ten sample surveys, as well as administrative data from six ministries, the State Committee for Property and the National Academy of Sciences. Statistics are disseminated through on-line databases, regular publications, and the national SDG reporting platform.

There is a growing demand for different types of environment indicators. Regarding SEEA, accounts for water have been introduced, and further work is ongoing to develop the energy, forest and environmental protection expenditure accounts. Indicators on green growth are being developed based on OECD methodology.

There are plans to further implement the different SEEA accounts, as well as to expand the list of SEIS and green growth indicators produced.

Recommendations

80. Belstat is encouraged to continue with its current plans to further enhance the range of environmental indicators produced, in line with international standards.

19.5 Research and Development and Innovation Statistics

General assessment

Belstat has a well-developed system for producing statistics on Research and Development and Innovation in line with international recommendations. The Assessment Team welcomes Belstat's commitment to further harmonise these statistics with international standards and to promote greater use of the data through improved dissemination channels.

Description

Belstat has been conducting enterprise surveys on Research and Development and Innovation since 2003. They are based on the concepts and definitions developed in the Frascati (Research and Experimental Development Statistics) and Oslo (Innovation Statistics) manuals published by the OECD.

For the Research and Development (R&D) surveys, all enterprises are surveyed annually to determine: details of staff engaged in R&D activities; expenditure on R&D; sources of financing of R&D; and the results (i.e. commercialisation) of R&D activity.

For the innovation surveys, all enterprises covered by sections B-E and sections 61-63 of the EU's NACE Rev. 2 and all High-Tech Park residents are surveyed annually. A once-off survey was conducted of enterprises in the Construction (NACE Section F) sector in 2018 and a similar survey will be conducted of enterprises in the Agriculture and Forestry (NACE Section A) sector in 2020. A very detailed questionnaire, covering twelve topics, is completed by large and medium sized enterprises while a shorter questionnaire is completed by small enterprises. The topics cover: innovation expenditure; volume of innovative products; sources of financing innovations; organisational and marketing innovations; effect of implemented innovation; factors hampering innovation; innovation projects that were not implemented; collaborative projects; new and high technologies; presence of R&D and design units; innovation developers; and environmental innovations.

Administrative data from the National Academy of Sciences, the State Committee on Science and Technology and the Ministry of Education are also used in preparing relevant statistics.

A large range of statistics are published in electronic and hardcopy formats, including an annual publication titled "Science and Innovation Activity in the Republic of Belarus".

Recommendation

81. Belstat is encouraged to further develop its excellent work in the area of Research and Development and Innovation Statistics in line with international recommendations.

19.6 ICT Statistics

General assessment

A broad range of ICT statistics, in line with international recommendations, are produced and disseminated. The Assessment Team welcomes the fact that Belstat keeps the changing

international requirements in this area under review and adjusts and develops its survey instruments to meet new demands.

Description

Belstat includes an annual module on ICT in its Living Conditions household survey and the questionnaires largely follow the guidelines of the "Manual for Measuring ICT Access and Use by Households and Individuals" (International Telecommunication Union, Geneva, 2014).

Belstat also conducts a survey of organisations every second year to monitor ICT usage. This is an exhaustive survey that is undertaken in line with the "Manual for the Production of Statistics on the Information Economy", United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD, 2014) and covers:

- Large and medium commercial organisations whose major type of economic activity relates to sections A-N, R and sections 86 and 95-96 of the EU's NACE Rev. 2 classification.
- Non-profit organisations whose major type of economic activity is higher education and health care.
- Small and micro organisations whose major type of economic activity is operations in the ICT sector.

The Ministry of Communications and Informatics undertakes quarterly and annual surveys of telecommunication activities. Administrative data from the Ministry of Communications and Informatics, the Ministry of Education, and the Ministry of Health are also used to compile ICT statistics.

A large range of statistics is published in electronic and hardcopy formats, including a special biennial publication titled "Information Society in the Republic of Belarus". In preparing analyses, Belarus takes account of international requirements, in particular those set down in "Core ICT indicators", International Telecommunication Union, 2010.

Recommendation

82. The Assessment Team welcomes Belstat's work in this area and encourages it to further develop its household surveys and surveys of enterprises in line with international recommendations.