

**Light Peer Review
on the Implementation of the
European Statistics Code of Practice
in the Republic of Macedonia**

Final report

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PREFACE

The Light Peer Review (LPR) of the State Statistical Office (SSO) of the Republic of Macedonia was undertaken within the framework of the EU-funded project ‘Global assessments of statistical systems of candidate and potential candidate countries as well as ENP countries’. The company ICON-INSTITUT Public Sector GmbH, under contract with Eurostat, was responsible for organising all activities and tasks relating to the LPR.

The review process was initiated in response to a request made by the SSO to Eurostat in February 2010. The review mission took place from 2 November until 5 November 2010. The structure of the LPR is closely aligned with the methodological approach used in the peer review process of EU Member States. This particular approach focuses on the institutional environment and dissemination sections of the European Statistics Code of Practice, and comprises of the following principles: (1) Professional independence, (2) Mandate for data collection, (3) Adequacy of resources, (4) Quality commitment, (5) Statistical confidentiality, (6) Impartiality and objectivity, and (15) Accessibility and clarity. The LPR is limited to the National Statistical Institute and its coordinating role within the national statistical system.

The LPR yields a report assessing compliance with the Code of Practice for the selected principles at indicator level. The report is compiled based on the information collected during a four day on-site mission, as well as on the basis of material provided by the SSO and Eurostat prior to and during the mission (in particular the LPR self-assessment questionnaire filled in by the SSO). The report includes a set of improvement actions covering the reviewed principles of the Code of Practice.

The peer review team very much appreciated the well-prepared visit and the openness of the communication both with the staff of the SSO and with representatives from partner and stakeholder organisations. The peer review team is confident that the peer review will be of benefit to the further development of the SSO.

Members of the peer review team:

Experts:	Mr. Günter Kopsch Ms. Hana Slegrova
Participant from Eurostat:	Ms. Janne Utkilen
Observers:	Ms. Buket Hasancebi (Turkish Statistical Institute) Mr. Dragan Vukmirovic (Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia)

1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Main findings (including an assessment of the co-ordination role of the National Statistical Institute):

- (1) The main goal of the Light Peer Review (LPR) is to evaluate the compliance of the State Statistical Office (SSO) of the Republic of Macedonia with selected principles taken from the European Statistics Code of Practice. This, in turn, will support the further improvement of the SSO.
- (2) The Peer Review Team recognized a visible and well documented progress in the development of the SSO with regard to the institutional aspects reviewed, as well as the accessibility of its statistical information. Moreover, interviews with major stakeholders along with the results of the user satisfaction survey confirm that substantial progress has been made in many statistical domains during the last few years.
- (3) The SSO is the main producer of official statistics in the Republic of Macedonia and seems to be accepted as the co-ordinator of the National Statistical System by the other producers of official statistics. They have signed memoranda of understanding with most other producers of official statistics and are the leading institution in the planning process of the five-year Programme of Statistical Researches. It is recommended that statistical data from all producers of official statistics be published on the SSO's website.
- (4) Discussions between the Peer Review Team and the management and stakeholders of the SSO have led to the impression that the SSO produces and disseminates official statistics respecting the principles of professional independence, statistical confidentiality, and impartiality and objectivity, in compliance with the Law on State Statistics. It is nevertheless recommended to amend the Law on State Statistics by including an explicit reference to independence regarding the content and timing of statistical releases, making the nomination process of the Director of the SSO more transparent, stating the required qualification of the Director more precisely, and extending the Director's term in office.
- (5) The SSO has a comprehensive legal mandate to collect the data needed for the execution of the Programme of Statistical Researches, be it directly from reporting units or from administrative data files. However, the further improvement of the use of administrative data is well recognized by the SSO and a clear objective of the office. The legal basis for the use of administrative data should therefore be further strengthened and additional

memoranda of understanding with providers of administrative data be concluded. The establishment of electronic data collection from businesses is an important improvement which should be further developed.

- (6) The high levels of motivation and professionalism among the SSO staff have contributed directly to the progress that the office has made during the last couple of years. The present number of staff and the financial resources of the SSO are, however, insufficient to carry out the developmental activities necessary to reach compliance with European requirements in due time. There will be a serious risk to the planned developmental activities if human and financial resources of the SSO are not noticeably increased next year.
- (7) Quality is considered to be a high priority of the SSO. Key office documents confirm the commitment of the management regarding quality issues. The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) model has been introduced as a quality approach and the lessons learned have influenced the way the office is run. Quality reports have been elaborated for several surveys while quality in the process of data production is monitored to a certain extent. To ensure a systematic approach to quality evaluation in statistical processes, procedures for monitoring quality of processes are under preparation. All policies of the SSO related to quality should be published on its website, not only for transparency reasons, but also in order to promote the efforts of the SSO in this field.
- (8) The SSO is paying great attention to data dissemination and to the improvement of the clarity and accessibility of the statistical data produced. Main users of the statistical information were satisfied with the significant progress in this area. Further improvements will be made with the launch of a new website in 2011, including the introduction of more user-friendly tools on the website and the release of metadata in a standardized structure. More complete information about methodology and data quality, as well as presentations of the policies of the office (e.g. quality strategy, dissemination strategy), would lead to a better understanding and use of statistics, and improve the image of the SSO.
- (9) The management of the SSO expressed its clear intention to take further steps towards compliance with the European Statistics Code of Practice. This is also confirmed in the quality management strategy of the office. The Peer Review Team discussed the improvement actions planned (listed in Chapter 5) with the top management and senior staff members of the SSO. These actions are fully supported by the team as a whole.

2 FINDINGS PER PRINCIPLE

2.1 PRINCIPLE 1: PROFESSIONAL INDEPENDENCE

The professional independence of statistical authorities from policy, regulatory or administrative departments and bodies, as well as from private sector operators, maintains the credibility of European Statistics.

Overall assessment

The SSO is, according to the Law on State Statistics (“The Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia” No. 54/97 and 21/07), an expert and independent administrative organization with competencies established by this Law and other acts. The Law explicitly stipulates in several articles the professional independence of the SSO and its Director as well as of the other institutions authorized to produce and disseminate official statistics. It also gives a strong role to the SSO in the whole programme planning process.

Discussions held between the Peer Review Team, the management and staff of the SSO, members of the Statistical Council and representatives of various user groups, have left the impression that the SSO acts independently in practise, free from political interference.

There is, however, an ongoing political debate at present on issues concerning the next population census. It is of the utmost importance that the soon to be implemented census law (which is currently undergoing the parliamentary approval process) is aligned with the Law on State Statistics. All methodological issues must be subject to the decision of the SSO and its Director, and should be in accordance with international standards and recommendations.

2.1.1 Indicator 1.1: The independence of the statistical authority from political and other external interference in producing and disseminating official statistics is specified in law.

Article 2 of the Law on State Statistics describes State Statistics as an independent expert activity. According to Article 4, all activities conducted to produce State Statistics should be implemented following the principles of neutrality (the objective manner of establishing the methods and definitions of collection, processing and dissemination of statistical data, unaffected by any influence), objectivity, rationality, confidentiality and professional independence (concerning professional independence, the law stipulates that the “matters from the official statistics must be carried out based on expert and scientific methods and findings and must be protected from any kind of influence”). The SSO itself shall (according to Article 8), remain an expert and independent administrative organization. The law requires amendment in terms of the inclusion of an explicit reference to independence in the content and timing of statistical releases.

2.1.2 Indicator 1.2: The head of the statistical authority has sufficiently high hierarchical standing to ensure senior level access to policy authorities and administrative public bodies. He/ She should be of the highest professional calibre.

The hierarchical position of the Director of the SSO is comparable with that of Directors of other governmental agencies. The Director is appointed and dismissed by the government. The law stipulates that the Director of the SSO has a fixed term of office of four years (with the option of re-election at the conclusion of this period), and provides a safeguard against inappropriate dismissal, thereby further strengthening the professional independence of the SSO. The law also provides a general description of the qualifications needed for the position. The nomination process, however, should be made more transparent and the required qualification should be stated more precisely in an amendment to the law. It is further recommended that the Director's term of office could be extended.

2.1.3 Indicator 1.3: The head of the statistical authority and, where appropriate, the heads of its statistical bodies have responsibility for ensuring that European Statistics are produced and disseminated in an independent manner.

Article 11 of the Law on State Statistics determines explicitly that it is the responsibility of the Director of the SSO to make decisions “on issues concerning expert and methodological issues of State Statistics”. All interview partners of the Peer Review stated that the SSO compiles its statistics and disseminates the results in a professional and independent manner.

2.1.4 Indicator 1.4: The head of the statistical authority and, where appropriate, the heads of its statistical bodies have the sole responsibility for deciding on statistical methods, standards and procedures, and on the content and timing of statistical releases.

The responsibility of the Director of the SSO for the content and methodology of all statistical activities and the scope and type of data collected and disseminated on the basis of the five-year Programme is explicitly stipulated in article 11 of the Law on State Statistics. All interview partners confirmed during the LPR that the law regarding the professional independence of the SSO is fully implemented.

2.1.5 Indicator 1.5: The statistical work programmes are published and periodic reports describe progress made.

According to Article 22 of the Law on State Statistics, the SSO is responsible for the preparation of the five-year Programme of Statistical Researches in co-operation with the other authorized producers of official statistics. The Programme shall be approved by the government and it can be amended once a year. The Programme is published in the “Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia” and on the website of the SSO. The planning of the five-year

Programme and its yearly revisions are well organized by the SSO. Before submitting the draft to the government extensive discussions take place with other producers, with users, and with the Statistical Council.

The SSO is in charge of the preparation of the Annual Report on the implementation of the Programme of Statistical Researches which it submits to the government.

2.1.6 *Indicator 1.6: Statistical releases are clearly distinguished and issued separately from political/policy statements.*

Statistical releases are clearly identifiable as coming from the SSO and do not contain any political comments. The SSO has strictly defined internal procedures for the drafting of press releases, which are done in close co-operation between subject matter and dissemination departments. SSO is making efforts to strengthen contacts with the media, among other, by offering lectures on methodological aspects.

2.1.7 *Indicator 1.7: The statistical authority, when appropriate, comments publicly on statistical issues, including criticisms and misuses of official statistics.*

The Law on State Statistics gives the Director of the SSO explicitly the right to react publicly in case of misinterpretation or misuse of SSO's statistics. It appears that an internal policy and a well established procedure exist on how to intervene publicly in the occurrence of such an event. The SSO monitors the media reaction to statistical press releases on a daily basis. In the event of serious misinterpretation or misuse, the SSO reacts, normally by giving notice to the editor and asking for correction. The SSO does not intervene in case of incorrect use of statistical data in political debates. A written description of the policy is not yet available and it is recommended that such a policy be formulated and published on the website.

2.2 PRINCIPLE 2: MANDATE FOR DATA COLLECTION

Statistical authorities must have a clear legal mandate to collect information for European statistical purposes. Administrations, enterprises and households, and the public at large may be compelled by law to allow access to or deliver data for European statistical purposes at the request of statistical authorities.

Overall assessment

The Law on State Statistics, in particular Chapters V and VII provides the SSO with a clear legal mandate to collect the data needed for the execution of the Programme of Statistical Researches. The SSO is entitled to collect data directly from reporting units and to access administrative data sources.

Despite the fact that household surveys are voluntary and that failure to complete a business survey is not fined by the SSO, the survey response rates are still rather high compared with those of many other European countries. Regarding

the use of administrative data, the SSO has signed, in addition to the legal provisions, several memoranda of understanding with public institutions. In practice, however, there is still room for improvement in terms of data accessibility in an adequate way. The legal basis for the use of administrative data should therefore be strengthened and the SSO should be given greater influence where the content of administrative sources is concerned.

2.2.1 *Indicator 2.1: The mandate to collect information for the production and dissemination of official statistics is specified in law.*

Chapter VII of the Law on State Statistics regulates data collection from legal and natural persons for the whole statistical system. Articles 31 to 35 of the Law define the rights and duties of the SSO and the rights and duties of the reporting units in connection with the primary collection of data for statistical purposes. The scope and content of statistical surveys are determined by the Programme of Statistical Researches. Population, housing and agricultural censuses are regulated by special laws.

The SSO has begun preparations to establish the use of electronic questionnaires and electronic data transmission via internet from businesses to reduce their reporting burden.

2.2.2 *Indicator 2.2: The statistical authority is allowed by national legislation to use administrative records for statistical purposes.*

According to Articles 26 and 27 of the Law on State Statistics, the SSO has the right to use administrative data sources, with the exception of data which must not be used for statistical purposes according to the legal basis of these administrative data. In general, the SSO has no problems to obtain the administrative data that are needed. However, an increased use of administrative data for statistical purposes is of high priority to the SSO. The SSO has concluded some memoranda of understanding with providers of administrative data; further memoranda should be concluded. It is further recommended to state more precisely in the Law on State Statistics the right of the SSO to access all administrative data sources needed for statistical purposes and to include a rule in the Law obliging all public institutions to inform the SSO on the implementation of any new administrative data sources or of any changes of existing data sources. The SSO should further investigate how it can support the ministries to properly run their administrative registers and how its influence on the content of administrative data sources can be strengthened (the statistical laws of Ireland and Norway are an example of this). Moreover, the SSO should be provided with the metadata of the administrative data it uses.

2.2.3 *Indicator 2.3: On the basis of a legal act, the statistical authority may compel response to statistical surveys.*

Chapter XII of the Law on State Statistics allows SSO to fine reporting units in obligatory surveys if they fail to submit requested data to the SSO within the

time frame specified, or if they submit incorrect data. Although the SSO does not exercise this right, the response rates are still rather high. SSO's policy is to cooperate closely with businesses, stressing the importance of statistics to convince businesses to report data. The SSO also started preparing electronic data collection from businesses via internet to reduce the reporting burden of businesses.

2.3 PRINCIPLE 3: ADEQUACY OF RESOURCES

The resources available to statistical authorities must be sufficient to meet European Statistics requirements.

Overall assessment

The SSO staff is highly motivated and well educated. That is the main reason for the visible progress the office has made during the last years, as was confirmed by many of the users interviewed in the course of the LPR. The present number of employees is, however, not sufficient to carry out all development actions necessary to reach compliance with European requirements in due time. A budget increase would also be necessary in order to achieve this. The fact that official statistics are a separate chapter within the accession negotiation process, and that statistical information is needed in most other chapters, has raised awareness of its importance. However, it has only resulted in a slight increase of SSO's staff numbers in the years 2008 and 2009, and with a nearly unchanged budget. In 2010 only 3 to 4 new jobs could be filled instead of about 20 as planned, and the budget has decreased.

2.3.1 Indicator 3.1: Staff, financial, and computing resources, adequate both in magnitude and in quality, are available to meet current European Statistics needs.

With regard to staff capacities, some positive aspects can be emphasized. Generally, staff appears to be well educated; more than 70% have university degrees and a good knowledge of English. Staff turnover is low. The wages in the office are comparable with wages in the ministries and the office has in general a good image as an employer. The number of applicants for advertised jobs is always very high. The office places great importance on an efficient human resources management.

The human and financial resources are, however, not adequate, despite the fact that SSO's management makes every effort to implement successfully their strategic plan. There will probably be no new employments in public institutions next year and further budget cuts for the SSO are expected. It is hardly conceivable how the SSO will be able to launch the necessary developments for complying with European requirements if the resource situation is not improved. There is still some way to go before SSO will reach full compliance with the *acquis*. (The general halt in recruitment does not extend to additional temporary resources needed for the implementation of the population census in 2011).

The SSO has developed a cost calculation system, which simplifies and helps coordinate activity and budget planning, and with that improving the effective use of the resources available.

2.4 PRINCIPLE 4: QUALITY COMMITMENT

All ESS members commit themselves to work and co-operate according to the principles fixed in the Quality Declaration of the European Statistical System.

Overall assessment

The SSO places great emphasis on the quality of the data produced. Key documents published by the SSO (e.g. the vision of the SSO) confirm the SSO's commitment to quality. Significant improvements were made recently. A quality strategy, the related action plan and other documents were elaborated for the implementation of quality measurement and evaluation. A systematic approach can be seen in the documents and in their implementation.

The SSO has officially accepted the European Statistics Code of Practice; the Code has been translated into Macedonian and posted on the website.

The CAF model has been introduced to the SSO as a means to guide their efforts towards effective quality improvement. The model has influenced the way the staff of the SSO is working (team work etc.). The second CAF self-assessment exercise was executed at the end of 2009. The evaluation process is currently in the last stage. The top management of the SSO is the driving force in this process.

2.4.1 Indicator 4.1 Product quality is regularly monitored according to the ESS quality components.

Quality reports have been elaborated for several surveys, mainly according to the EU legislation. The reports are submitted to Eurostat and are used for internal purposes.

A quality guide based on the quality dimensions as published by Eurostat, as well as experience of the SSO, was prepared and published on the intranet for survey managers and other persons involved in statistical production. The co-ordination, methodological advice and calculation of specific indicators (accuracy) are ensured by the Department for Statistical and Mathematical Methods.

In order to apply a standardized approach for the measurement of data quality, the SSO has adopted a metadata quality structure. Its implementation has started with 21 surveys. The intention is to cover all surveys and statistical fields.

2.4.2 Indicator 4.2 Processes are in place to monitor the quality of the collection, processing and dissemination of statistics.

Quality is monitored to a certain extent throughout the stages of data production; the frequency is based on the periodicity of statistical surveys conducted. Data collection (e.g. non-response), data capture and processing are usually monitored as well as timeliness and punctuality throughout the data dissemination phase. To

ensure a systematic approach to quality evaluation in statistical processes the quality monitoring procedures of processes are being prepared for implementation.

2.4.3 *Indicator 4.3 Processes are in place to deal with quality considerations, including trade-offs within quality, and to guide planning for existing and emerging surveys.*

The SSO places great importance on the accuracy of the data produced. In case the SSO expects responses from important statistical units in the near future, the SSO prefers to delay the dissemination of statistical results to avoid problems with data accuracy and to prevent immediate data revisions. Pilot surveys are conducted before new surveys are introduced.

2.4.4 *Indicator 4.4 Quality guidelines are documented and staff are well trained. These guidelines are spelled out in writing and made known to the public.*

Documents related to quality are available on the intranet (quality strategy, quality action plan, quality guidelines etc.). An elaboration of the revision policy and its publication on the website as well as the publication of other policies of the SSO related to quality is crucial in terms of transparency. It also serves to promote the efforts of the SSO in this field.

Training in quality management issues was conducted in June 2009 within the framework of the Regional IPA 2007 Assistance Programme, and is also incorporated in the SSO's training programme. Training in quality measurement and evaluation has been implemented internally. Further training in quality issues would support a systematic approach and assist in sharing the experience the SSO has already gained, both inside the SSO and with other producers of official statistics.

2.4.5 *Indicator 4.5 There is a regular and thorough review of the key statistical outputs using external experts where appropriate.*

Reviews of statistical production were conducted by international organizations (e.g. IMF), along with the assistance of external consultants. Quality reporting that meets EU legislation criteria is also considered to play an essential role in the quality improvement process of the SSO. Internal reviews are ensured by the Internal Audit Department the activities of which could be orientated towards the production of statistics due to the statistical experience of its staff.

2.5 PRINCIPLE 5: STATISTICAL CONFIDENTIALITY

The privacy of data providers (households, enterprises, administrations and other respondents), the confidentiality of the information they provide and its use only for statistical purposes must be absolutely guaranteed.

Overall assessment

The SSO takes statistical confidentiality very seriously. The confidentiality principle is reflected in the statistical law, in internal documents produced by the SSO, and by specific measures taken by the SSO (such as including information for respondents in statistical questionnaires and the commitment signed by all employees at the commencement of their employment).

The confidentiality principle is also well known by the users. A Confidentiality Committee was created to support the activities conducted by the SSO in this field.

2.5.1 Indicator 5.1 Statistical confidentiality is guaranteed in law.

Statistical confidentiality is guaranteed by law. The Law on State Statistics includes a number of specific provisions related to this issue, in particular the definition of statistical confidentiality as one of the main statistical principles, the responsibilities of the SSO (e.g. to inform reporting units, to ensure the information in statistical forms and in the work of interviewers), the use of confidential data, as well as the SSO's obligation to adopt measures and techniques and other rules. The Law is available on the Internet.

2.5.2 Indicator 5.2 Statistical authority staff sign legal confidentiality commitments on appointment.

Staff of the SSO are required to sign confidentiality commitments upon the commencement of their employment with the SSO. This statement remains valid even after the termination of their employment. In accordance with the internal rules - the obligation for data protection continues after the employment ends – this responsibility should be strengthened by the incorporation of this rule to the Law.

2.5.3 Indicator 5.3 Substantial penalties are prescribed for any wilful breaches of statistical confidentiality.

According to Articles 62 and 63 of the Law on State Statistics, penalties can be incurred for breaches of statistical confidentiality. As these penalties are quite low, internal rules related to the confidentiality principle include also disciplinary measures in such cases.

2.5.4 Indicator 5.4 Instructions and guidelines are provided on the protection of statistical confidentiality in the production and dissemination processes. These guidelines are spelled out in writing and made known to the public.

Instructions and guidelines have been elaborated in the form of internal rulebooks. Their aim was to explain the rules, reinforce the importance of confidentiality and to guide the SSO staff in the production and dissemination of statistical data. The rules are available to the staff via the intranet. A

Confidentiality Committee has been created to support the efforts of the SSO in this field, including the preparation of the guidelines and related activities.

The responsibility of the SSO to protect confidential data is stated in statistical questionnaires and in the information addressed to all survey respondents. This is part of the SSO's policy to promote the confidentiality principle in relation to the public. Other producers of statistics as well as users of statistical data confirmed their knowledge of the principle and their confidence that the SSO is respecting it.

2.5.5 *Indicator 5.5 Physical and technological provisions are in place to protect the security and integrity of statistical databases*

Within the limits of the Peer Review it appears that there is no reason to doubt the technical and physical protection of the statistical databases. Procedures are in place to ensure the application of the confidentiality principle. A specific unit in the IT department is working on the IT data protection. Improvements were achieved in the prevention of access to the IT network. Further initiatives are undertaken for the use of automated software for the detection of confidential data. The co-operation of various departments represented in the Confidentiality Committee contributes to the testing and preparation of this software.

2.5.6 *Indicator 5.6 Strict protocols apply to external users accessing statistical micro-data for research purposes.*

Access to micro-data for research purposes is allowed by the statistical law. Internal procedures have been developed in order to facilitate this. The Director General's consent is required in order to gain access to the micro-data. The Director General's decision is based on the assessment of written applications of interested researchers confirming that the micro-data will only be used for specific and clearly explained research purposes. Researchers have to pay for the additional work in the preparation of micro-data. New initiatives of the SSO are orientated to improve statistical legislation, to promote on its website the possibility of accessing micro-data to scientific institutions and to prepare data sets for the use of researchers.

2.6 PRINCIPLE 6: IMPARTIALITY AND OBJECTIVITY

Statistical authorities must produce and disseminate European Statistics respecting scientific independence and in an objective, professional and transparent manner in which all users are treated equitably.

Overall assessment

Observations made during the Peer Review have led to the conclusion that the SSO respects scientific independence in producing and disseminating official statistics and carries out its tasks in an objective, professional and transparent manner. The practice in ensuring equality of access to newly released data is to

be underlined as exemplary. It would be useful to lay it down explicitly in the Law on State Statistics.

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

Objectivity of State Statistics is one of the principles explicitly emphasized in the Law on State Statistics. The Director of the SSO is, according to Article 11, responsible for the contents and methodology of statistical activities and for the scope and type of data that are collected and disseminated on the basis of the Programme. The stakeholders interviewed felt confident that SSO compile statistics in an objective manner.

2.6.2 *Indicator 6.2: Choices of sources and statistical techniques are informed by statistical considerations.*

The SSO follows a policy that the choice of data sources and statistical techniques are solely driven by statistical considerations. With regard to methodology, the use of internationally accepted norms and standards is a clear objective of the SSO. Stakeholders interviewed confirmed the professionalism of SSO's staff.

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

If errors are evident in published statistical data they will be corrected and the users informed. To avoid such errors, SSO staff is made aware that they will be fined according to the liability clause under the Law on Civil Servants, if they are proven responsible for errors published. It would be recommendable to formally document the complete procedure of correcting an error in the form of a guideline which could be included in the dissemination strategy or published separately on the website.

2.6.4 *Indicator 6.4: Information on the methods and procedures used by the statistical authority are publicly available.*

For more than 75% of the statistical output the SSO already publishes information on the methods and procedures used on its website. However, the metadata are not standardized yet and vary a lot in scope and quality between the various statistical domains. A completely new and comprehensive metadata system in a standardized structure will be launched next year on the SSO's website. The dissemination strategy of the SSO should be supplemented with a chapter on the publication of metadata.

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

The SSO regularly publishes an Advance Release Calendar containing the release dates for the forthcoming three months. Divergences from the pre-announced

release calendar, which do not happen very often, are not announced in advance. Users have to call the SSO and to ask for the new date. It is urgently recommended that any change of a pre-announced publication date be published in advance as early as possible for the sake of transparency. The dissemination strategy mentions the release calendar but it should also explain under which circumstances a pre-announced publication date can be changed.

2.6.6 *Indicator 6.6: All users have equal access to statistical releases at the same time and any privileged pre-release access to any outside user is limited, controlled and publicised. In the event that leaks occur, pre-release arrangements should be revised so as to ensure impartiality.*

All users have equal access to statistical releases at the same time. Privileged pre-release access is not granted under any circumstances. From the discussions with users during the Peer Review it appears that this approach is generally accepted and that there is no pressure on the SSO to provide privileged access.

2.6.7 *Indicator 6.7: Statistical releases and statements made in Press Conferences are objective and non-partisan.*

Internal procedures are in place on how to prepare and adopt press releases and how to prepare statements in press conferences. Close cooperation between experts from the dissemination sector and SSO staff, who are familiar with the subject matter, guarantees the objectivity and professionalism of the releases. Political statements are never included in statistical releases. The procedures on how press releases and statements for press conferences are prepared and adopted in the office should be described in the dissemination strategy or any other document which is published on the SSO's website.

2.7 PRINCIPLE 15: ACCESSIBILITY AND CLARITY

European Statistics should be presented in a clear and understandable form, disseminated in a suitable and convenient manner, available and accessible on an impartial basis with supporting metadata and guidance.

Overall assessment

The SSO pays great attention to data dissemination, as well as to improving the clarity and accessibility of statistics. A dissemination strategy has been adopted by the SSO; new developments are realized mainly in electronic presentation of the data and preparation of standardized metadata.

Most users have reacted positively to the progress made in this area. User satisfaction surveys and communication with users are important sources that assist in understanding user's needs.

To improve the content of the information presented, higher priority should be given to the presentation of the efforts and policies of the SSO, as it could help to increase the transparency of statistical work and to improve the image of the

SSO. More comments and explanations would lead to a better understanding and usage of statistics, inter alia within the framework of statistical literacy activities.

2.7.1 *Indicator 15.1: Statistics are presented in a form that facilitates proper interpretation and meaningful comparisons.*

The website of the SSO provides news releases, access to public database, electronic versions of SSO's publications, etc. A new website is under preparation; the goal being to improve the content, design and technical aspects of the current website.

A user satisfaction survey was implemented for the first time in 2007, the second in 2009. The outcomes of the survey have been analysed and used for preparations of further improvements in data dissemination.

The scope and the structure of the related metadata, including explanatory notes about the methodology and quality, are very different depending on the domain and the form of presentation of the data. A new system of standardized metadata is under preparation. It will be published on the SSO's website from 2011 onwards.

Users were satisfied with the dissemination of statistics and the website. Those who had questions were able to contact the SSO directly. However, improved explanations of the data available would contribute to the better understanding of statistics.

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

The SSO makes good use of the Internet as a communicative medium. The users appreciated the presentation of an electronic version of publications provided on the SSO's website. The introduction of more user-friendly tools (e.g. Excel) allowing more flexible usage of disseminated data on the website is under preparation, in accordance with the recommendations made by the users in the user satisfaction survey.

2.7.3 *Indicator 15.3: Custom-designed analyses are provided when feasible and are made public.*

Custom-designed analyses and specific statistical outputs are part of the work of the SSO. Tailor made products and services, based on discussions between the SSO and users, are paid by the customers.

2.7.4 *Indicator 15.4: Access to micro-data can be allowed for research purposes. This access is subject to strict protocols.*

Access to micro-data is ensured, as explained in Principle 5 (Indicator 5.6). This access is subject to strict protocols and the SSO is working on further progress in this field (promotion how to access data, preparation of datasets etc.).

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

The standardization of metadata is considered to be one of the important goals of the SSO. Efforts are being undertaken to assist the release of metadata in a standardised structure (based on the use of ESMS file). This task should be better reflected in the SSO's dissemination strategy.

2.7.6 *Indicator 15.6: Users are kept informed on the methodology of statistical processes and the quality of statistical outputs with respect to the ESS quality criteria.*

The presentation of methodology of statistical processes and of the quality of statistical outputs on the website varies. For some surveys (e.g. LFS) a very detailed description including indicators on data quality is published, for other surveys, or forms of data presentation, the information is rather limited to the content of statistical indicators (e.g. public database on the website). The news releases generally include more information. The same holds true for the publications.

Seminars and similar activities are used for presentation of statistics in the framework of statistical literacy activities.

More complete information about the methodology and data quality might help in the presentation of statistics to the general public, to increase the transparency of the work of the SSO, and the overall understanding of statistics.

3 COORDINATION ROLE OF THE NATIONAL STATISTICAL INSTITUTE

The SSO seems to be accepted as the co-ordinator of the National Statistical System by the other producers of official statistics, despite the fact that the SSO's role as a co-ordinator is not defined precisely enough in the Law on State Statistics. An amendment to the law, which explicitly names the SSO as the main producer and co-ordinator of the System of Official Statistics, including a precise definition of its role as a co-ordinator, should be made. The SSO has signed a memorandum of understanding with most other producers of official statistics, mainly to support data sharing between the institutions, but also to assist in assigning tasks and promoting co-operation in other areas of work. Memoranda of understanding should be concluded with all other producers of official statistics.

The SSO is the leading institution in the planning process of the five-year Programme of Statistical Research. It is legally responsible for drafting the Programme in cooperation with the other producers of official statistics and sends it after discussions with the Statistical Council to the government for approval. Responsibility for the implementation of statistical classifications lies with the SSO. Statistical classifications submitted by the SSO to the government and approved by the government are legally binding for all public institutions. To further strengthen the role of the SSO as the co-ordinator of the National Statistical System it would be useful to publish all statistical data from all producers of official statistics on SSO's website.

4 GOOD PRACTICES TO BE HIGHLIGHTED

The Law on State Statistics does not only regulate the production and dissemination of official statistics by the SSO, but also the production and dissemination of all official statistics by all producers of official statistics. It also includes rules on the co-ordination of the statistical system.

SSO has a clear policy that official statistical data shall be available to all users in an equal way. No privileged access is granted.

5 LIST OF IMPROVEMENT ACTIONS BY PRINCIPLE OF THE CODE

5.1 Principle 1: Professional Independence

Improvement actions	Timetable
Preparing a draft of a revised Law on State Statistics	2011
Publishing leaflet of Code of Practice in Macedonian language	2011

5.2 Principle 2: Mandate for Data Collection

Improvement actions	Timetable
Signing agreements with additional data providers and revising existing agreements to clarify the mandate and to improve the quality of administrative records.	2012
Improving cooperation with enterprises to improve awareness of importance of reliable and accurate statistical information.	2012
Starting with electronic data collection.	2012
Investigating the possibility for gathering data on large businesses directly from their IT systems.	2014

5.3 Principle 3: Adequacy of Resources

Improvement actions	Timetable
Revising backup and archiving strategy and developing backup and archiving system.	2012

5.4 Principle 4: Quality commitment

Improvement actions	Timetable
Preparing guidelines and procedures for monitoring of quality when collecting, processing and disseminating data, followed by their implementation.	2012 (guidelines)

5.5 Principle 5: Statistical Confidentiality

Improvement actions	Timetable
Adopting micro-data access policy for research purposes and making it transparent.	2011

5.6 Principle 6: Impartiality and objectivity	
Improvement actions	Timetable
Making existing internal procedures public for the preparation of press releases and other publications.	2011
5.7 Principle 7: Sound Methodology	
Improvement actions	Timetable
Establishing a working group to define a project for the revision of statistical surveys (where needed) in order to further harmonise them with EU methodologies.	2011
Starting the implementation of the revision process.	2011
5.8 Principle 8: Appropriate Statistical Procedures	
Improvement actions	Timetable
Preparing guidelines for data collection and capture, and coding.	2012
Preparing guidelines for data processing.	2012
Starting implementation of the Statistical Business Process Model	2011
5.9 Principle 9: Non-Excessive Burden on Respondents	
Improvement actions	Timetable
Establishing procedures for better co-ordination of sampling and survey design.	2012
Carrying out a survey on Data Providers' Opinion.	2013
5.10 Principle 10: Cost Effectiveness	
Improvement actions	Timetable
Implementing automated editing and using modern data capture techniques.	Starting 2012
Analyzing the results of the Cost Calculation System.	2012
5.11 Principle 11: Relevance	
Improvement actions	Timetable
Establishing and maintaining a register of data users.	2012

5.12 Principle 12: Accuracy and Reliability

Improvement actions

Timetable

Establishing procedures for measurement of non-sampling errors.

2013

Preparing and publishing a data revision policy.

2011

5.13 Principle 13: Timeliness and Punctuality

Improvement actions

Timetable

Analyzing the possibilities for shortening the time gap between the date of occurrence and the date of publishing the data.

2013

5.14 Principle 14: Coherence and Comparability

Improvement actions

Timetable

Documenting breaks in time series.

2011 – 2015

Analyzing coherence of some important statistical data (i.e. employees, wages)

Ongoing

5.15 Principle 15: Accessibility and Clarity

Improvement actions

Timetable

Re-designing the website with improved contents, design and technical aspects.

2011

Introducing user-friendly tools for flexible usage of the disseminated data on the web page.

2011 – 2012

Releasing reference metadata according to a standardised structure (ESMS) together with the disseminated data.

2011 – 2014

Analysing the visual identity and re-designing the content of publications.

2012

Carrying out systematic activities for full compliance with EU SDMX.

2014

Carrying out systematic activities for full compliance with the IMF Special Data Dissemination Standard (SDDS)

2011

ANNEXES

ANNEX A: PROGRAMME OF THE VISIT

ANNEX B: LIST OF PARTICIPANTS