

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

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PREFACE

The light peer review (LPR) of the National Statistical Service of the Republic of Armenia (NSSRA) was undertaken within the framework of the EUROSTAT-funded project ‘Assessment of statistical systems and selected statistical areas of the ENP countries’. GOPA Consultants, under contract with EUROSTAT, was responsible for organising all activities and tasks relating to the LPR.

LPRs are based on the structure and procedures of the ESS (European Statistical System) peer reviews and are designed for Candidate Countries and for those countries with a developed statistical system. The objectives of these reviews are, in particular, to assess the compliance of the reviewed National Statistical Institute (NSI) with Principles 1-6 and 15 of the European Statistics Code of Practice (CoP), to evaluate the co-ordination role of the NSI within the National Statistical System (NSS), to highlight transferable practices suitable for fostering compliance with the CoP and to recommend improvement actions for all principles of the CoP needed in view of fully complying with the CoP.

It should be mentioned that the NSSRA filled in the new self-assessment questionnaire on the implementation of the European Statistics Code of Practice and the questionnaire on the co-ordination role of the NSIs, which will be used in the second round of peer reviews in the EU member states.

The review process was initiated by EUROSTAT at the request of the NSSRA, made in September 2013. The review was conducted by three experts: leading expert Günter Kopsch (former Director of the Federal Statistical Office of Germany), Claudia Junker (EUROSTAT) and Siv Irene Pedersen (EUROSTAT). The review mission, in the form of an on-site visit, took place from 10 to 14 February 2014 (see Annex 1). Written material and links to documents published on the NSSRA website were made available prior to and during the assessment mission. Key documents included the completed self-assessment questionnaires (i.e. compliance with the CoP and co-ordination role), which were provided by the NSSRA by mid-January 2014.

The review team very much appreciated the well-prepared meetings and the openness of communication both with the NSSRA staff and with representatives from partner and stakeholder organisations. It is hoped that the review will be beneficial for the NSSRA’s further development.

0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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

- (1) The peer review team formed a good impression of the National Statistical Service of the Republic of Armenia (NSSRA) regarding the reviewed institutional aspects. Interviewed stakeholders emphasised that significant improvements have been achieved in the field of data accessibility in particular.
- (2) The Law on State Statistics of the Republic of Armenia provides a strong legal basis for the NSSRA with regard to professional independence. According to the Law, the NSSRA is a body ‘that is independent from state and local self-government bodies of the Republic of Armenia in its activities’. Moreover, the Law stipulates requirements for state statistical activities, which are directly based on the United Nations Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics. The term ‘state statistics’ corresponds to the term ‘official statistics’, which is used in most other statistical systems of the Eastern European, Caucasus and Central Asia countries.
- (3) The head of the NSSRA has a fixed term mandate of six years and the Law protects him/her from inappropriate dismissal during his/her term of office. It would be reasonable to stipulate the selection and appointment procedure in the Law.
- (4) A further safeguard for the professional independence of the NSSRA and the objectivity and impartiality of the production of state statistics is the very special organisation of official statistics in Armenia, with the management of the NSSRA acting as well as the State Council on Statistics, which has the right to adopt secondary legislation (e.g. the Annual Statistical Work Programme and standards to be used).
- (5) Discussions held between the peer review team, the management and other staff of the NSSRA and representatives of its main stakeholders have led to the opinion that the NSSRA acts independently in practice and that there is no inappropriate interference into the production and dissemination of state statistics.
- (6) State statistics are only produced by the NSSRA in Armenia. Statistics produced by other public bodies are called ‘administrative statistics’. This means that only the NSSRA has to follow the strong rules of the Law on State Statistics; the producers of administrative statistics do not. Administrative statistics is used for the purposes of the body producing the data and as input for the production of state statistics.
- (7) The State Council on Statistics, however, is given the legal right to co-ordinate administrative statistics. It has the authority to decide on the forms to be used by the administrative bodies for the collection of statistical data and to decide on standards and

methodologies. A strong objective has been the establishment of administrative registers by all state bodies and the improvement of their reliability. The influence of the Council and the NSSRA on the quality of administrative registers appears, however, not to be very strong.

- (8) The main co-ordination mechanisms are the Three-Year State and the Annual Statistical Work Programmes. The peer review team felt that the planning and user consultation process should be more formalised than it is at present. The already established Scientific and Methodological Council should, with a new composition, supervise and manage the statistical planning/consultation process in the future.
- (9) The NSSRA has a strong legal mandate to collect the data needed for the implementation of the statistical programmes. Responsibility for the methods to be used lies with the Council on State Statistics. Use of administrative data has made good progress in recent years. Nevertheless, further broadening and a clear objective of the NSSRA with regard to the use of administrative data are needed.
- (10) The NSSRA has concluded a number of memoranda of understanding for the improvement of co-operation with the other statistics producers. Comprehensive memoranda of understanding should be concluded soon with all producers of administrative statistics that provide such data to the NSSRA for the production of state statistics.
- (11) The peer review team had a clear impression that the financial resources of the NSSRA allocated by the state budget are not sufficient for implementing the Annual Statistical Work Programme and the necessary development activities. The NSSRA has to largely rely on foreign donor assistance, which has been crucial for conducting many survey projects and for modernising the IT equipment.
- (12) A large part of the staff works in the regional offices, being responsible for pure data collection activities, limited in scope and requirements. Based on an increased use of electronic data collection and an improvement of administrative registers in the communities, the reallocation of posts from regional offices to the central office should be considered. The development and implementation of a centralised, focused internal staff training programme is of high importance for increased staff efficiency.
- (13) The NSSRA promotes data quality as a general principle throughout the office and encourages all statisticians to apply quality measures in their daily work. Quality declarations of all 136 statistical products are available on the website, covering elements of quality dimensions and metadata.
- (14) However, no overall quality management system is in place and thus no systematic monitoring and management of quality is being implemented. It will be of utmost importance to introduce a wider structure of a Total Quality Management System in

order to start systematic quality management and assurance activities and root the principles of quality in all daily activities and staff. The designation of a quality manager and the creation of a unit responsible for the quality management are recommended.

- (15) Statistical confidentiality is guaranteed by the Law on State Statistics of Armenia and is strictly observed in practice. There has not been any breach of statistical confidentiality. Penalties have nevertheless been defined by law. Routines for data security are in place, but lack of resources may put data security at risk. The NSSRA does not provide individual data to any user or researcher and users in general have a good understanding of the need for statistical confidentiality.
- (16) Documentation and publication of internally-applied procedures (e.g. how errors discovered in published statistics are corrected and publicised) would be a mean to further improve the public perception that the NSSRA is an objective and impartial institution.
- (17) The NSSRA disseminates all statistical data free of charge on its website and several reports are published as paper publications. The NSSRA has several dissemination databases, such as ArmStatBank, ArmDevInfo and databases from different surveys. Users are generally satisfied with the website and the paper publications. Through quality declarations and other metadata, users are generally kept informed on methodology and have a good understanding of data quality. The NSSRA does not, however, have a comprehensive metadata system for all its statistics. Custom-designed analyses are provided free of charge after written request and approval from the State Council on Statistics, but are normally not published by the NSSRA. Equality of access to newly released data is ensured by the NSSRA. The data available to researchers is the data available through the databases and anonymised data requested by the researcher.
- (18) The management of the NSSRA expressed its clear intention to take further steps towards full compliance with the Code of Practice. The improvement actions as outlined in the annex and discussed with top management and senior staff should be of help.

1. FINDINGS PER PRINCIPLE

1.1. Principle 1: Professional independence

Professional independence of statistical authorities from other policy, regulatory or administrative departments and bodies, as well as from private sector operators, ensures the credibility of European Statistics.

Overall assessment:

Article 6 of the Law on State Statistics of the Republic of Armenia (signed by the President of Armenia on 26 April 2000) determines the body implementing state statistics, which is called the 'National Statistical Service and its territorial and functional units'. It is according to the Law 'a body implementing functions aimed at the public interest that is independent from state and local self-government bodies of the Republic of Armenia in its activities'. The term 'state statistics' corresponds to the term 'official statistics', which is used in most other statistical systems in Eastern European, Caucasus and Central Asia countries. State statistics are only produced by the National Statistical Service of the Republic of Armenia (NSSRA). Statistics produced by other public authorities are called 'administrative statistics'. This is statistics that is used for the purposes of the body producing the data and as input for the production of state statistics.

The supreme body of governance of the NSSRA is neither a ministry, nor the Government as a whole, nor the Parliament, but is according to Article 10 of the Law the State Council on Statistics, which is given the right to adopt secondary legislation in the field of statistics. The President of the NSSRA holds at the same time the post of the Chairperson of the Council, and the other six Council members also hold management functions within the NSSRA comparable to heads of departments in other statistical offices. Moreover, Article 5 of the Law on State Statistics stipulates requirements for state statistical activities, which are directly based on the United Nations Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics. The Law on State Statistics also gives a strong role to the NSSRA and its supreme body, the Council on State Statistics, through the planning process of the Three-Year State Statistical Work Programme and the Annual Statistical Work Programmes.

The Law provides a strong legal basis for the NSSRA with regard to professional independence. The legal status of a statistical office is a good prerequisite for being able to fully comply with the Independence Principle of the Code of Practice. However, it is not a guarantee. Professional independence of a producer of official statistics also has to be accepted in practice, in particular by the Government. Discussions held between the peer review team, the management and other staff of the NSSRA and representatives of its main stakeholders have led to the opinion that the NSSRA acts independently in practice and that there is no inappropriate interference into the production and dissemination of state statistics.

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

Article 5 of the Law on State Statistics determines the fundamental principles to be followed by the NSSRA in all of its activities that are conducted to produce and disseminate state statistics. Among others, the objectivity and neutrality of statistics, anonymity of the statistical data and integrity and accessibility of statistical information are explicitly mentioned, but without any explanation or definition, which should be supplemented in a future revision of the Law. Moreover, such an amendment should include an explicit reference to independence with regard to decisions on statistical methods, standards and procedures and on the content and timing of statistical releases.

The Law on State Statistics holds only for the NSSRA as the only producer of state statistics, and not for other authorities producing administrative statistics.

Indicator 1.2: The heads of the National Statistical Institutes 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 hierarchical level of the NSSRA's President is comparable to the highest ranking of public servants. He is appointed by the President of the Republic, which is comparable to the appointment of other heads of independent public authorities in Armenia, and participates in the meetings of the Government, without being a member of the Government itself. In the discussions with the management of the NSSRA it was agreed that the participation in Government meetings has both advantages and disadvantages, with the NSSRA considering that the advantages are predominant.

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

According to Article 9 of the Law on State Statistics, the NSSRA is headed by the President of the office, who has the task of organising the implementation of the state statistical work programme in correspondence with the principles laid down in the Law. The President of the Service is at the same time the Chairperson of the State Council on Statistics, which is the supreme body of governance of the NSSRA. As already stated, the Law on State Statistics holds only for the NSSRA and not for other authorities producing administrative statistics.

Indicator 1.4: The heads of the National Statistical Institutes 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.

The State Council on Statistics, which is chaired by the President of the NSSRA, decides on the methods to be used for the implementation of the programme, and

adopts the Annual Statistical Work Programme, which includes the planned publications and their periodicity. The review team formed the opinion that in practice the NSSRA meets the standards of the Code of Practice with respect to the responsibility for deciding on statistical methods, standards and procedures, and on the content and timing of statistical releases. Those interviewed during the peer review imparted a positive picture of the NSSRA's independence in production and dissemination activities.

Indicator 1.5: The Statistical Work Programmes are published and periodic reports describe progress made.

The objectives and planning process of the Three-Year State Statistical Work Programme are regulated in Article 11 of the Law on State Statistics. The programme is drafted by the NSSRA, confirmed by the Council and then presented by the Government to the National Assembly for adoption. It includes the main directions of the state statistical activity for the observation of the economic, demographic, social and environmental situation and development of the country. For the implementation of the Three-Year State Statistical Work Programme, Annual Statistical Work Programmes are developed by the NSSRA and adopted by the State Council on Statistics one month after the adoption of the State Budget of the Republic of Armenia.

Drafts of the Three-Year State Statistical Programme as well as of the Annual Statistical Work Programmes are circulated among stakeholders for comments and expression of new demands. The NSSRA provides written answers to these opinions. Users who do not agree with the NSSRA's answer are invited to bilateral meetings. Nevertheless, it appears that there is room for improved involvement of the main user groups, in particular the private sector of economy and the public at large, in the planning process. A concept for improving the consultation of all user groups in the preparation process of the Three-Year State and Annual Statistical Work Programmes should therefore be developed. It is suggested to activate the already-existing Scientific and Methodological Council, which, with a new composition, should in future fulfil the functions that Statistical Councils fulfil in other countries. Regular meetings of such a producer and user council would allow multilateral discussions of the draft programmes.

The NSSRA drafts and submits reports on the implementation of the Three-Year State Statistical Work Programmes to the National Assembly. Reports on the implementation of the Annual Statistical Work Programmes are also drafted by the NSSRA and confirmed by the Council on State Statistics.

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

The NSSRA publishes its own releases, which are clearly identifiable as coming from the NSSRA. It appears to be a clear policy of the NSSRA not to include any political comments in its statistical releases. The NSSRA has internal procedures for the drafting and publication of press releases and the organisation of press conferences;

however, these have not yet been published. Press releases in English (e.g. ‘Current-operative preliminary main macro-economic indicators characterising the socio-economic situation of RA for March 2014’, published on 22 April 2014; ‘Consumer price index in the Republic of Armenia in January-March 2014’, published on 31 March 2014; ‘Social Snapshot and poverty in Armenia 2013’, published on 26 November 2013; etc.) mostly include tables and only exceptionally include comments (e.g. ‘Social Snapshot and poverty in Armenia 2013’, published on 26 November 2013).

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

The Law on State Statistics does not include the right of the NSSRA to react publicly in the event of criticism or misuse of state statistics. It appears, however, that an internal policy exists on how to intervene publicly in the occurrence of such an event. The dissemination division of the NSSRA regularly monitors media reactions to statistical press releases and the NSSRA reacts in cases of serious misuse of published state statistical data. The NSSRA does not intervene in cases of incorrect use of statistical data in political debates. It is recommended to explicitly lay down the right of the NSSRA to intervene publicly in cases of criticism and misuse of state statistical data and to publish the internal policy on how to react on the website.

Indicator 1.8: The appointment of the heads of the National Statistical Institutes 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.

The Law on State Statistics provides the President of the NSSRA with a fixed term mandate of six years. Renewal is possible in practice (the current President is already in his third term). He is appointed by the President of the Republic, which is common practice for the heads of independent public authorities in Armenia. The required qualification is clearly stated in the Law on State Statistics. Moreover, the Law protects the President against an inappropriate dismissal during his term of office, which can be seen as a further institutional safeguard of the professional independence of the NSSRA. The reasons for a dismissal stipulated in the Law do not compromise professional or scientific independence. The Law does not include provisions on the selection procedures for the appointment of the President of the NSSRA or of the members of the State Council on Statistics. Even if the issue were regulated by the Law on Public Service for permanent bodies created by the laws of the Republic of Armenia, it would be reasonable to include a description of the selection and appointment procedures in the Law on State Statistics.

1.2. Principle 2: Mandate for data collection

Statistical authorities 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:

In particular, Article 12 of the Law on State Statistics together with the Three-Year State and the Annual Statistical Work Programmes provide the NSSRA with a strong legal mandate to collect the data needed for the implementation of the statistical programmes. The NSSRA is entitled to collect data directly from statistical units and is allowed to access administrative registers. Responsibility for the methods to be used lies with the Council on State Statistics. The Law stipulates the obligation of providers of statistical information to reply to state statistical observations in the Annual Statistical Work Programme free of charge. However, response in household surveys is normally voluntary, whereas response in the population and the agriculture census is obligatory. In case of non-response in obligatory surveys and censuses the Law includes rules to fine natural and legal persons. These rules are practiced in the event that businesses do not provide their data or do not provide correct information. Use of administrative data has made good progress in recent years. Further broadening is nevertheless needed.

Indicator 2.1: The mandate of the statistical authorities to collect information for the development, production and dissemination of European statistics is specified in law.

The mandate of the NSSRA to collect statistical data for the production and dissemination of state statistics is specified in the Law on State Statistics and in the Annual Statistical Work Programmes, the latter being secondary legislation adopted by the Council on State Statistics. The Annual Statistical Work Programmes include the list of surveys that shall be implemented by the NSSRA and Article 12 of the Law provides the legal foundation for the implementation of these surveys (in the Law called ‘state statistical observations’). The NSSRA management stated that response rates are in general satisfactory. Problems with non-response exist only for the Integrated Living Conditions Survey of Private Households, in particular in Yerevan and for households with a high level of income.

To reduce the response burden on enterprises and to improve the efficiency of the NSSRA, the establishment of online reporting via internet is being prepared. At this point only submission of the data by e-mail is possible. Computer Assisted Interviewing (CAI) techniques in household and price statistics cannot be used yet due to a lack of the necessary equipment.

Indicator 2.2: The statistical authorities are allowed by law to use administrative data for statistical purposes.

The NSSRA is given the right to access and use data from administrative registers. The respective regulation in the Law is, however, very short and not completely clear (“The observations by forms are implemented through ... as well as use of collected

data (including received from administrative registers)”). The State Council on Statistics has the task of co-ordinating administrative statistics in the Republic of Armenia as stipulated in the Annual Statistical Work Programme.

The NSSRA has made good progress in the course of recent years in the use of administrative data for statistical purposes. It has already concluded a number of memoranda of understanding for the improvement of co-operation and sharing of statistical data with other data producers (e.g. the Central Bank, State Revenue Committee, Ministry of Economy and Ministry of Justice; the Ministry of Transport and Communications provides data on the basis of a Prime Minister’s decree). Further improvement and broadening of the use of administrative data for state statistical purposes is nevertheless an objective of the NSSRA and is expressed in the 2013-2015 Three-Year State Statistical Work Programme. The NSSRA has reported in its self-assessment that some administrative registers are still lacking and that some registers are of a low quality. The NSSRA, supported by the State Council, should therefore endeavour to support the ministries and other public bodies in properly managing their administrative registers and to further strengthen its influence on the content of the registers. The access to and use of data from administrative registers indicate that the State Council acts effectively as the co-ordinator of administrative statistics. The co-ordinating authority of the Council refers in particular to issues such as standards and methods used.

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

All data collections from businesses are obligatory. In cases of non-response or incorrect response, businesses will be fined if they do not react to a reminder. The population census as well as the agriculture census is obligatory for households, whereas responding to household surveys is voluntary. As already stated, the response rates in business statistics are satisfactory according to the NSSRA management. In household statistics, there are problems with non-response for the Integrated Living Conditions Survey.

1.3. Principle 3: Adequacy of resources

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

Overall assessment:

According to the answers of the NSSRA in the self-assessment questionnaire and discussions with the NSSRA’s top management as well as senior and junior staff and various user groups during the peer review visit, it appears that the financial resources of the NSSRA allocated by the state budget are not sufficient to fulfil the implementation of the Annual Statistical Work Programme and the necessary development activities. The NSSRA has to rely on foreign donor assistance, which has been crucial for conducting many surveys and for updating and acquiring equipment.

The lack of financial resources has negative effects on the modernisation of IT equipment in particular and with that on the efficiency of the work processes.

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

With a total number of 360 staff members, 334 of which are civil servants, and approximately 400 contractual employees the staff capacity of the NSSRA appears to be adequate for a country of the size of Armenia. The education level of the civil servants is rather high, with nearly 90% having university degrees, and the NSSRA commends staff knowledge and skills in the self-assessment. However, a large part of the staff works in the regional offices, being responsible for pure data collection, limited in scope and requirements. This is common for countries that were part of the Soviet Union. Because of this, the number of staff in the central office (181) is rather low in view of the varied tasks. With the further implementation of electronic data collection and a further improvement of administrative registers in the communities, the reallocation of posts from regional offices to the central office should be considered. It is worth mentioning that the NSSRA is in a position to take such a decision on the basis of the Law on Civil Service.

The central office is organised into many rather small units, which can create bottlenecks in the event of changing workload, thus increasing the risk of delays when staff members change or are not present for any reason. A more flexible office structure should be considered.

Salaries in the NSSRA are comparable to those in other parts of the public service, however not to those in the private sector of the economy and also not to those of the Central Bank. Turnover of young staff is a problem, in particular in the field of IT.

The NSSRA does not have a systematic staff training programme. Staff may participate in local training programmes in other institutions or in international training courses if resources allow. Such staff training, however, is not systematic and nearly all subject or domain training is provided on the job. Young staff seem to have almost no chance to attend any training, while systematic and regular training would be urgently needed for the young staff in particular. The NSSRA should therefore work towards developing and implementing a centralised and focused internal staff training programme.

The very low IT budget does not allow for the necessary renewal of IT equipment. IT expenditure comprised only 1.5 % of the annual NSSRA budget in 2013. In particular, IT equipment in the regional offices is outdated and not sufficient in numbers. Many of the older computers cannot handle newer software. Two versions of each programme and application must be developed so that both older and newer computers can be used. Standard software is also maintained in older and newer versions. The NSSRA urgently needs improvement in this domain and support from donors seems to be the most realistic means for getting the necessary resources. The NSSRA should nevertheless continue promoting the provision of sufficient resources for IT and the implementation of surveys from the state budget.

1.4. Principle 4: Commitment to quality

Statistical authorities are committed to quality. They systematically and regularly identify strengths and weaknesses to continuously improve process and product quality.

Overall assessment:

The NSSRA promotes data quality as a general principle throughout the office and encourages all statisticians to apply quality measures in their daily work. Most of the quality dimensions are mentioned in Article 5 of the Law on State Statistics. From 2011 to 2013 the NSSRA developed quality declarations for all of its 136 statistical products, covering some of the quality dimensions and metadata. They are available in English on the website of the NSSRA and mark a first important step in the documentation of quality of statistical products for the NSSRA.

However, no overall quality management system is in place and, as a consequence, no systematic monitoring and management of quality is being implemented, although it is planned for the future. Thus, implementation of quality management and quality assurance has been rather piecemeal and narrowly focused. All statistical subject divisions within the NSSRA consider data accuracy and timeliness as a measure of quality, but the wider structure of a Quality Management System (QMS) is not commonly understood, not yet introduced and hence not followed by staff.

It is recommended that the NSSRA identifies different quality management systems, develops a Quality Management System based on its needs and local conditions and starts implementing this Quality Management System as a matter of priority. For the implementation of such a comprehensive and all-encompassing QMS, it is recommended that the NSSRA nominates a quality manager (possibly in the division on business register, sampling and classifications), develops a plan for the design of an associated quality assurance framework and implements a training programme on quality management for all staff in the office. Implementation of such a Quality Management System and the related quality assurance framework will be a long term task for the NSSRA for the next 4-5 years.

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.

The mission found that no overall quality policy exists as such and is therefore not available to the public, although the NSSRA has made a number of efforts in the area of quality management.

NSSRA staff is strongly committed to quality. This commitment is substantiated through a general statement in Article 5 of the Statistical Law which mentions various quality dimensions, as well as in a statement in the ‘Three Year State Statistical Work Programme of the Republic of Armenia for 2013-2015’ which mentions quality as an area of priority for international co-operation. However, the current understanding of

staff about quality commitment is limited and the concept of quality is largely assessed through the combination of data accuracy, reliability and timeliness characteristics. The quality dimensions are generally evaluated through sampling error measurement, time schedules applied for the internal monitoring of work (although not all of them are announced externally to users) and the general professional experience of staff and heads of divisions.

Although a recent Twinning project included a component on quality and some progress was achieved through the publications of quality declarations (see Indicators 4.2 and 4.4 below), there is no commonly spread, deep understanding of the wider concept of a Quality Management System such as the ESS Quality Assurance Framework, TQM or EFQM, leading to the need to assess quality by a wider range of parameters. Such an understanding may have been partially transferred to the top management of the NSSRA but is not yet rooted in the staff of the NSSRA.

The NSSRA has recognised the need to introduce a wider quality concept throughout the office, broadening the general understanding of all staff regarding all quality aspects such as data quality, reporting on quality to users and producers, product quality, process quality, measurement and assessment of quality. This concept would also include aspects such as staff management, training, change management, business process orientation and the like. As a matter of priority, the NSSRA should therefore develop an overall Quality Management System and a quality assurance framework during the next 3-5 years, depending on available resources. In order to make this objective operational, the NSSRA should investigate a number of known quality frameworks and their implementation in practice in order to define the best and most suitable model for the conditions in which the NSSRA is operating. A next step would be to develop a plan for implementing the quality assurance framework, including the necessary training of staff at all levels and making the quality commitment public on the website. A necessary precondition for this will be the nomination of a quality manager for the NSSRA and the set-up/further development of an entity/structure (division or working group) to take overall responsibility for the development and implementation of quality management.

If the NSSRA intends to pursue the implementation of European standards in selected statistical domains, then the production of quality reports will need to be envisaged to accompany the production of data in accordance with European standards. The introduction of a quality management framework will support the production of these quality reports and will provide the means to compile them.

Indicator 4.2: Procedures are in place for planning and monitoring the quality of the statistical production process.

Quality declarations for the 136 products have been developed on the basis of the 2002 European Quality Declaration. These quality declarations are user-oriented and mark a first step in the undertaking of framing and assessing quality in all stages of data production. However, no properly designed and documented procedures for monitoring the quality of the statistical production process yet exist. They will need

to be developed within the framework of the work on the overall Quality Management System.

Indicator 4.3: Product quality is regularly monitored and assessed with regard to possible trade-offs and is reported according to the quality criteria for European Statistics.

At present there is a working group on quality involving a number of staff from other divisions of the NSSRA, but being a more consultative and co-ordinating body it has no overall mandate for the development of a Quality Management System and no responsibility for setting up processes and guidelines to monitor product quality. Product quality is entirely in the hands of the person producing the product, his/her head of division and, finally, the top management of the NSSRA. Some centralised guidance on how to produce the 136 quality declarations exists and is updated from time to time and currently supplemented with new ones, for example on transport, population census, etc.

The nomination of a quality manager and a more centralised approach to quality management should make it possible to develop a systematic approach to monitoring and assessing product quality in accordance with the relevant quality criteria.

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

The 136 quality declarations can be seen as a regular review of key statistical outputs and they are also updated when changes occur. However, the quality declarations as they currently exist are more user-oriented quality reports containing a limited range of information. Thorough in-depth reviews of key statistical outputs may be implemented by some of the statistical divisions, but this is done neither with central guidance nor on a regular basis, and they are not made public. Quality assessments or quality audits are not yet implemented and no common questionnaire covering the assessment of the quality of all phases of statistical production exists. External experts are involved in the IMF reviews of macro-economic data and experts within the twinning projects may also review certain domains of statistics, but these cannot be considered quality assessments within the meaning of the ESCoP. The future quality manager should develop a programme of regular and comprehensive quality reviews (e.g. quality assessments, quality audits) of all key statistical outputs based on an assessment checklist that is applicable for all outputs.

1.5. Principle 5: Statistical confidentiality

The privacy of data providers (i.e. 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:

Statistical confidentiality is strictly observed by the NSSRA. Legally it is ensured by Article 14 of the Law on State Statistics, which is supplemented by the order 'On protection of Statistical Confidentiality', State Council on Statistics of RA, resolution No. 53. There seems to be a good understanding of the content and the importance of statistical confidentiality among NSSRA staff and users, and there are no examples of breaches of statistical confidentiality. Data security has been taken care of and the greatest challenge is the lack of IT resources also mentioned under Principle 3.

Indicator 5.1: Statistical confidentiality is guaranteed in law.

Chapter 2, Article 14 of the Law on State Statistics of the Republic of Armenia ensures that there is a legal provision for statistical confidentiality. This article covers issues such as a definition of confidential data and procedures for disseminating data on monopoly activities, which is defined as confidential but the non-dissemination of this information would essentially influence the completeness of statistical information. In such cases the decision on dissemination has to be adopted by the Council.

Indicator 5.2: Staff sign legal confidentiality commitments on appointment.

The NSSRA staff as well as contract staff sign commitments of confidentiality when appointed. These commitments were updated in 2007.

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

The penalties for breaching statistical confidentiality are determined by Article 23 of the Republic of Armenia Law on Civil Service. No breach of the statistical confidentiality has ever been reported.

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

Resolution No. 53 from the State Council of Statistics of RA is an order 'On protection of Statistical Confidentiality' and covers the implementation of the statistical confidentiality mentioned in the Law on State Statistics. This order is available on the NSSRA's website but is not easily accessible to users. The 'Commission on statistical confidentiality issues (working group)', established by the President of the NSSRA, is responsible for systematically updating and evaluating all processes and procedures regarding statistical confidentiality.

There is a good understanding of the need for statistical confidentiality among users. This could be supported by the publication of a user-friendly explanation of statistical confidentiality on the website. The NSSRA accommodates requests from users to obtain micro-data while ensuring statistical confidentiality and has identified proper techniques to this end. Researchers receive anonymised data files. Other users, such as international organisations, ask for special calculations using individual data, but no-one will receive non-anonymised micro-data. There is no example of a breach of this principle.

Indicator 5.5: Physical, technological and organisational provisions are in place to protect the security and integrity of statistical databases.

The routines for data security are well established in the NSSRA and dedicated staff is allocated to several important tasks ensuring data security. A network administrator has the responsibility of ensuring data security for the network and monitoring the use of network resources and passwords. The network administrator is also responsible for updating the network and ensuring the uninterrupted operation of network and safety features. A database administrator has the obligation to develop and maintain the databases and to ensure data security. The database administrator is also responsible for user registration, an internal database and back-ups. The obligations of the network administrator and the database administrator are described in the internal guidelines. The NSSRA has brief internal instructions on storage and the use of passwords as well as internal instructions for creating and storing backups.

The major challenge for data security is the lack of resources. The IT equipment is partly of poor quality. There are a number of outdated computers and, as mentioned under Principle 3, this means that software has to be maintained and developed in two different versions. Old versions of standard software could result in a lack of security updates. There is also a significant risk of data loss, including back-up data.

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

Researchers do not have access to identifiable micro-data and the NSSRA does not have a safe centre or remote access to micro-data. The NSSRA provides researchers with unidentifiable micro-data through several dissemination databases and on request. It also makes specialised, tailor-made calculations for users in general. Statistical confidentiality is strictly upheld by the NSSRA. Users get access to this data by sending a written request to the NSSRA and this request is approved by the State Council on Statistics. Users have a good understanding of the NSSRA's limitations and seem to be satisfied with both the process and the service they receive. The NSSRA has not published easily accessible and user-friendly guidelines on the procedures for getting access to tailor-made statistics.

1.6. Principle 6: Impartiality and objectivity

Statistical authorities respect scientific independence whilst developing, producing and disseminating European Statistics in an objective, professional and transparent manner in which all users are treated equitably.

Overall assessment:

Observations made during the peer review provided strong evidence that the NSSRA respects scientific independence in producing and disseminating state statistics and carries out its tasks in an objective, professional and transparent manner. Neither the impartiality nor the objectivity of the Service were questioned at any stage of the peer review; rather, they were confirmed by all interviewed groups of stakeholders. The practice in ensuring equality of access to newly released data is to be highlighted as exemplary. Documentation and publication on the website of internally agreed and applied procedures would be a means to further improve the population's perception that the NSSRA is an impartial and objective institution.

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

Article 5 of the Law on State Statistics stipulates objectivity, neutrality and integrity of statistical information as requirements of state statistics. With the Law's determination of the State Council on Statistics as the supreme body of governance of the NSSRA, scientific independence of statistics has a very strong legal basis in Armenia. Stakeholders interviewed during the peer review, including representatives of the media, felt confident that the NSSRA compiles statistics on an objective basis determined by statistical considerations only.

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

With the legal right of the State Council on Statistics to adopt the Annual Statistical Work Programmes, choices of sources and statistical methods as well as decisions about the dissemination of statistics are in the hands of the statisticians. The NSSRA strictly applies international statistical methods and standards to guarantee the objectivity and international comparability of the statistical data produced. The stakeholders who were interviewed confirmed the professionalism of the NSSRA's staff.

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

If errors are identified in already-published statistics they will be corrected immediately and users will be informed. A document that describes the procedure and that can be used by the staff does not yet exist and should be prepared and published soon. The document should explain how to act in the event of errors in printed publications, online databases and press releases.

Staff are informed that they will be fined if they cause such errors. This, in the eyes of the peers, is not conducive to creating a culture in the office where errors can be and are admitted.

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

The NSSRA's website includes documentation for all statistical products. The so-called 'quality declarations' describe the regulatory background and the reason why the statistics are produced, explain the methodology used, provide information on the data quality and how data should be interpreted, and supply other important information for users. Relevant information can also be found in all print publications of the NSSRA.

As a subscriber to the Special Data Dissemination Standard of the IMF (SDDS), the NSSRA regularly provides metadata concerning the SDDS indicators to the IMF.

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

The NSSRA publishes an annual release calendar in advance, which is, however, not yet complete. It contains the SDDS data, while dates of publications are included in the Annual Statistical Work Programme. It is recommended to publish a comprehensive annual release calendar separately on the website in advance and to include the obligation to publish a release calendar in a revised Law on State Statistics.

Any change of a pre-announced publication date for the release calendar should be published and explained in advance as early as possible for the sake of transparency. In the dissemination policy or in a separate document it should be precisely explained under which circumstances a pre-announced publication date can be changed and how the revised date will be made public. The rules should be published. The management of the NSSRA stated that such changes have never happened.

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

The NSSRA publishes a revision policy for National Accounts on its website. A comprehensive revision policy should be developed and published in the dissemination policy or in a separate document. It should contain the procedures used for all statistics with publications of preliminary and final results, and it should contain procedures used in the event of changes in classifications and methodology.

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.

The management of the NSSRA informed the members of the peer review team that in practice all users have equal access to statistical releases, as stipulated in the Three-Year State Statistical Work Programme. Until now leaks have never occurred. It is recommended to describe the mechanisms used to ensure equal access as well as the

measures for preventing leaks in the dissemination policy or in a separate document, which should be published on the website.

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

Impartiality and objectivity are major principles which determine the production and dissemination of state statistics by the NSSRA. It appears that procedures for preparing and approving press releases and statements for press conferences in the office and for ensuring objectivity in their contents have been described in internal documents. They should be published on the NSSRA's website, if possible also in English.

1.7. Principle 15: Accessibility and clarity

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

Overall assessment:

The NSSRA disseminates all statistics on its website and much of this is also published on paper. Some of the statistics are also available in English and Russian. Metadata is presented together with the statistics both in electronic and paper form, but could benefit from some improvement. All statistics disseminated by the NSSRA, including paper publications, are free of charge and available to everybody.

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

The NSSRA website is structured and easily accessible. 'Resolution of the State Council on Statistics of the Republic of Armenia' of 15 August 2001 No. 60 is an order on the forms of publication of statistical information. This order is based on Chapter 2, Article 14 of the Law on State Statistics of the Republic of Armenia, and regulates the types of publications and forms of dissemination. A comprehensive document on the NSSRA's dissemination policy is missing.

Metadata according to the SDDS and quality declarations developed and updated for each statistical product are published on the website. Paper publications include a chapter on metadata.

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

The NSSRA disseminates data through several dissemination databases, PDF reports and other statistical releases. ArmStatBank (based on PC Axis) and ArmDevInfo (based on DevInfo) are the largest dissemination databases. There are also databases with anonymised data from different surveys, most of them open to all users. The

users are to a large degree satisfied with the NSSRA website; this is especially the case for expert users. Some users interviewed during the peer review criticised the number of databases, which makes it more difficult to find the data users are looking for. A common dissemination database should therefore be developed.

The NSSRA publishes a large number of paper publications. A 'Catalogue of Statistical Publications' is published at the beginning of the year and the dissemination of these publications is accompanied by press releases and press conferences. While users, and especially expert users, increasingly use the website, paper publications are still requested due to unstable internet connections and habits. It could be predicted that the need for paper publications will decrease in the future. The NSSRA has held training for user groups on the use of databases and should continue to do so. This kind of training could also be useful in the process of developing a unified dissemination database.

The NSSRA has a call centre, placed within the Statistical Information, Dissemination and Public Relations Division, which is open from 9am to 6pm. There is no policy or guideline for how to deal with questions from users. Staff of the Statistical Information, Dissemination and Public Relations Division answer general questions themselves, and refer specific issues to the relevant subject-matter departments.

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

The NSSRA follows guidelines concerning requests for data and all users are treated equally. While the impression of the more experienced users was that procedures for requesting custom-designed analyses were known, these procedures are not easily found on the website. Custom-designed analyses are made for users upon written request to the President of the NSSRA and are decided by the State Council on Statistics. Most users were of the opinion that they receive the information they need and understood the limitations in terms of dissemination of individual data placed on the NSSRA.

All statistics are available free of charge, including custom-designed analyses. Users are generally satisfied with the work of the NSSRA. Most custom-designed analyses are not published on the website by the NSSRA.

Indicator 15.4: Access to micro-data is allowed for research purposes and is subject to specific rules or protocols.

Researchers are not treated much differently than any other user and do not receive identifiable micro-data. The NSSRA does not have a safe centre where researchers can work with micro-data and it is not possible to remotely access micro-data. The data available to researchers is the data available through the databases and anonymised data requested by the researcher.

Indicator 15.5: Metadata is documented according to standardised metadata systems.

Metadata is disseminated along with the statistics, both in a special chapter in the paper publications and on the website, where metadata is available in the methodology icon. The NSSRA has subscribed to the SDDS and has a link to the Armenian page of the IMF SDDS website. The NSSRA has additionally developed ‘quality declarations’ for 136 statistical products. These quality declarations are updated as needed by the subject matter divisions and are initiated by the relevant Head of Division.

The NSSRA does not have a metadata system that includes standardised metadata on all statistics disseminated by the NSSRA. The metadata should be improved in three steps: first, by reorganising the way SDDS and quality declarations are disseminated on the website to make it easier for users to find them; second, by identifying a metadata standard that will serve the needs and conditions of the NSSRA and the users; and third, by implementing this metadata standard.

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

Users are generally kept informed on the methodology for surveys and censuses through the quality declarations which are available on NSSRA’s website. Meetings with the users showed that they generally have a good understanding of the quality of statistics and the challenges linked to the treatment of primary data, and there seems to be good, mainly bilateral communication between the expert users and the NSSRA. The users did not seem as informed about the methodology for producing statistics based on administrative data, or the processes involved when the NSSRA disseminates statistics produced by other public bodies.

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

Users are not kept informed on quality in a comprehensive and systematic way. Metadata is published by the NSSRA in the form of quality declarations for all statistical products and NSDS. This does not follow the quality criteria for European Statistics yet, and the users are therefore not informed about it.

2. CO-ORDINATION ROLE OF THE NATIONAL STATISTICAL INSTITUTE

A review of the co-ordination of the National Statistical System in Armenia first requires an answer to the question: How is the National Statistical System defined and delimited?

The Law on State Statistics does not give a clear answer to this question. It does not speak of the National Statistical System of Armenia. An internationally used definition can be found in the OECD Glossary of Statistical Terms: ‘The National Statistical System is the ensemble of statistical organisations and units within a country that jointly collect, process and disseminate official statistics on behalf of the

national government'. A problem is that the term 'official statistics' is also not used in the Law on State Statistics. The Law speaks of 'state statistics', which are produced by the National Statistical Service (NSSRA), and it speaks of 'administrative statistics', which are produced by other public bodies.

As a result of the discussions with the NSSRA management, producers of administrative statistics and different user groups, it turned out that the term 'state statistics' is used synonymously for 'official statistics' and that state statistics are only produced by the NSSRA. That means that the Armenian Statistical System is a strongly centralised system, and it means that only the NSSRA has to follow the strong rules of the Law on State Statistics while the producers of administrative statistics do not.

As regards the co-ordination of statistics in Armenia, the Law on State Statistics stipulates in Article 7 that the NSSRA implements the state statistical work and co-ordinates it on the territory of the Republic of Armenia. Moreover, the State Council on Statistics has the task of co-ordinating the administrative statistics stipulated in the Annual Statistical Work Programmes.

The main co-ordination mechanisms are the Three-Year State and the Annual Statistical Work Programmes. The NSSRA is, according to the Law on State Statistics, the institution that drafts the programmes, which are circulated among stakeholders to obtain their comments, demands and concerns. In the meetings with users during the peer review it was positively emphasised that the NSSRA always responds in writing or, if necessary, invites stakeholders to bilateral meetings. Nevertheless, the peer review team felt that the whole planning and user consultation process should be more formalised than it is at present. The function of the State Council on Statistics in Armenia is completely different from that of councils in most other countries. It is therefore recommended to activate the already-established Scientific and Methodological Council, which, with a new composition, should in future and under the chairmanship of the NSSRA oversee and manage the statistical planning/consultation process. The new Council would comprise representatives of the other most important authorities producing statistics stipulated in the Annual Statistical Work Programmes and of main user groups from the public sector as well as from the private economy and society. The Committee could establish standing or ad hoc working groups for selected statistical domains, if needed.

The State Council is given the legal right to co-ordinate administrative statistics and, in addition, the authority to adopt secondary legislation in the field of statistics. It adopts the Annual Statistical Work Programmes, has the right to decide on the forms to be used by administrative bodies for the collection of data which will be used for statistical purposes and the right to decide on standards and methodologies. A strong objective has been the establishment of administrative registers by all state bodies and the improvement of their reliability. The influence of the Council and the NSSRA on the quality of administrative registers appears, however, not to be very strong. Responsibility for the quality of each institution's register lies with the institution. Users interviewed during the peer review voiced doubts about the quality of statistics

that are based on administrative data. The Council and the NSSRA intend to improve their co-ordination activities and their monitoring of the data quality of administrative registers. For this, it is recommended to organise training for other statistics producers concerning the understanding and improvement of data quality. However, the Council and the NSSRA can only use the competencies given to them by the Law if they have the resources needed to fulfil the labour-intensive tasks related to co-ordination activities. It seems that such resources are not sufficiently available.

The NSSRA has concluded a number of memoranda of understanding for improving co-operation with the other statistics producers (e.g. the Central Bank, State Revenue Committee, Ministry of Economy and Ministry of Justice; the Ministry of Transport and Communications provides data on the basis of a Prime Minister's decree). Comprehensive memoranda of understanding should be concluded as soon as possible with all producers of administrative statistics that provide such administrative statistics to the NSSRA for the production of state statistics. The memoranda should include the other authority's guarantee to comply with the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics and the European Statistics Code of Practice and provide human and financial resources for the implementation of their statistics, along with the establishment of a working group for the co-ordination of activities. The memoranda should further guarantee the NSSRA's obligation to determine standards, provide guidelines and give methodological support, as well as the exchange of data in compliance with confidentiality rules.

3. GOOD PRACTICES TO BE HIGHLIGHTED

- The statistical system is strongly centralised as all official statistics, called ‘state statistics’, are produced by the NSSRA. In a small country like Armenia it makes sense to centralise the production of official statistics in one institution to make better use of resources, to centralise educated and skilled statisticians in one office and to increase the efficiency of statistical production.
- The NSSRA has access to the tax register without limitations or problems. Good co-operation has been established by organising specific training and producing manuals/handbooks regarding the implementation of NACE rev 2 for the tax office employees. This has helped to improve the relationship with the tax office and has benefited the free access to tax data.
- The system of professional independence as established by the NSSRA is a good example of how to ensure professional independence in a transition country that does not have a long history of such independence. This system consists of three different elements, which together provide a relatively secure independence from government influence:
 - The President of the NSSRA is appointed by the President of the country for six years, which is a different time schedule than that for the President of the country. As a consequence, the NSSRA President cannot be dismissed upon the arrival of the new President of the country. Furthermore, this method of appointment also provides a strong position vis-à-vis the government and allows strong guidance on the design of other administrative data sources.
 - The NSSRA’s Three-Year State Statistical Work Programme is approved by the Parliament after the consultation of all stakeholders. This gives a strong mandate to the NSSRA to collect and produce official statistics.
 - The Annual Statistical Work Programme is approved by the Council of the NSSRA, which also represents the top management of the NSSRA. Financing of the Programme is provided by the state budget.
- On the basis of the Law on Civil Service the NSSRA has the authority and right to move staff from the territorial bodies to its headquarters, which provides sufficient flexibility in staff allocation.
- The NSSRA ensures equality of access for all users to newly released data.

4. LIST OF IMPROVEMENT ACTIONS BY PRINCIPLE OF THE CODE

4.1. Improvement Actions Principle 1: Professional Independence

Improvement actions	Timetable
Including definitions of the principles of official statistics into the Law on State Statistics.	2016
Including a description of the procedures for selection and appointment of the NSSRA President and the members of the State Council into the Law on State Statistics.	2016
Developing a concept for the establishment of more formalised consultations of all user groups in a more integrated way in the programme planning process.	2015
Developing and publishing a guideline on how to comment publicly on statistical issues, including criticisms and misuses of official statistics.	2014

4.2. Improvement Actions Principle 2: Mandate for Data Collection

Improvement actions	Timetable
Stating in the Law more precisely the NSSRA's right to access and use all kinds of administrative data for statistical purposes.	2016
Concluding further memoranda with providers of administrative data for improving the quality of administrative registers.	2014-2016
Developing online reporting via internet to reduce the reporting burden for businesses and increase the NSSRA's efficiency.	2015-2016 (depending on resources)
Investigating the use of CAI techniques in household and price statistics.	2015-2016

4.3. Improvement Actions Principle 3: Adequacy of Resources

Improvement actions	Timetable
Considering a reorganisation of the NSSRA together with a reallocation of posts from regional offices to the central office (in parallel with the formation of a system providing monthly and quarterly information from administrative registers and the introduction of online reporting).	2016-2018
Promoting the provision of sufficient resources for IT and the implementation of surveys from the state budget.	Ongoing

4.4. Improvement Actions Principle 4: Commitment to Quality

Improvement actions	Timetable
Nominating a quality manager within the Business Register, Sampling and Classifications Unit.	2014
Developing a plan for a quality management system and for the design of an associated quality assurance framework.	2015
Making the quality commitment public.	06/2015
Implementing training on quality issues.	2015 - 2018
Implementing the quality management system and the related quality assurance framework.	2015 - 2018

4.5. Improvement Actions Principle 5: Statistical Confidentiality

Improvement actions	Timetable
Disseminating separate guidelines on the access to and handling of micro-data for researchers' purposes.	2014
Developing a strategy for assuring technical provisions for data security.	2014
Disseminating a user-friendly explanation of confidentiality on the website.	2014

4.6. Improvement Actions Principle 6: Impartiality and Objectivity

Improvement actions	Timetable
Preparing and publishing a description of the procedure for correcting serious errors in already-published data and informing users.	2014
Publishing the pre-release calendar separately on the website.	2014
Publishing a revision policy for all relevant data.	2014
Describing and publishing the mechanisms used to ensure equal access to statistical releases.	2014
Publishing procedures for preparing press releases and statements in press conferences and ensuring the objectivity of their content.	2014

4.7. Improvement Actions Principle 7: Sound Methodology

Improvement actions	Timetable
Improving the NSSRA's sampling, together with the implementation of a specific sampling software developed within the NSSRA.	2015
Upgrading methodological work by offering advice to the subject-matter divisions on sampling issues.	2014-2015
Broadening the use of data from administrative registers.	2014-2017
Developing and implementing a centralised internal training programme (including languages) for all staff.	2015

4.8. Improvement Actions Principle 8: Appropriate Statistical Procedures

Improvement actions	Timetable
Creating a new database of the addresses of private Armenian households according to the 2011 Population Census.	2014

4.9. Improvement Actions Principle 9: Non-Excessive Burden on Respondents

Improvement actions	Timetable
Undertaking yearly updates of the response burden measurement, taking into account only structural changes of questionnaires, population sizes and new or discontinued statistics.	2014-2018
Establishing new baseline measurements every 5-7 years.	2017
Continuing to redesign questionnaires in accordance with the design manual established during the Twinning project and giving priority to redesigning costly surveys with a high response burden, high frequency or low data supplier satisfaction.	2014-2016

4.10. Improvement Actions Principle 10: Cost Effectiveness

Improvement actions	Timetable
Creating a corporative modern network with regional offices.	2014(depending on resources)

4.11. Improvement Actions Principle 11: Relevance

Improvement actions	Timetable
Intensifying communication with users through user satisfaction surveys and further improvement of the programme planning procedures for reviewing existing statistics and identifying emerging data requirements	2014-2017

4.12. Improvement Actions Principle 12: Accuracy and Reliability

Improvement actions	Timetable

4.13. Improvement Actions Principle 13: Timeliness and Punctuality

Improvement actions	Timetable
Investigating user needs for the improvement of the timeliness of NSSRA data and comparing the timeliness of NSSRA data to international timeliness standards	2015

4.14. Improvement Actions Principle 14: Coherence and Comparability

Improvement actions	Timetable

4.15. Improvement Actions Principle 15: Accessibility and Clarity

Improvement actions	Timetable
Developing and publishing a dissemination policy.	2015
Re-arranging existing metadata on the website.	2014
Identifying metadata standards.	2014
Developing metadata according to the chosen international standards.	2015-2019
Publishing a tailor-made analysis on the website.	2015/Ongoing
Developing a systematic training programme for users.	2014
Developing one dissemination database.	2018 (depending on resources)

4.16. Improvement Actions: Coordination of the National Statistical System

Improvement actions	Timetable
Changing the composition of and activating the existing Scientific and Methodological Council of the NSSRA to oversee and manage the planning/user consultation process, which is to be more formalised in future.	2015
Organising training of other statistics producers on the understanding and improvement of data quality.	2015

5 ANNEXES

Annex 1

Agenda of the LPR

Light Peer Review, Agenda

National Statistical Service, Armenia

Date and place of LPR

Date: 10-14 February 2014

Place: NSS premises

Assessment team

GOPA expert: Mr. Günter Kopsch

Eurostat: Ms Claudia Junker

Ms Siv-Irene Pedersen

Light Peer Review of the Armenian National Statistical Service

Day 1: February 10		
09.00 – 09.30	Welcome and introductory meeting with the top management of the National Statistical Service of Armenia	Assessment Team NSS top management
09.30 – 11.00	Review of Principles 1, 2 and 3, including coordination of the statistical system	Assessment Team NSS top management
11.00 – 11.15	Coffee Break	
11.15 – 13.00	Cont.: review of Principles 1, 2 and 3, incl. coordination of the statistical system	Assessment Team NSS top management
13.00 – 14.30	Lunch Break	
14.30 – 16.00	Review of Principle 4	Assessment Team NSS top management
16.00 – 16.15	Coffee Break	
16.15 – 17.15	Review of Principle 5	Assessment Team NSS top management
Day 2: February 11		
09.00 – 11.00	Review of Principles 6 and 15	Assessment Team NSS top management
11.00 – 11.15	Coffee Break	
11.15 – 12.45	Meeting with Statistical Council	Assessment Team

Light Peer Review of the Armenian National Statistical Service

		Chairperson and some additional Council members
12.45 – 14.00	Lunch Break	
14.00 – 15.30	Meeting with junior staff	Assessment Team NSS junior staff
15.30 – 15.45	Coffee Break	
15.45 – 17.15	Meeting with other producers of official statistics (ministries, Central Bank, other public authorities)	Assessment Team Representatives of other producers
Day 3: February 12		
09.00 – 11.00	Meeting with users: ministries and other public bodies	Assessment team Representatives of users from ministries, Central Bank and other public bodies
11.00 – 11.15	Coffee Break	
11.15 – 12.45	Meeting with users: scientific community	Assessment team Representatives of scientific community
12.45 – 14.00	Lunch Break	
14.00 – 15.30	Meeting with users: business associations, Chamber of Commerce, trade unions	Assessment Team Representatives of these institutions
15.30 – 15.45	Coffee Break	
15.45 – 17.15	Meeting with media	Assessment Team Representatives of media

Light Peer Review of the Armenian National Statistical Service

Day 4:	February 13	
10.00 – 11.30	Meeting with international organisations	Assessment Team Representatives of international organisations (UN, IMF, Worldbank, etc.)
11.30 – 13.00	Lunch Break	
13.00 – 17.00	Meeting with NSS senior staff: detailed review and discussion of improvement actions with respect to all principles of the Code of Practice	Assessment Team NSS senior staff (division heads)
Day 5:	February 14	
13.00 – 15.00	Meeting with top management: conclusions and recommendations (including improvement actions)	Assessment team NSS top management

Law on State Statistics of the Republic of Armenia

LAW ON STATE STATISTICS OF THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA

This Law determines the order of organization of state statistics in the Republic of Armenia and regulates the relations regarding the obligatory collection, processing, accumulation, summarizing and keeping, as well as the analysis, exchange of statistical data related to the social and economic processes in the Republic, population and spheres of its activities, and the presentation (publication) of statistical information.

CHAPTER 1 GENERAL PROVISIONS

Article 1. The State Statistics Legislation

The state statistics legislation is composed of this Law and other relevant legislative acts.

Article 2. The Sphere of Law Activity

This Law is mandatory to all the legal persons, isolated units of foreign legal persons acting in the territory of the Republic of Armenia, individual entrepreneurs, state bodies and local self-government bodies, state establishments not being the state bodies (hereinafter referred to as the state establishments), as well as to the citizens (providing with statistical information).

Article 3. State Statistics

State Statistics is an activity to be implemented by the state statistics body and its units according to the three-year and annual programs of state statistical work.

Article 4. Principal Tasks of the State Statistics

Principal tasks of the state statistics are as follows:

- a) organization of the statistical informational system on economic and public processes and their results, provision with information to the state bodies and local self-government bodies, legal persons, state establishments and international organizations, as well as the society according to the established order;
- b) provision with unique methodology on statistics appropriate to the standards established by international organizations;
- c) maintenance of the state statistical register;
- d) maintenance of classifiers of required technical, economic and social information for organization of statistical work;
- e) systematization of development of document forms being the source of statistical information;
- f) support to state bodies and local government bodies, as well as the organizations mentioned in Program of State Statistical Work in creation of own bases of statistical information with the purpose of comparability of interdepartmental information resources.

Article 5. Requirements to the State Statistics

Requirements to the state statistics are as follows:

- a) objectivity, validity, neutrality of statistics,
- b) reliability, accuracy, comparability in time and space, anonymity of the statistical data,
- c) actuality, stability, integrity of statistical information,
- d) comparability with the international norms and standards,
- e) accordance of the statistical indicators with the international requirements to the national accounts,
- f) periodic publication of summarized statistical data,
- g) accessibility and publicity of the statistical information.

CHAPTER 2 ORGANIZATION OF THE STATE STATISTICS

Article 6. Body Implementing the State Statistics

The state statistics shall be implemented by the body implementing state statistics – National Statistical Service and its territorial and functional units.

The body implementing the state statistics is a body implementing functions aimed at the public interest, that is independent from state and local self-government bodies of the Republic of Armenia in its activities.

Competence of the body implementing state statistics is established by the law.

Article 7. National Statistical Service

The National Statistical Service (hereinafter referred to as Service) implements the state statistical work and co-ordinates its on the territory of the Republic of Armenia.

Article 8. Territorial and Functional Units of the Service

The territorial units of the Service are created in accordance with the regional division of the Republic of Armenia.

To implement the separate functions according to the decision of the State Council on Statistics the functional units can be structured, separate functional authorities submitted to the territorial units of the Service.

The heads of territorial and functional units are nominated and relieved by the President of Service, but staff – by the heads of units.

Article 9. President of Service

The Service is headed by the President, who is appointed for a term of 6 years and relieved by the President of the Republic.

The President of the Service can be appointed the citizen of the Republic of Armenia having high economic education and work experience in the domain of statistics.

The President of the Service can't hold another state post or implement the other paid work besides scientific, pedagogical and creative.

The President of the Service participates at the meetings of the Government with the right of consultative vote and can express its opinion concerning the issues being under discussion.

The President of the Service:

- a) organizes the implementation of the state statistical work program,
- b) represents the Service in internal and external relations,
- c) implements another authorities established by the law.

The powers of President of the Service can be ahead of time stopped, in case of:

- a) his (her) resignation,
- b) stopped his (her) citizenship of the Republic of Armenia,
- c) recognition his (her) incapable or limited capable by the court decision or conviction on sentence entered into validity,
- d) his (her) death.

The deputies of the President are appointed by the State Council on Statistics on proposal of the President of the Service.

Article 10. State Council on Statistics

The supreme body of governance of the Service and its units is State Council on Statistics (hereinafter referred to as “the Council”). The President of the Service holds at the same time the post of the Chairman of the Council.

Council implements the working out of the policy in the domain of state statistics, designing, regulation, organization of the long-term activities, monitor on the implementation of the Program of State Statistical Work, as well as coordination of the administrative statistics in the Republic of Armenia stipulated by the Program of State Statistical Work.

Council:

- a) confirms the draft of tree-year program of state statistical work,
- b) confirms the annual program of state statistical work in a month after the adoption of the State Budget of the Republic of Armenia,
- c) confirms the regulations and structure of the Service, its territorial and functional units,
- d) monitors the implementation of the program of state statistical work and confirms the report on implementation of annual program,
- e) adopts the legal acts in the domain of statistics in cases stipulated by the Law,
- f) confirms its internal rules of procedure,
- g) implements other powers stipulated by the Law.

The Council shall be composed of 7 members, which are appointed for a term of 6 years and relieved by the President of the Republic.

The members of the Council can be appointed the citizens of the Republic of Armenia having high education, for reasons of practical and scientific and educational experience in the following domains:

- demography, sociology and public activity,
- international statistical cooperation,
- financial and banking,
- nature protection,
- management of entrepreneurial activity,
- information technologies.

In case of opening of the vacant place of the Council member the new appointment is given for the inpassed term of the period of office of the relieved member.

The powers of the Council member can be ahead of time stopped, in case of:

- a) his (her) resignation,
- b) stopped his (her) citizenship of the Republic of Armenia,
- c) recognition his (her) incapable or limited capable by the Court decision or conviction on sentence entered into validity,
- d) his (her) inadequate absence during the year on more than half meetings of the Council,
- e) his (her) death.

The meetings of the Council are called by the Chairman of the Council non-rarely than once a month. Special meeting of the Council may be called on demand of no less than four of its members. The meeting of the Council are recorded.

Council has the right to decide, if at the meeting no less than 5 of its members are present. The decision of the Council is considered as adopted, if more than half of Council members have voted for it.

Article 11. State Statistical Work Program

The State Statistical Work Program (hereinafter referred to as Program) is the basis for implementation state statistics on the territory of the Republic of Armenia.

Program includes statistical information necessary for the observation of the economic, demographic, social and environmental situation in country, taking into account the availability of resources, the burdens on respondents and the cost-effectiveness.

The directions of activity and actions envisaged by the Program should take into account the comparability of country indicators with the international statistical standards, provide with possible stable periodicity of trends from the viewpoint of their revealing during the long term and provide with the proportion of resources foreseen for state statistics on annual basis.

The program is developed based on the study of the demand of statistical information users.

For the determination of directions of the state statistical activity the three-year program is developed, while for the definition of actions providing with realization of these directions – annual program.

The three-year program is adopted by the national Assembly on presentation of the Government.

The three-year program includes the main directions of the state statistical activity in economic, demographic, social and environmental fields of the country. Report on implementation of the three-year program is submitted to the National Assembly before the 1 May of the next year.

The annual program is adopted by the Council on presentation of the President of the Service and published.

The annual program includes:

- a) list of statistical work, terms of their implementation, the coverage, as well as types of observation,
- b) periodicity of the presentation of statistical indicators,
- c) list of surveys that should be implemented by the Service, published statistical handbooks, bulletins and other publications and their periodicity,
- d) list of organizations, state bodies and local self-government and other administrative registers and list of summary statistical information (data), presented by them,
- e) list of statistical information users, composition of information, provided free of charge and order of its presentation.

Article 12. State Statistical Observations

State statistical observations (hereinafter referred to as observations) imply collection of information (data) on phenomenon and processes, taking place in the economy and society, on the basis of primary reporting documentation derived from the statistical information providers or direct inquiry based on the before designed program, methods and forms.

The methods (including the methodology of calculation of indicators), sampling and order of execution of observations (including the order of collection-presentation of information) implemented on the basis of the program are established by the Council.

The observations by forms are implemented through entire, sample surveys, as well as use of collected data (including received from administrative registers).

The observations according to the coverage can be state, branchial, (departmental) and territorial, as well as by separate sectors of the coverage.

Body implementing the state statistics can involve other legal persons, state establishments, as well as citizens in their work while conducting observations on the contract basis.

The provider of statistical information for the conduction of observations foreseen by the Program are obliged to provide necessary data free of charge according to the order established by the Council.

Article 13. Statistical and Information (Administrative) Register

Body implementing the state statistics carries out the statistical internal registers of statistical information providers, which will ensure the accounting of accumulated on it information and unique identification of indicators.

The system of accounting and unique identification operates for the whole period of operation of the given register.

Service creates and maintains business (entrepreneurial) register.

The creation and maintenance of the business-register are implemented on the basis of the state register of legal units. The Business-register is liable to regular update data base of registered in the Republic of Armenia legal units on their real place of location, main and not main types of activity, number of employees and additional other indicators established by the Council.

State bodies and local self-government, including the Central Bank (hereinafter referred to as bodies implementing administrative statistics), implements branchial (departmental) and local (municipal) accounting (statistics) through the maintenance of administrative registers.

Administrative registers shall include at least the following components:

- a) the necessary indicators included into Program and presented to the Service by the statistical information providers,
- b) the maintenance of the passports of communities, that includes the system of accumulated on a regular basis and kept indicators on population number, sex-age and social composition, cultural, educational and sport complexes (constructions) situated in the community, health, housing communal economy, production infrastructure, budget of the community and other necessary information.

The completeness of the information (data) collected through state statistical and administrative observations composes the unique system of the state statistical information of the Republic of Armenia.

The methodology and forms of documentation of the administrative information collection foreseen by the Program are established by the Council.

Article 14. Presentation, Use, Publication and Keeping of the State Statistical Information

For the implementation of work foreseen by the Program the state statistical information (data) is collected (presented) through the form of the statistical documents established by the Council.

The statistical information is collected through the following type of statistical documents:

- a) state statistical reports,
- b) survey questionnaire,
- c) other type of documents and information concerning the observations adopted by the Council.

Population Censuses are carried out according to the order established by the Law and other legislative acts.

Forms of documents include the volume of statistical data, addresses and terms of presentation, frame of statistical information providers and other data.

In cases foreseen by the Program the information is presented to the Service in summarized form.

The statistical information (data) should be reliable. The accounting and norms established by laws regulating financial reports and other legislative acts serve the basis for filling in the statistical documents (calculation statistical indicators). In cases foreseen by the laws and other legislative acts the providers of statistical information implement special calculations and corrections, present statistical data (information) according to the established requirements.

Statistical data are considered confidential (hereinafter referred to as statistical confidentiality) if through them it is possible by direct or indirect form to reveal (unify, identify) the provider of statistical information, to obtain individual (personal) information. The data taken from publicly available sources shall not be considered confidential.

The data considered confidential without the agreement of their provider should not be published or by other form disseminated. The agreement should be expressed in written form. In case of legal units the agreement should be done by their executive body or other body having appropriate authorization according to the regulations. Agreement can contain the restrictions concerning the use of data. The provision on non-publication or non-dissemination by other form of the information doesn't operate in case, when it is the information reflecting natural or other monopoly activity. Non-publication (non-dissemination) of this information will essentially influence on keeping of principles of the statistical information completeness. In such cases the decision on publication (dissemination) is adopted by the Council.

The direct identification of the provider of statistical information is by means of name, address, identification code of classification.

Indirect identification is by means than above-mentioned data.

For scientific research work the data consist of statistical confidentiality in exceptional cases may be used or published by the form and part, that don't allow the direct identification of individual (personal) data, according to the Council decision.

The reporting or providing of collected information to staff-member of the body, implementing statistics, and to persons, rendering to this body services, is not considered as publication or data distribution, if:

- a) they are necessary for statistical purposes,
- b) these persons abstain from publication of information, containing the statistical confidentiality, trusted them or known related to the work, as well as from their use or publication in own interests or in third persons interests.

The body implementing statistics according to the order established by the Council takes measures for the appropriate protection of information consisting of statistical confidentiality.

The Council determines the forms of publication of the statistical information according to the order established by the Law and other legal acts.

The publications foreseen by the Program are placed in Internet network and open library of the Service.

For the information presented to the users, not included in the list of free users of the statistical information, foreseen by the Program, and information presented to other users out of the information volume presented free of charge by the Program, Service levies the payment, the order of which calculation, pay and use is established by the Government.

Statistical information is considered official if it is published by:

- a) Service or its territorial and functional unit,
- b) other state bodies on the basis of information presented by the body implementing the state statistics.

Besides the body implementing state statistics the bodies implementing administrative statistics can publish departmental and community information mentioned its source.

Order and terms of keeping the state statistical information are determined by the laws.

CHAPTER 3 RIGHTS AND OBLIGATIONS OF THE BODY IMPLEMENTING THE STATE STATISTICS AND BODIES IMPLEMENTING THE ADMINISTRATIVE STATISTICS

Article 15. Rights of the Body Implementing the State Statistics

Body implementing the state statistics in the framework of its competence has the right:

- a) to receive reliable statistical data from the providers of statistical information according to the order established by the Law and other legal acts;
- b) to receive the required statistical data from the providers of statistical information on a contract basis, including citizens on their social and demographic situation, as well as households;
- c) to prepare and present appropriate conclusions and recommendations based on the analysis of the social, economic and demographic processes;
- d) to explain issues related to use and comments on the statistical information and data;
- e) in order to provide the reliability, completeness of data, information (initial or summarized form) and maintenance of the order of data calculation, to implement the checking by the established order. In case of misrepresentations, it is necessary to instruct to liquidate

- them and to introduce relevant corrections in the initial and summarized statistical data;
- f) to examine the issues related to the statistics and accounting ;
 - g) to present statistical, analytical, informational, publishing and other services foreseen by the regulation on a contract basis outside the program, according to the order determined by law and other legal acts;
 - h) to adopt the departmental normative legal acts foreseen by given Law and other legal acts regarding the implementation of statistical work and completion of forms of the documents mentioned in the second part of the 14 Article of given Law;
 - i) to conclude the treaties on co-operation with bodies of the other countries implementing statistics and international statistical organizations according to the order determined by Law and other legal acts.

Article 16. Obligations of the Body Implementing the State Statistics

Body implementing the state statistics is obliged:

- a) to organize execution of work foreseen by the Program;
- b) to provide the information related to the economic, social, demographic and environmental situation to the President of the Republic, Government, National Assembly, as well as other state bodies determined by the Program, according to the order foreseen by the Program;
- c) to ensure the accessibility to the summarized state statistical information;
- d) to preserve the principles of anonymity of the collected statistical data;
- e) not to publish and disseminate the initial statistical information;
- f) to present the information available at the databank to the legal person, state establishment or citizen on their apply;
- g) to provide the units presenting the state statistical information with the statistical reporting forms and instructions free of charge, and to inform them on terms, periodicity of submission of the statistical reports as required.

Article 17. Rights of the Bodies Implementing the Administrative Statistics

Bodies implementing the administrative statistics according to the order determined by the laws and other legal acts have the right:

- a) to receive necessary data and information for the maintenance of administrative registers from legal persons, state establishments and individual entrepreneurs;
- b) to publish the results of implemented by them information functions (observation of the administrative character) mentioned the source.

Article 18. Obligations of the Bodies Implementing the Administrative Statistics

Bodies implementing the administrative statistics are obliged to preserve the requirements of the legislation during the implementation of observations and other work.

CHAPTER 4 RIGHTS AND OBLIGATIONS OF THE UNITS PRESENTING THE STATISTICAL INFORMATION

Article 19. Rights of Units Presenting the Statistical Information

The units presenting the state statistical information have the right:

- a) to receive the forms of statistical reports and instructions from the body implementing the state statistics free of charge;
- b) to receive the initial self-related data from the databank of the body implementing the state statistics.

Article 20. Obligations of the Units Presenting the Statistical Information

The units presenting the state statistical information are obliged:

- a) to present the necessary statistical data and information for the implementation of Program according to the established order and terms by the Program;
- b) to execute the instructions related to the state statistics and accounting given by the body implementing statistics.

The units presenting the statistical information complete and present the statistical reports (questionnaire and other) independently, if there is no another order established by the Council.

CHAPTER 5 RESPONSIBILITIES FOR VIOLATION OF THE LAW ON STATE STATISTICS

Article 21. Responsibilities of the Units Presenting the Statistical Information and Officials of the Body Implementing the State Statistics

The violation of the Law on State Statistics by the units presenting the statistical information, as well as by the officials of the body implementing the state statistics are called to administrative or criminal responsibility according to the order determined by the Law.

In case of non-presentation of the necessary statistical reports for the observations within the determined terms the written notice is given during the 15 days. For delay of presentation of the reports on more than one month from the determined term and non-presentation of the report within the 15 days after the presentation of the written notice or presentation (despite the term) with violation of the determined order (not reliable data, their reflection not in full volume and other misrepresentation) the units presenting the statistical reports are called to responsibility according to the order determined by the Law.

Activities of the officials of the body implementing the State Statistics shall be appealed by order determined by the Law.

The appellation of the activities of the officials of the body implementing the state statistics related to the imposing of administrative penalty is implemented according to the legislation of the Republic of Armenia on administrative offences.

CHAPTER 6 INTERNATIONAL TREATIES

Article 22. International Treaties

In case the rules determined for the international treaties in the Republic of Armenia are different from the rules determined by this Law, the rules of international laws are applied.

CHAPTER 7 FINAL PROVISIONS

Article 23. The Entry into Force of the Law

This law comes into force as soon as it is published.

From the moment of the entry into force of the given Law to recognize as loosed the force the Law “On State Statistics” of the Republic of Armenia, adopted on 29 May 1996.

From the moment of the entry into force of the given Law the Ministry of Statistics, State Register and Analysis is recognized into National Statistical Service, which is becoming of its successor.

The legal acts, regulating the domain of the State Statistics, operate before the adoption by the State Council on Statistics of the appropriate legal acts, determined by the given Law.

President
Republic of Armenia

R. Kocharyan

26 April 2000
Yerevan
3P-48