



EUROPEAN
STATISTICAL
SYSTEM

PEER REVIEW REPORT

ON COMPLIANCE WITH THE EUROPEAN STATISTICS CODE OF
PRACTICE AND FURTHER IMPROVEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT OF
THE NATIONAL STATISTICAL SYSTEM

BULGARIA

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1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Bulgarian statistical system has a clear and strong legal base in the Statistics Act supported by several acts governing public administration services. The Statistics Act establishes the National Statistical System and its actors, with the National Statistical Institute designated as the coordinator of statistical activities. The National Statistical Institute has its headquarters in the capital city, Sofia, and also has six regional statistical offices around the country. The other actors in the Bulgarian statistical system are the Bulgarian National Bank and the other national authorities developing, producing and disseminating European statistics.

The National Statistical Institute has a clear mandate to coordinate all statistical activities related to the development, production and dissemination of national and European statistics. Coordination is managed through the National Statistical Council, composed of all producers of official statistics and representatives of important stakeholders. The National Statistical Institute drafted the Strategy for the Development of the Bulgarian Statistical System, 2021–2027 and the National Statistical Programme, together with the other national authorities developing, producing and disseminating official statistics and other stakeholders. This strategic document sets out the main goals to ensure a modern and effective statistical system, high quality and trust in official statistics, including via a systematic approach to quality management, and the transition from statistical data to statistical information with added value and active collaboration with national and international partners. The National Statistical Programme presents the annual work programme; its development is consulted with the National Statistical Council. Finally, the programme is adopted by the Council of Ministers and defines the tasks of the National Statistical Institute and the other national authorities for the year.

The fundamental principle of professional independence is explicitly established in the Statistics Act and its importance is clearly recognised across the Bulgarian statistical system and beyond. Professional independence is acknowledged by both users and providers of data needed for the production of official statistics, and their trust in statistics and in the National Statistical Institute as a professional independent producer is high. This trust is also shared by important users such as the scientific community and the media.

The Statistics Act allows the National Statistical Institute to use administrative data for statistical purposes and obliges other entities that manage registers for public purposes to provide data to the National Statistical Institute, upon request and free of charge.

The quality management system of the National Statistical Institute is well developed and documented. It is based on ISO certification. The National Statistical Institute has held ISO 9001 certification for over seven years, and an ISO 27001 certificate for information security has also been obtained more recently. The National Statistical Institute subsequently incorporated the quality and information security management systems into an Integrated Management System in 2020. This strong position in quality and data security enables the National Statistical Institute to coordinate quality in the Bulgarian statistical system and to participate actively in the broader data landscape within Bulgaria and within the e-government strategy. In addition, quality reports for statistical output are easily available on the National Statistical Institute's website.

Statistical information is disseminated according to a release calendar on the National Statistical Institute's website and through its Information System, "Infostat". Much statistical information is

directly available, but the National Statistical Institute can also provide tailor-made information on request. User satisfaction is regularly monitored.

In addition, the National Statistical Institute uses a variety of channels to improve communication with users and to receive feedback, for instance press releases, mailing of official statistical information to the media, and via its Facebook, YouTube and Instagram accounts.

The working atmosphere at the National Statistical Institute is friendly and cooperative. Both training and work processes aim at good statistical processes with high quality outcomes. The work environment is supportive and inclusive, and opportunities for career paths are offered to staff to support development.

The National Statistical Institute has made significant progress since the 2014 peer review, in three areas in particular: modernisation of statistical processes, including implementation of standards, enhancing the organisation's modernisation and cost-effectiveness, and improving user services.

An important milestone in having its professional independence acknowledged by the Government was the signing of the Commitment on Confidence in Statistics by the Prime Minister in 2021. The peer review team encourages the National Statistical Institute to work actively with relevant government authorities in order to ensure professional independence even further.

Overall, the peer review team considers that the Bulgarian statistical system has a high level of compliance with the European Statistics Code of Practice (ES CoP) and that progress since the 2014 peer review has been positive. However, the peer review team identified two compliance-relevant recommendations and 20 improvement-related recommendations, grouped under five main headings.

RECOMMENDATIONS

I. Ensuring professional independence

The importance and the practical implementation of professional independence appear to be clearly recognised across the Bulgarian statistical system and beyond. Nevertheless, the European statistics Code of Practice (ES CoP) envisages the procedures for the recruitment and appointment of the head of the National Statistical Institute to be transparent and based on professional criteria only. In Bulgaria, there is no established process and criteria for the recruitment of the President of the National Statistical Institute.

To comply with the ES CoP, the peer review team recommends:

1. The Council of Ministers should establish a procedure for recruiting and appointing the President of the National Statistical Institute, ensuring the transparency thereof and the recruitment to be based on professional criteria only. (Compliance-relevant: ES CoP, Indicator 1.8)

Another aspect of ensuring professional independence is to make it explicit that the head of the National Statistical Institute has the sole responsibility for taking all statistical decisions and for ensuring that official statistics are produced independently, including deciding on the content and timing of statistical releases. In this respect, the current situation in practice in Bulgaria should be formalised by aligning the legal framework with the ES CoP.

To comply with the ES CoP, the peer review team recommends:

2. The Council of Ministers should take all necessary steps to amend the statistical legal framework to clarify the role, responsibilities and prerogatives of the President of the National Statistical Institute, and of the heads of other national authorities where appropriate, in particular to establish that the President has the sole responsibility for deciding on statistical methods, standards and procedures, and on the content and timing of statistical releases. (Compliance-relevant: ES CoP, Indicators 1.4 and 1.3)

The existing arrangement related to pre-release access to statistics includes several specific stakeholders who have general pre-release access to all statistics. However, the relevant provision does not make it clear that sending information prior to official dissemination constitutes a pre-release access, which should remain exceptional. Neither does it establish nor refer to the actual arrangements put in place for such access, notably as regards the strict embargo conditions. This could be improved by specifying which statistics are subject to pre-release access, who gets access and when, and the reasons for access in each specific case. This would improve adherence with the criteria in the ES CoP that pre-release access should be limited and well-justified.

To improve beyond compliance with the ES CoP, the peer review team recommends:

3. The National Statistical Institute should review the pre-release access arrangements, particularly in relation to explaining the reasons for pre-release access, limiting the scope of pre-release access to well-justified cases and making the arrangements more visible. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicator 6.7)

In all the three other national authorities reviewed (the Agrostistics Department at the Directorate-General for Agriculture and Regional Policy in the Ministry of Agriculture, the Directorate of Analysis, Planning and Prognosis and the Department of Medical Expertise of Working Capacity and Accidents at Work at the National Social Security Institute, the Directorate of Monitoring and Assessment of the Environment at the Executive Environment Agency), there is strong commitment to statistical work among those responsible for statistics. Users of statistics and data providers should also be aware of these authorities' roles as producers of official statistics. There is a need for the same awareness within these authorities themselves.

To improve beyond compliance with the ES CoP, the peer review team recommends:

4. The three other national authorities reviewed (the Agrostistics Department in the Ministry of Agriculture, the Directorate of Analysis, Planning and Prognosis and the Department of Medical Expertise of Working Capacity and Accidents at Work in the National Social Security Institute, the Directorate of Monitoring and Assessment of the Environment in the Executive Environment Agency) should increase the transparency and visibility of their statistics-producing role, including by explaining their professional independence and statistical activities, based on their statistical work programme, both internally and externally. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicators 1.3 and 1.5)

In two of the other national authorities reviewed (the National Social Security Institute and the Executive Environment Agency), statistical tasks and various administrative tasks are taken care of by the same staff. Actions should be taken to delineate these roles, either by dividing them up among different staff or by making sure that both the people taking care of these duties and their work colleagues inside and outside the institutions know "which hat they are wearing". This would make sure the principles for statistical production are followed when dealing with statistical tasks and not applied for other tasks.

To improve beyond compliance with the ES CoP, the peer review team recommends:

5. The National Social Security Institute and the Executive Environment Agency should delineate the statistical responsibilities and tasks within their organisations; the organisational structure and rules should support a clear distinction between their role in producing European statistics and other roles. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicator 1.3)

II. Ensuring adequate financial and human resources

The capacity to attract and retain talent is critical for the relevance and sustainability of the National Statistical Institute, but remains a challenge. Current career development efforts and modest salary increases are appropriate but insufficient. The low wages within the state administration, in general, and the National Statistical Institute in particular, are a pervasive obstacle.

To improve beyond compliance with the ES CoP, the peer review team recommends:

6. The National Statistical Institute should explore ways to engage with relevant stakeholders to address the current salary limitations and to identify internal solutions to these limitations, such as through efficiency gains or organisational reengineering. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicators 3.1 and 10.4)

Learning prospects and the uniqueness of what can be learned at the National Statistical Institute are major incentives to attract and retain talent in-house. However, the transfer of expertise among staff and cross-department mobility is limited in a context where the working environment is not conducive to the exchange of ideas and creative working interactions.

To improve beyond compliance with the ES CoP, the peer review team recommends:

7. The National Statistical Institute should develop incentives to attract and retain staff in a more systematic and planned manner, and should put in place mechanisms to ensure knowledge transfer, career development and career opportunities. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicators 3.1 and 7.6)

The National Statistical Institute follows a comprehensive annual training plan based on a yearly staff evaluation. However, the design of individual training plans is not based on a collaborative diagnosis involving staff, and annual training plans lack a mid-term career development perspective. Training features mostly external courses and does not exploit the possibilities of tapping into internal knowledge and expertise – a central added value of the organisation.

To improve beyond compliance with the ES CoP, the peer review team recommends:

8. The National Statistical Institute should ensure that the approach to training includes both internal and external sources, and is based on a comprehensive assessment of needs, developed in consultation with staff, and linked to their mid-term career development plans. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicators 7.6 and 3.1)

III. Strengthening coordination and the visibility of quality in the Bulgarian Statistical System

The National Statistical Institute has a clear mandate to coordinate statistical activities in Bulgaria. The coordination would benefit from having a permanent body for producers of European statistics where coordination could be efficiently implemented. Such a permanent body should consist only of producers of statistics to allow coordination, guidance and cooperation purely from the point of view of producers of statistics. The National Statistical Council should concentrate on issues relevant for both producers of statistics and other relevant stakeholders.

To improve beyond compliance with the ES CoP, the peer review team recommends:

9. The National Statistical Institute, in cooperation with the other national authorities developing, producing and disseminating European statistics, should strengthen the coordination activities in the Bulgarian statistical system by introducing structured and regular procedures to provide methodological and other guidance to, and share good practices and tools with, other national authorities. A formal mechanism for the coordination should be targeted solely towards other national authorities. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicator 1bis.1)

The National Statistical Institute has actively developed its quality management system, including quality management and information security. While the quality management system has been updated, the national quality guidelines have not been adjusted to this new quality management system and are therefore outdated. The development of revised quality guidelines should be pursued and support should be provided for their implementation. Furthermore, while the National Statistical Institute is in a position to implement this coordination task, it also needs appropriate funding to do so.

To improve beyond compliance with the ES CoP, the peer review team recommends:

10. The National Statistical Institute, in cooperation with the other national authorities developing, producing and disseminating European statistics, should take an active approach in coordinating the development of quality management among other national authorities and develop up-to-date national quality guidelines and support their implementation through staff training and regular monitoring. The National Statistical Institute should work to obtain appropriate funding to support the necessary coordination. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicators 1bis.2 and 3.1)

The three reviewed other national authorities developing, producing and disseminating European statistics do not offer a release calendar on their English websites, and statistical information is either not available or only available in a non-reusable format (pdf). Users need access to official statistics in a user-friendly format.

To improve beyond compliance with the ES CoP, the peer review team recommends:

11. The three other national authorities reviewed (the Agrostistics Department in the Ministry of Agriculture, the Directorate of Analysis, Planning and Prognosis and the Department of Medical Expertise of Working Capacity and Accidents at Work in the National Social Security Institute, the Directorate of Monitoring and Assessment of the Environment in the Executive Environment Agency) should publish a release calendar and statistics on their websites. Alternatively, the three other national authorities reviewed should publish their official statistics on the website and/or web services of the National Statistical Institute and provide links from their respective websites. The three other national authorities reviewed should publish their statistical information in reusable format (e.g., xlsx, open data). (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicators 6.5 and 15.2)

Methodological documentation and quality reports contain important information for users of statistics and should be publicly available. This information is useful when using statistics, it helps the users to understand how the statistics are compiled and gives them insight into the quality of statistical data. Such information in the form of methodology documents and quality reports is not available on the websites of the other national authorities reviewed.

To improve beyond compliance with the ES CoP, the peer review team recommends:

12. The three other national authorities reviewed (the Agrostistics Department in the Ministry of Agriculture, the Directorate of Analysis, Planning and Prognosis and the Department of Medical Expertise of Working Capacity and Accidents at Work in the National Social Security Institute, the Directorate of Monitoring and Assessment of the Environment in the Executive Environment Agency) should publish quality reports and methodological and quality documents on their websites. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicators 15.6 and 15.7)

IV. Making the most of the evolving data landscape

In practice, it is not always easy for the National Statistical Institute to obtain access to administrative data, and access is sometimes refused, with arguments relating to the law on which the requested register is based. There are also no registers of houses and other buildings, and geo-information is almost always lacking. Registers are not always updated frequently enough to be used for timely statistics.

To improve beyond compliance with the ES CoP, the peer review team recommends:

13. The Government should take steps towards removing all legal obstacles to accessing administrative sources, as well as towards expanding the information included in registers and improving their timeliness. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicator 2.2)

Obtaining access to and the use of administrative data could benefit from a more proactive approach by the National Statistical Institute. An explicit strategy would provide a framework for improving relations with administrative data providers, obtaining access to administrative data and using such data in statistical production.

To improve beyond compliance with the ES CoP, the peer review team recommends:

14. The National Statistical Institute should continue to develop and implement a strategy for access to and use of administrative data, and to work very actively with administrative data providers to ensure access, both at working level and at the strategic and highest management levels. This administrative data strategy should include the necessary actions to achieve, in cooperation with the administrative data providers, better alignment between administrative and statistical concepts and definitions, and to increase the quality of administrative data. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicator 9.4)

In many cases, the National Statistical Institute and the other national authorities developing, producing and disseminating European statistics are effectively consulted about the concepts and definitions used for administrative data, even though the Statistics Act does not seem to give them the right to be consulted. In other cases, consultation is not effective or timely enough. Furthermore, the opportunities for reusing administrative data within the National Statistical Institute do not seem to be fully exploited.

To improve beyond compliance with the ES CoP, the peer review team recommends:

15. The Council of Ministers should take all necessary steps to amend the Statistics Act to clarify that the National Statistical Institute and the other national authorities developing, producing and disseminating European statistics have the legal right to be consulted about the concepts, definitions and quality of administrative data. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicator 2.2).

The use of administrative data in the production of official statistics is not entirely straightforward. Administrative data may contain errors and their concepts may differ from statistical concepts; also, linking with other administrative data or survey data may produce errors. It would therefore be useful for the National Statistical Institute to extend its expertise in this area.

16. The National Statistical Institute's administrative data strategy should include applied research and the development of statistical methods for the use of administrative data in the production of official statistics, and ensure the necessary resources for this work. The National Statistical Institute should also explore the opportunities for an increased reuse of administrative data within the National Statistical Institute. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicator 8.7)

Data exchange between the National Statistical Institute, other national authorities developing, producing and disseminating European statistics, and administrative data providers and respondents, in particular enterprises, takes various forms: web portals, CD-ROMs, paper format, USB sticks, etc. Automatic data exchange between the National Statistical Institute, other national authorities developing, producing and disseminating European statistics, administrative data providers and respondents would lead to cost savings for all parties, by reducing the number of manual operations, and to higher quality of official statistics by reducing the likelihood of processing errors.

To improve beyond compliance with the ES CoP, the peer review team recommends:

17. The National Statistical Institute, other national authorities developing, producing and disseminating European statistics and administrative data providers should take the necessary steps to launch and maintain an automated data exchange. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicator 10.3)

The National Statistical Institute has very successfully performed applied research and development on new data, such as scanner data, big data and data obtained by web scraping. This has led to the development of experimental statistics, in particular for online job advertisements and for online-based enterprise characteristics. However, this research and these experimental statistics are not published on the National Statistical Institute's website.

To improve beyond compliance with the ES CoP, the peer review team recommends:

18. The National Statistical Institute should continue research and development activities for exploring new data sources and in other methodological fields, and publish the results of this work on its website. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicator 13.5)

V. Strengthening cooperation with broader society

The National Statistical Institute has a good relationship with users. Operational work with institutional users such as the business community tends to be ad-hoc, without user-specific agendas. Given that there still remain challenges in the response burden on businesses, a more targeted approach would be advisable.

To improve beyond compliance with the ES CoP, the peer review team recommends:

19. The National Statistical Institute should establish a consultative body with business associations to discuss current challenges and actions to address the response burden on businesses. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicators 9.3 and 9.1)

The range of users of official statistics in Bulgaria is becoming more comprehensive alongside the country's socio-political development. Their distinct requirements and evolving needs call for a customised approach. However, there are no consultative bodies for different user groups and profiles.

To improve beyond compliance with the ES CoP, the peer review team recommends:

20. The National Statistical Institute should intensify and customise interaction with different user profiles to maximise the potential of their experience as users of statistics. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicators 11.1 and 11.3)

The National Statistical Institute has made promising developments exploring new data sources in a context where the data landscape in the country is expanding, and the newly developed e-government strategy opens the door to new possibilities. This national context offers fertile ground to work on options that have not yet been capitalised upon. The National Statistical Institute is especially well placed to participate in data stewardship for the e-government strategy, for example by providing support or by playing a central role as data steward.

To improve beyond compliance with the ES CoP, the peer review team recommends:

21. The National Statistical Institute should establish and maintain a dialogue with the Government about new data sources and their role in official statistics and e-government. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicator 2.4)

The National Statistical Institute's institutional positioning in the country is excellent, being perceived as a trustworthy, credible and competent organisation. However, it faces some structural challenges which hinder its optimal performance, such as salary level constraints and limitations in the access to and exchange of administrative data. While cooperation with data producers, data holders and institutional users of official statistics is very fluid and constructive, it tends to be an ad-hoc, issue-based and operational-level type of cooperation. System-level issues are not necessarily addressed as part of a collective effort.

The National Development Programme Bulgaria 2030 and the government's e-strategy offer the opportunity to start discussing and finding system-level solutions to aspects that hinder the optimal performance of the National Statistical Institute within the Bulgarian statistical system.

To improve beyond compliance with the ES CoP, the peer review team recommends:

22. The National Statistical Institute, in cooperation with the National Statistical Council, should explore the possibility of a strategic data alliance to elevate the current system-level challenges to society, particularly in the context of the role of data and official statistics for evidence-based policymaking, the push for a data-driven economy and the desired role of statistics in a democratic society. This alliance should go beyond the current programming and operational partnerships and include a broader range of actors. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicators 10.4, 10.2 and 2.1)

In the spirit of continuous improvement integral to the European Statistical System (ESS), the National Statistical Institute will interpret the recommendations, formulated in this report, into improvement actions for implementation within the National Statistical System (NSS).

2 INTRODUCTION

It is recognised that quality is one of the European Statistical System's (ESS) comparative advantages in a world experiencing a growing trend of instant information and new challenges, driven by exceptional circumstances or the continuous need for faster but quality-assured data. The European Statistics Code of Practice (ES CoP) is the cornerstone of the ESS common quality framework, and the ESS statistical authorities have committed themselves to adhere to it.

In this context, it is crucial for the ESS to be equipped with a review mechanism, the peer reviews, supporting with credible evidence this self-commitment to adhere to the ES CoP. The objective of this review mechanism is to enhance the integrity, professional independence and accountability of the ESS statistical authorities. The first round of peer reviews was carried out in 2006-2008, followed by a second round in 2013-2015.

In 2017, the ES CoP was reviewed and extended and now encompasses 16 principles. This revised version of the ES CoP triggered a third round of peer reviews, being carried out in the Member States of the European Union and of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), and Eurostat from 2021 to mid-2023. This round of peer reviews aims at improving the quality and trust in European statistics by assessing the compliance of the ESS with the principles of the revised ES CoP. The peer reviews cover the ESS statistical authorities (Eurostat, the National Statistical Institutes (NSIs) and selected Other National Authorities (ONAs)) developing, producing and disseminating European statistics. The peer reviews will be followed by a period of annual monitoring of the implementation of the improvement actions developed by the NSIs to address the recommendations laid down in the peer review reports.

The third round of peer reviews has the following two objectives:

- To review the compliance/alignment of the ESS with the ES CoP, in order to demonstrate to the ESS and to external stakeholders that the ESS is a system based on the principles of the ES CoP;
- To help NSIs, ONAs and Eurostat in their further improvement and development by indicating future-oriented recommendations; at the same time, they should stimulate government authorities to support the implementation of these recommendations.

Each peer review is conducted by a team of four statistical experts (both from inside and outside the ESS). The peer review has four phases: completion of the Self-Assessment Questionnaires (SAQs) by a country; analysis of these SAQs by the peer review team; a country visit by the peer review team; and the preparation of the final report and ensuing recommendations by the peer review team. These recommendations are of two types:

- Compliance-relevant (ensuring compliance/alignment with the ES CoP);
- Improvement-related (less critical/technical supporting improvements).

A combination of an audit-like and a peer review approach is used when assessing the national statistical systems (NSS) in the countries to benefit from the positive aspects of both approaches. The audit-like approach requires the provision of documents as evidence, the ownership of the recommendations by the peer review expert team, and the right for the NSIs to express diverging views on the recommendations and to formulate the corresponding improvement actions. Whereas the peer review approach allows for common agreement within the ESS on the methodology, the

objectives, scope and implementation arrangements, the focus on improvements and a peer learning process.

Although all principles of the ES CoP will be reviewed for all countries through the SAQ, the peer review experts are free to customise the country visit to concentrate on those principles where more clarification/explanation is needed. However, certain principles such as those concerning professional independence and coordination and cooperation, as well as principles including elements of modernisation, will be assessed during the peer review visit for every member of the ESS.

In addition to the common principles to be addressed for every member of the ESS, the peer review team placed an emphasis on commitment to quality (principle 4), pre-release access (indicator 6.7), human resources (principle 3) and the role of the National Statistical Institute in the data landscape and its relations with administrative data providers (indicators 2.2 and 9.4). Commitment to quality was identified as a potential strength. Pre-release access was chosen because there was a need to obtain more information than that contained in the Self-Assessment Questionnaire, while human resources were identified as a major challenge. Relations with administrative data providers were reviewed because several problems with access to data were identified. The peer review team decided to discuss issues related to the data landscape because practices applied by the National Statistical Institute in using new data sources for experimental statistics were identified as interesting and successful.

Also, although the reports should not be used to compare one country to another, much effort has been made to ensure the harmonisation of the reports and the ensuing recommendations across the countries so that all countries are treated equitably.

The peer review of Eurostat was conducted by the European Statistical Governance Advisory Board (ESGAB).

3 BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE NATIONAL STATISTICAL SYSTEM

Legislation and the Bulgarian statistical system

The **Statistics Act** establishes that the Bulgarian statistical system is formed by the National Statistical Institute, its six regional statistical offices (RSOs), the Bulgarian National Bank (BNB) and other national authorities developing, producing and disseminating European statistics (ONAs). The Statistics Act, together with a number of other legislative acts (in particular the Administration Act, Civil Servants Act, Public Finance Act, Personal Data Protection Act, Electronic Governance Act, the 2021 Population Census and Housing Census in the Republic of Bulgaria Act and the Guidelines for the dissemination of statistical information in the Bulgarian statistical system), guide the activities of the National Statistical Institute.

The National Statistical Institute is a public body under the Council of Ministers with the status of a state agency. It coordinates Bulgaria's statistical activity and is responsible for the development of methodology, planning and performance of statistical surveys, the reception, collection, processing and storage of individual data and statistical information, as well as the analysis, provision and dissemination of statistical information, in a timely, accurate manner and to all users. According to the Statistics Act, it shall also develop demographic forecasts, maintain registers and archives, and provide the required data and statistics to Eurostat. Finally, it shall carry out statistical surveys which are not included in the National Statistical Programme (NSP), and process statistical data or provide other statistical services under contract.

A Commitment on Confidence in Statistics (CoC) has been approved by the Council of Ministers and signed by the Prime Minister in 2021.

The **National Statistical Council (NSC)** is a consultative body to the President of the National Statistical Institute, who designates and dismisses its members. It consists of representatives of all ONAs, the BNB, academic society and different groups of respondents and users. Amongst others, the NSC gives opinions and recommendations on the annual National Statistical Programme and on the Strategy for the Development of the Bulgarian Statistical System for each five-year period as indicated in the Statistics Act.

The National Statistical Institute, in collaboration with the ONAs and the BNB, has established the Strategy for the Development of the Bulgarian Statistical System, 2021–2027. This strategic document sets out the main goals to ensure a modern and effective statistical system, high quality and trust in official statistics, including via a systematic approach to quality management, and the transition from statistical data to statistical information with added value and active collaboration with national and international partners.

Organisation

The National Statistical Institute is composed of one head office in Sofia and six regional statistical offices (RSOs). The head office is organised in seven directorates. The RSOs perform mainly the collection and primary processing of statistical data, thereby carrying out the functions and tasks of the National Statistical Institute at regional level.

Appointment procedures for the head of the NSI

According to the Statistics Act, the National Statistical Institute is managed by a President appointed by a decision of the Council of Ministers for a term of seven years. (S)he can be reappointed only once. The reasons for dismissal are enumerated exhaustively in the Statistics Act. However, the Statistics Act does not establish the procedure or conditions for recruitment. The fact that the President of the NSI is not a public servant also means that the Civil Servants Act does not apply. This means that there is no established procedure for recruiting the President. The difficulties that this state of fact entails are illustrated by the current delay in recruiting a new President.

Statistical programmes

The National Statistical Programme (NSP) is drawn up for each calendar year following consultations with all statistical authorities. Together with the ONAs and other stakeholders, the NSI drafts the NSP, which is adopted by the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Bulgaria. The NSP defines the tasks of the NSI and the ONAs to be carried out during the respective year.

Resources

The total number of staff in the National Statistical Institute was 968 in 2021, of which 321 were employed at the head office and 647 at the RSOs. The annual budget for 2021 amounted to approximately 28 million BGN (approximately 14 million Euro).

Coordination of the National Statistical System

The National Statistical Institute coordinates at national level all activities related to the development, production and dissemination of national and European statistics. It cooperates with the national statistical authorities in drafting and implementing the NSP and ensures methodological uniformity in the surveys. In accordance with national legislation, the National Statistical Institute keeps an up-to-date record of all national statistical authorities in Bulgaria. There are currently 11 national statistical authorities, 8 of which are ONAs.

The main forum for coordination is the National Statistical Council, where the National Statistical Institute collaborates actively with the statistical authorities in both drafting and implementing the National Statistical Programme. ONAs are part of the structure of different ministries and executive agencies and are therefore fairly independent of the National Statistical Institute. Nevertheless, relations between the ONAs and the National Statistical Institute are based on written agreements and/or memorandums.

Furthermore, the National Statistical Institute represents the Bulgarian statistical system in the European Statistical System, and in relations with other international or foreign statistical organisations.

ONAs reviewed in the peer review process

The selection of ONAs for participation in the peer review was based on the fact that only a few statistical authorities other than the National Statistical Institute send data directly to Eurostat. These ONAs participate in the NSC and provide statistics of importance at both European and national levels, in terms of volume and political relevance.

The *Agrostatistics Department* at the Directorate-General for Agriculture and Regional Policy is placed in the Ministry of Agriculture. It is responsible for statistics in the field of agriculture and agricultural holdings' natural indicators: area, production, average yields, number of farm animals, production of animal products, the structure of agricultural holdings, land cover and land use.

The *Analyses, Planning and Prognosis Directorate* and the *Medical Expertise of Working Capacity and Accidents at Work Department* at the National Social Security Institute (NSSI) are responsible for statistics within the European System of integrated Social Protection Statistics (ESSPROS – Module on Pension Beneficiaries) and for European Statistics on Accidents at Work (ESAW) and European Occupational Diseases Statistics (EODS), respectively. The NSSI is the public institution that manages the state social security in the Republic of Bulgaria. It administers compulsory social security for sickness, maternity, unemployment, accidents at work and occupational diseases, disability, old age and death.

The *Monitoring and Assessment of the Environment Directorate* at the Executive Environment Agency (ExEA) is responsible for statistics on the generation, recovery and disposal of waste, the recovery and disposal of packaging waste and the capacity for waste recovery and disposal. ExEA is an administration under the Minister of Environment and Water that carries out management, coordination and information functions as regards environmental control and protection in Bulgaria.

Data access

The Statistics Act allows the National Statistical Institute to use administrative data for statistical purposes and obliges other entities that manage registers for public purposes to provide data to the National Statistical Institute, upon request and free of charge. The National Statistical Institute has entered into written agreements with the owners of administrative registers to organise access.

Relations with users / Dissemination of statistical products and services

Statistical information is disseminated according to a release calendar on the National Statistical Institute's website and through its Information System, "Infostat". Much statistical information is directly available, but the National Statistical Institute can also provide tailor-made information on request. The dissemination policy is based on principles of objectivity and impartiality, compliance with announced deadlines, protection of statistical confidentiality, accessibility for, and equal treatment of, all users, including user-orientation and clarity of data. The NSI's Rules for the Dissemination of Statistical Products and Services include basic principles for the dissemination of statistical information, the different types of statistical products and services as well as the ways in which the dissemination policy is being implemented by the National Statistical Institute.

Regular user satisfaction surveys are organised via the National Statistical Institute's website and through a dedicated link on Infostat. In addition, the National Statistical Institute uses other channels to improve communication with users and receive feedback, for instance press releases, mailing of official statistical information to the media, and via its Facebook, YouTube and Instagram accounts. There are also several initiatives aimed at actively interacting with users, evaluating their satisfaction, and increasing statistical literacy and confidence in official statistics.

4 PROGRESS/ADVANCEMENT IN THE LAST FIVE YEARS

Modernisation of statistical processes and implementation of standards

The 2014 peer review prompted the National Statistical Institute to start working on the review and streamlining of statistical procedures, which were mostly in place but not laid down in writing. By 2016 the organisation had developed a Quality Management System (QMS) following the ISO 9001 standard, and by 2018 an Information Security Management System (ISMS) compliant with the ISO 27001 standard was in place. One year after that, the National Statistical Institute was ISO 9001 and ISO 27001 certified for the entire statistical business process.

The National Statistical Institute subsequently incorporated the quality and information security management systems into an Integrated Management System (IMS). In 2022, the organisation had just obtained the second audit certification of its IMS.

The National Statistics Institute implemented a national Generic Statistical Business Process Model (GSBPM) on the basis of GSBPM ver. 5.1, adapted to the needs of the Bulgarian statistical system by adding an additional third level. This was another direct consequence of implementing an improvement action prompted by the 2014 peer review.

The National Statistical Institute used this national version of the GSBPM ver. 5.1 to describe in detail the implementation of procedures for quality management within the statistical production processes.

The GSBPM was also used to develop the National Process Metadata Structure (NPMS) in Statistical Data and Metadata eXchange format (SDMX) for all statistical surveys designed and conducted by the National Statistical Institute. The organisation has also developed a national IT tool to manage the metadata in SDMX format. This tool has been shared with ONAs, who can also use it.

Another advancement since the last peer review in terms of implementation of standards is that the National Statistical Institute has developed and implemented the Euro SDMX Metadata Structure (ESMS) and the ESS Standard Quality Report Structure (ESQRS) for all statistical surveys.

Furthermore, the use of administrative data has been expanded to several statistical subject matter domains such as labour market statistics, income and living conditions, energy statistics, foreign trade and crime statistics.

Increasing cost-effectiveness and modernisation of the organisation

Following the 2014 peer review, the National Statistical Institute underwent a restructuring of the regional statistical offices, which were reduced from 28 to 6, one in each economic region. This process involved the downsizing of 200 administrative positions. Another development in terms of modernising the organisation has been the creation of a Scientific Expert Council, a consultative body to the President of the National Statistical Institute.

Concerns raised in the previous peer review about the need for detailed action plans to implement the Strategy for the Development of the Bulgarian Statistical System have been duly addressed.

The Strategy now features an action plan that guides its implementation. The action plan includes precise arrangements and tools to monitor and deliver the Strategy, such as indicators that are regularly followed. Similarly, the NSP includes a plan for the activity of the National Statistical Institute

and detailed plans for the statistical activities of the ONAs. All plans include performance indicators, which are followed upon. The National Statistical Institute also puts together an annual report on the implementation of the NSP and the activity of the National Statistical Institute. This report includes financial results and informs on the allocation of budget for the next period.

Improving services for users

There has also been progress in information systems for statistical purposes. The main milestone has been the development of INFOSTAT and MONITORSTAT, information systems that facilitate users' access to statistical information. This system, which is offered through the National Statistical Institute's website, allows users to customise options and choose their preferred data formats for statistical information, generating tables and downloading results in several forms.

5 COMPLIANCE WITH THE CODE OF PRACTICE AND FUTURE ORIENTATION

5.1 STRENGTHS OF THE NSI AND THE PARTICIPATING ONAs IN RELATION TO THEIR COMPLIANCE WITH THE CODE OF PRACTICE

Professional independence

The fundamental principle of professional independence is established in the Statistics Act. Professional independence is strong in the attitude and work practices of the NSI and the three ONAs involved in the peer review, and this is reflected in the attitude of stakeholders. Professional independence is based on international standards and good practices as well as the European legal framework.

A Commitment on Confidence (CoC) in Statistics was approved by the Council of Ministers and signed by the Prime Minister in December 2021.

Users and providers of data trust the official statistics as well as the NSI as an institution. This strong trust was noted by the peer review team both from providers of data and different user group representatives, e.g., administrative, scientific and media users. This is noteworthy in a context in which trust in public administration and organisations is not always at a good level.

As a matter of fact, the NSI is particularly well positioned as an institution in the country. Partners and users across the Bulgarian statistical system consider the NSI a trustworthy, credible and competent organisation and this can therefore be regarded as a distinct strength of the Bulgarian statistical system.

Proven high level of quality management and information security

The NSI's quality management system is definitely a strength. For more than seven years the NSI has obtained ISO 9001 certification of its quality management. Also, all statistics are accompanied by quality reports according to ESS standards, and these reports are published on its website.

As the NSI has well-established relations with the other national authorities developing, producing and disseminating European statistics, it actively coordinates both methodological and quality aspects in modern statistical processes, thus benefiting the whole statistical system of Bulgaria.

The NSI is also certified for information security (ISO 27001), which enhances respondents' trust and is obviously an asset with the increased focus on privacy in the European Union. This strong position in quality and security shows the NSI's high commitment to these two aspects and will enable the NSI to play an important role in the broader data landscape within Bulgaria and within the Bulgarian government's e-government strategy.

Dissemination

The NSI uses several channels for communication and dissemination, including press releases, press conferences, media and social networks. It considers cooperation with the media to be a basis for an effective communication and dissemination policy. The NSI's management and NSI experts give interviews, press conferences and opinions, and participate in various events whenever there are questions related to statistical issues, including criticisms.

There was active cooperation with the media in the communication for the population census 2021. The media supported keeping citizens aware of the process of the population census and informing about the online data collection and data security in the NSI.

Internal written procedures are available for regulating the dissemination of information and statistics and for working with the media.

Cooperation

The NSI is an active partner in the region, successfully implementing cooperation projects and sharing good practices and knowledge with countries from the EU, the Western Balkans and the countries covered by the European Neighbourhood Policy East and South.

Continuous activities for new and alternative sources of data

The usage of administrative data for the production of official statistics is increasing. The NSI continuously explores possibilities to use new administrative registers maintained by other government agencies, actively communicating with them and reviewing the structure and content of those administrative records.

As a member of the ESS, the NSI is an active partner in research projects aimed at exploring the opportunities for using privately held data as an alternative source for official statistics. Based on these activities, the NSI also produces experimental statistics.

SMART planning

The architecture of future planning and documentation is at a good level. Good interaction between plans covering several years and yearly implementation plans supports long-term planning into realistic gradual implementation phases. Performance indicators are connected to all these plans and are followed regularly.

Conducive work environment

The work environment is characterised by a friendly and cooperative atmosphere. Staff interactions are supportive and benefit from the understanding attitudes of managers and supervisors.

The work climate also reveals an inclusive atmosphere. This, together with the perception that personnel are competent and knowledgeable, encourages and motivates staff, particularly young talent. In a context where structurally low salary levels are an issue, such a positive work environment is an organisational strength, which at least partially helps offset the risk of staff turnover.

Innovative Practices

The NSI is an active participant in ESS development activities. Since 2015, the NSI has been an active partner in the ESSnet on Big data I and II projects. Within these projects, the NSI explores the possibility of using big data sources as alternative sources for statistical productions. Since the beginning of 2021, the NSI has been a partner of the Trusted Smart Statistics project of the Eurostat - Web Intelligence Network. As part of these activities, the NSI has also very successfully performed applied research and development of tools for new data, such as scanner data, big data and data obtained by web scraping. This was carried out in cooperation with other European NSIs and has led

to the development of experimental statistics, in particular for online job advertisements and for online-based enterprise characteristics.

It is one of the NSIs in Europe that is certified for its quality management (ISO 9001), and is thus a pioneer in this regard.

5.2 ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.2.1 Ensuring professional independence

The Statistics Act of Bulgaria dates from 1999 and, though amended on several occasions, it has not been fully aligned with the European legal framework and the ES CoP. Aspects that would merit updating include the roles and tasks of the President of the National Statistical Institute and of the ONA heads, and the National Statistical Institute's role in the design and development of administrative registers. For the purposes of coherent and transparent communication with citizens and other stakeholders, it appears essential for the Statistics Act to be amended to be consistent with the ES CoP in those parts which are also included in Regulation (EC) No 223/2009 on European statistics (which is directly applicable and therefore does not require transposition into Bulgarian law).

A Commitment on Confidence (CoC) in Statistics has been approved by the Council of Ministers and signed by the Prime Minister. With its signing, the government proclaims that the Bulgarian statistical system complies with the principles of the ES CoP - professional independence, a mandate to collect data and access to data, impartiality and objectivity, data quality, accuracy and reliability, accessibility and clarity - and supports the commitment to the achievements of the goals of the Strategy for the Development of the Bulgarian Statistical System.

The fundamental principle of professional independence is explicitly established in the Statistics Act and its importance is clearly recognised across the Bulgarian statistical system and beyond. The high trust among all categories of users that was repeatedly confirmed to the peer review team also indicates that professional independence is implemented in practice. At the same time, several ES CoP indicators explicitly foresee that professional independence shall be vested in the Head of the NSI, and that his/her position shall be protected.

One of the ES CoP indicators in this respect relates to the procedure for the recruitment and appointment of the head of the NSI. The President and Deputy President of the NSI are not civil servants and are therefore not covered by the Civil Servants Act as regards recruitment, appointment and dismissal. While the Statistics Act foresees the reasons for dismissal of the President, the process and criteria for recruitment are missing. The peer review team understood from the NSI during the peer review visit that it is actively searching for solutions to this situation, in collaboration with the Deputy Prime Minister's office. Progress is nevertheless slow, and the government should be invited to address the issue without further delay to avoid any negative impact on the perception of professional independence of the NSI and the wider statistical system.

To comply with the ES CoP, the peer review team recommends:

R1. The Council of Ministers should establish a procedure for recruiting and appointing the President of the National Statistical Institute, ensuring the transparency thereof and the recruitment to be based on professional criteria only. (Compliance-relevant: ES CoP, Indicator 1.8)

The Statistics Act vests the independence in the statistics themselves, not in the NSI nor in the President of the NSI. Furthermore, the Statistics Act explicitly gives the NSI the mandate to coordinate the Bulgarian statistical system. The legal framework should make it clear that the President of the NSI, and the heads of ONAs, as appropriate, have the sole responsibility for taking all statistical decisions and for ensuring that official statistics are produced independently. The peer review team found one illustration that this is currently not sufficiently assured in the fact that the NSI has not yet published its annual release calendar for 2022, as it is waiting for the Council of Ministers' decision on the National Statistical Programme. The President of the NSI should have the sole responsibility for deciding on the content and timing of statistical releases. According to indications from the NSI, 98% of the country's statistical production stems from EU obligations. Both the content and the timing of release of those statistics should therefore be known well in advance and publication of the release calendar should not be subject to the Council of Ministers' approval of the National Statistical Programme. In addition, the published release calendar can be revised, if needed. In the view of the peer review team, publishing the release calendar with the disclaimer that it is a draft subject to potential revisions is a better token of professional independence than waiting for the Council of Ministers' decision.

To comply with the ES CoP, the peer review team recommends:

R2. The Council of Ministers should take all necessary steps to amend the statistical legal framework to clarify the role, responsibilities and prerogatives of the President of the National Statistical Institute, and of the heads of other national authorities where appropriate, in particular to establish that the President has the sole responsibility for deciding on statistical methods, standards and procedures, and on the content and timing of statistical releases. (Compliance-relevant: ES CoP, Indicators 1.4 and 1.3)

Pre-release access is explicitly foreseen in the Rules for the Dissemination of Statistical Products and Services, Article 7(6), as follows: "Information to the President, Prime Minister and President of the National Assembly shall be sent by courier one hour prior to the official dissemination under strict embargo of data disclosure." This appears to correspond to the criteria in the ES CoP that pre-release access should be controlled and publicised. However, the relevant provision does not make it clear that sending information prior to official dissemination constitutes a pre-release access which should remain exceptional. Neither does it establish nor refer to the actual arrangements put in place for such access, notably as regards the strict embargo conditions. This arrangement could therefore be improved in the following respects: 1) it should be clarified what is meant by "information"; 2) it should be explained why the President, Prime Minister and President of the National Assembly have this privileged access; 3) it should also be clarified why these three stakeholders should have automatic pre-release access in all cases and not just in some cases; 4) the exceptional character of the access should be made clear and the actual arrangements put in place to ensure that the embargo is respected should be illustrated. These clarifications would improve adherence with the criteria in the ES CoP that pre-release access should be limited and well-justified.

To improve beyond compliance with the ES CoP, the peer review team recommends:

R3. The National Statistical Institute should review the pre-release access arrangements, particularly in relation to explaining the reasons for pre-release access, limiting the scope of pre-

release access to well-justified cases, and making the arrangements more visible. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicator 6.7)

The fundamental principle of professional independence is explicitly established in the Statistics Act and its importance is clearly recognised across the Bulgarian statistical system and beyond. The high trust in statistics among all categories of users that was repeatedly confirmed to the peer review team also indicates that professional independence is implemented in practice.

The statistical activities in the three ONAs reviewed are located either within ministries (the “Agrostatistics” Department at the Directorate-General Agriculture and Regional Policy within the Ministry of Agriculture and the “Monitoring and Assessment of the Environment” Directorate at the Executive Environment Agency within the Ministry of Environment and Water) or within national institutes (the “Analysis, Planning and Prognosis” Directorate and the “Medical Expertise of Working Capacity and Accidents at Work” Department at the “Insurance and Short-term Benefits” Directorate within the National Social Security Institute). These organisations have other types of responsibilities and tasks besides statistics, some of which are political in nature and follow different practices and principles than the statistical activities.

The statistical activities of these entities within ministries and institutes and the quality framework upon which European statistics are based are not clearly communicated to the outside audience or within the institutions. This may cause confusion among users of statistics as to the role or mandate of the institutions producing statistics and also requiring source data from citizens, companies and other actors. The same kind of confusion or misunderstanding may also appear within these institutions.

In addition to communicating about statistical activities and their professional principles, these activities are based on the statistical work programme and should be made public and followed upon.

To improve beyond compliance with the ES CoP, the peer review team recommends:

R4. The three other national authorities reviewed (the Agrostatistics Department in the Ministry of Agriculture, the Directorate of Analysis, Planning and Prognosis and the Department of Medical Expertise of Working Capacity and Accidents at Work in the National Social Security Institute, the Directorate of Monitoring and Assessment of the Environment in the Executive Environment Agency) should increase the transparency and visibility of their statistics-producing role, including by explaining their professional independence, and statistical activities, based on their statistical work programme, both internally and externally. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicators 1.3 and 1.5)

In two of the other national authorities reviewed (the National Social Security Institute and the Executive Environment Agency), statistical tasks and various administrative tasks are carried out in the same departments by the same personnel. The peer review team considers that this involves a risk of statistics-producing roles and principles becoming unclear or mixed up with other roles and principles with regard to data quality, confidentiality and data sharing. Another risk for statistical production is whether there are adequate human resources for the production of official statistics if other non-statistical duties and roles are continuously given to the statistics workforce.

In order to ensure professional independence in statistical production also in the future, clarifying the different roles and responsibilities would make sure that other functions do not blend with the activities to produce official statistics.

To improve beyond compliance with the ES CoP, the peer review team recommends:

R5. The National Social Security Institute and the Executive Environment Agency should delineate the statistical responsibilities and tasks within their organisations; the organisational structure and rules should support a clear distinction between their role in producing European statistics and other roles. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicator 1.3)

5.2.2 Ensuring adequate financial and human resources

The NSI has an engaging, motivating and supportive work environment. Yet, retaining talent, and young talent in particular, remains a challenge in a context where attracting and retaining talent is critical for the relevance and sustainability of the National Statistical Institute. Current career development efforts such as promotions across diverse seniority ranks with modest salary increases are appropriate but insufficient. The low wages within the state administration and the National Statistical Institute are a major obstacle to attracting and retaining talent.

To improve beyond compliance with the ES CoP, the peer review team recommends:

R6. The National Statistical Institute should explore ways to engage with relevant stakeholders to address the current salary limitations and to identify internal solutions to these limitations, such as through efficiency gains or organisational reengineering. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicators 3.1 and 10.4)

Furthermore, in the setting described in the previous recommendation, it is the learning prospects and the uniqueness of what can be learned at the National Statistical Institute that attracts and keeps talent in-house. However, the transfer of knowledge and expertise internally - especially from senior staff to junior staff – is still limited, and the degree of mobility across departments is also modest. Moreover, the physical work environment is not conducive to the exchange of ideas and creative working interactions.

To improve beyond compliance with the ES CoP, the peer review team recommends:

R7. The National Statistical Institute should develop incentives to attract and retain staff in a more systematic and planned manner, and should put in place mechanisms to ensure knowledge transfer, career development and career opportunities. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicators 7.6 and 3.1)

The NSI follows an annual human resource training plan which covers all staff and draws upon the annual staff evaluation. The plan is quite comprehensive and all personnel in the human resources department are involved in organising and evaluating vocational training. However, there seems to be a misalignment between training and career development. As acknowledged by the NSI, staff are unaware of the connection between competency, training and promotion. This situation occurs in a context where the design of individual training plans is not based on a collaborative diagnosis process involving staff (future trainees).

The training courses offered are standard, which means that training sequences do not always suit specific individual career development needs. Also, training plans have a short-term scope; they are done by year and do not incorporate a mid-term view (3-5 years) aligned to staff career progression inside the NSI. Linking training plans with career development trajectories would act as an incentive for staff retention, particularly for new recruits. Furthermore, training courses are primarily external, and internal training sessions within teams are infrequent. Yet, one of the aspects staff value the most, particularly junior staff, is the knowledge and expertise that already exists in the NSI, embodied in its

senior personnel. In this context, the NSI has not yet tapped into the opportunities that internal training could bring in terms of knowledge transfer.

To improve beyond compliance with the ES CoP, the peer review team recommends:

R8. The National Statistical Institute should ensure that the approach to training includes both internal and external sources, and is based on a comprehensive assessment of needs, developed in consultation with staff, and linked to their mid-term career development plans. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicators 7.6 and 3.1)

5.2.3 Strengthening coordination and the visibility of quality in the Bulgarian statistical system

The Statistics Act designates a clear mandate to the NSI to coordinate statistical activities in Bulgaria. The coordination is executed mainly through the National Statistical Council.

The National Statistical Council participates in giving an opinion and recommendations on the Strategy for Development of the Bulgarian Statistical System for each 5-year period. The Council also discusses proposals from ONAs for the National Statistical Programme and supports the Bulgarian statistical system in implementing the National Statistical Programme. The Council is a useful body to discuss the Strategy for Development and the Statistical Programme. The peer review team considers that there are important coordination topics regarding the production of statistics that would benefit from having a special group.

The National Statistical Council consists of representatives from each ONA, academic community representatives and representatives of various respondents and users. However, there is no permanent tool or body consisting solely of producers of official statistics where the NSI's coordination role could be effectively implemented. Such a permanent body should consist only of producers of statistics to allow coordination, guidance and cooperation purely from the point of view of producers of statistics. The National Statistical Council should concentrate on issues relevant for both producers of statistics and other relevant stakeholders.

To improve beyond compliance with the ES CoP, the peer review team recommends:

R9. The National Statistical Institute, in cooperation with the other national authorities developing, producing and disseminating European statistics, should strengthen the coordination activities of the Bulgarian statistical system by introducing structured and regular procedures to provide methodological and other guidance to, and share good practices and tools with, other national authorities. A formal mechanism for the coordination should be targeted solely towards other national authorities. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicator 1bis.1)

The NSI has published a good set of quality guidelines on its website and the three ONAs reviewed use these guidelines in their statistical activities. However, the guidelines are rather old and do not fully support good quality and modern statistical production and processes.

The NSI has actively developed its quality management system, including quality management and information security. While the quality management system has been updated, the national quality guidelines have not been adjusted to this new quality management system and are therefore outdated. The development of revised quality guidelines should be pursued and support should be provided for their implementation. Furthermore, while the NSI is in a position to implement this coordination task, it also needs appropriate funding to do so.

The three ONAs reviewed receive some training on methodological and quality issues from the National Statistical Institute. Since the National Statistical Institute has advanced its quality work, there is a possibility to enhance ONA quality management, e.g., through additional training by the NSI to the ONAs. With the very limited resources for quality management, this is currently not possible to the extent needed and thus the NSI should be appropriately resourced for the task.

Quality management within the Bulgarian statistical system can also benefit the e-government work within the Bulgarian government by adding quality and data security to the overall data management. The NSI and ONAs work closely with register holders in the Bulgarian government while using the data for statistical purposes. They are thus in a position to pay attention to data quality and, in cooperation with the register holders, to improve the quality and quality management of Bulgarian data.

To improve beyond compliance with the ES CoP, the peer review team recommends:

R10. The National Statistical Institute, in cooperation with the other national authorities developing, producing and disseminating European statistics, should take an active approach in coordinating the development of quality management among other national authorities and develop up-to-date national quality guidelines and support their implementation through staff training and regular monitoring. The National Statistical Institute should work to obtain appropriate funding to support the necessary coordination. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicators 1bis.2 and 3.1)

The NSI has a well-structured release calendar on its website for statistics produced by the NSI. For the three ONAs reviewed, the peer review team could not find a release calendar on their English websites. Their corresponding statistics were also not to be found on their websites or the NSI's website.

Statistical release dates and times should be pre-announced so that users know when to expect statistical data to be published and can plan their work accordingly. Users also need access to statistical information which can be printed and/or a web-based publication or a database service on a website.

The NSI has developed the INFOSTAT information system to offer users flexible access to statistical data; this service could also be used as a national service to offer access to official statistical information. On the whole, this could offer an economical and efficient service for the Bulgarian statistical system.

To improve beyond compliance with the ES CoP, the peer review team recommends:

R11. The three other national authorities reviewed (the Agrostistics Department in the Ministry of Agriculture, the Directorate of Analysis, Planning and Prognosis and the Department of Medical Expertise of Working Capacity and Accidents at Work in the National Social Security Institute, the Directorate of Monitoring and Assessment of the Environment in the Executive Environment Agency) should publish a release calendar and statistics on their websites. Alternatively, the three other national authorities reviewed should publish their official statistics on the website and/or web services of the National Statistical Institute and provide links from their respective websites. The three other national authorities should publish their statistical information in reusable format (e.g., xlsx, open data). (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicators 6.5 and 15.2)

Users of statistical information are interested to know what data statistics are based on and how they are compiled i.e., the methods behind the numbers. This information can be obtained from methodological documentation.

The National Statistical Institute has developed its website structure so that both metadata and methodology as well as quality reports are easily accessible in connection with the statistics published. The same kind of structure should be developed for the statistics compiled by the three ONAs reviewed.

To improve beyond compliance with the ES CoP, the peer review team recommends:

R12. The three other national authorities reviewed (the Agrostistics Department in the Ministry of Agriculture, the Directorate of Analysis, Planning and Prognosis and the Department of Medical Expertise of Working Capacity and Accidents at Work in the National Social Security Institute, the Directorate of Monitoring and Assessment of the Environment in the Executive Environment Agency) should publish quality reports and methodological and quality documents on their websites. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicators 15.6 and 15.7)

5.2.4 Making the most of the evolving data landscape

The Statistics Act (Article 20.6) gives the National Statistical Institute and the ONAs the right of access, free of charge, to administrative data held based on a law. This has enabled the National Statistical Institute and the ONAs to be very successful in using a wide range of administrative data for the production of official statistics. In practice, it is not always easy to obtain access, and access is sometimes refused, with arguments relating to the law on which the requested administrative data is based. There are also no registers of houses and other buildings, and geo-information is almost always lacking. Registers are not always updated frequently enough to be used for timely statistics. The National Statistical Institute and the ONAs could benefit from public support from the government, e.g., by giving access to administrative data a prominent place in the government's e-strategy. The Government should affirm that it considers access to administrative sources vital for information based on official statistics.

To improve beyond compliance with the ES CoP, the peer review team recommends:

R13. The Government should take steps towards removing all legal obstacles to accessing administrative sources, as well as towards expanding the information included in registers and improving their timeliness. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicator 2.2)

Access to and use of administrative data could benefit from a more proactive approach by the NSI. An explicit strategy could provide a framework for improving relations with administrative data providers, obtaining access to administrative data and using such data in statistical production.

To improve beyond compliance with the ES CoP, the peer review team recommends:

R14. The National Statistical Institute should continue to develop and implement a strategy for access to and use of administrative data, and to work very actively with administrative data providers to ensure access, both at working level and at the strategic and highest management levels. This administrative data strategy should include the necessary actions to achieve, in cooperation with the administrative data providers, better alignment between administrative and statistical concepts and definitions, and to increase the quality of administrative data. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicator 9.4)

In many cases, the NSI and the ONAs are already effectively consulted about the concepts and definitions used for administrative data, even though the Statistics Act does not seem to give them the right to be consulted. In other cases, consultation is not effective enough or timely enough, and

the NSI has to implement detailed conversions to statistical concepts and definitions. These conversions are carried out by the NSI's statistical units, as these issues are not considered to be *horizontal*; as a consequence, more advanced statistical methods might not be investigated or might remain underused. Also, the opportunities for reusing administrative data within the NSI do not seem to be fully exploited. It would be very useful if it were clarified that the NSI and the other national authorities developing, producing and disseminating European statistics have the right to be consulted about the design and development of different administrative registers, databases and records, including concepts, definitions and quality of administrative data, in order to make administrative data more suitable for statistical purposes.

To improve beyond compliance with the ES CoP, the peer review team recommends:

R15. The Council of Ministers should take all necessary steps to amend the Statistics Act to clarify that the National Statistical Institute and the other national authorities developing, producing and disseminating European statistics have the legal right to be consulted about the concepts, definitions and quality of administrative data. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicator 2.2)

The use of administrative data in the production of official statistics is not entirely straightforward. Administrative data may contain errors and their concepts may differ from statistical concepts; also, linking with other administrative data or survey data may produce errors. It would therefore be useful for the NSI to extend its expertise in this area.

To improve beyond compliance with the ES CoP, the peer review team recommends:

R16. The National Statistical Institute's administrative data strategy should include applied research and the development of statistical methods for the use of administrative data in the production of official statistics, and ensure the necessary resources for this work. The National Statistical Institute should also explore the opportunities for an increased reuse of administrative data within the National Statistical Institute. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicator 8.7)

Data exchange between the National Statistical Institute, ONAs and administrative data providers and respondents, in particular enterprises, takes various forms: web portals, CD-ROMs, paper format, USB sticks, etc. Progress is being made in this area, and the National Statistical Institute plays an important role here, for example, as coordinator of the *Single-Entry Point* project, where enterprises need to provide their data only once. Automatic data exchange between the National Statistical Institute, ONAs, administrative data providers and respondents would lead to cost savings for all parties, by reducing the number of manual operations, and to higher quality of official statistics by reducing the likelihood of processing errors.

To improve beyond compliance with the ES CoP, the peer review team recommends:

R17. The National Statistical Institute, other national authorities developing, producing and disseminating European statistics and administrative data providers should take the necessary steps to launch and maintain an automated data exchange. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicator 10.3)

The area of new data is very promising for official statistics, for example, for producing more detailed and more frequent statistics. The NSI has very successfully performed applied research and development on new data, such as scanner data, big data and data obtained by web scraping. This was carried out in cooperation with other European NSIs and has led to the development of experimental statistics, in particular for online job advertisements and for online-based enterprise characteristics. It would give an impetus to the NSI's reputation as a knowledge institute if this

research and any future research were to be published on its website, for example on a separate webpage for research and development. The resulting statistics could then be published on a separate page for experimental statistics. This could also contribute towards making the NSI an even more attractive employer for talented data scientists and statisticians.

To improve beyond compliance with the ES CoP, the peer review team recommends:

R18. The National Statistical Institute should continue research and development activities for exploring new data sources and in other methodological fields, and publish the results of this work on its website. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicator 13.5)

5.2.5 Strengthening cooperation with broader society

The National Statistical Institute has a good relationship with users and facilitates and promotes regular exchanges. Institutional users, including producers of official statistical data, are members of the National Statistical Council. In this setting, operational work with institutional users such as the business community tends to be ad-hoc, conducted in inter-organisational working groups and without user-specific agendas addressed through systematic and regular exchange channels. Given that there still remain challenges in the response burden on businesses, a more targeted approach would be advisable.

To improve beyond compliance with the ES CoP, the peer review team recommends:

R19. The National Statistical Institute should establish a consultative body with business associations to discuss current challenges and actions to address the response burden on businesses. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicators 9.3 and 9.1)

The range of users of official statistics in Bulgaria is becoming more comprehensive alongside the country's socio-political development. Citizens, civil servants in relevant ministries, academic researchers, policymakers, business organisations and the media increasingly use statistics. Their distinct requirements and evolving needs call for a customised approach.

However, there are no consultative bodies for different user groups and profiles in a context where two of the National Statistical Institute's strategic goals are transitioning from statistics to value-added statistics, and high quality and confidence in official statistics.

To improve beyond compliance with the ES CoP, the peer review team recommends:

R20. The National Statistical Institute should intensify and customise interaction with different user profiles to maximise the potential of their experience as users of statistics. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicators 11.1 and 11.3)

The National Statistical Institute has made promising developments exploring new data sources in a context where the data landscape in the country is expanding, and the newly developed e-government strategy opens the door to new possibilities. The current National Development Programme Bulgaria 2030 explicitly mentions that decision-making based on data is crucial to improving the country's institutional environment and the will to transform into a data-driven economy. The programme also advocates for an open data policy and efforts to implement e-government services. This national context offers fertile ground to work on options that have not yet been capitalised upon. The NSI is especially well placed to participate in data stewardship for the e-government strategy, for example by providing support or by playing a central role as data steward.

To improve beyond compliance with the ES CoP, the peer review team recommends:

R21. The National Statistical Institute should establish and maintain a dialogue with the Government about new data sources and their role in official statistics and e-government. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicator 2.4)

The National Statistical Institute's institutional positioning in the country is remarkable. Partners and users across the Bulgarian statistical system value the National Statistical Institute highly, considering it a trustworthy, credible and competent organisation. Still, the National Statistical Institute faces some critical challenges that hinder its optimisation as an organisation. Some of these challenges are system-level aspects external to the organisation, such as salary level constraints and the limitations in the access to and exchange of administrative data. In this context, cooperation with data producers, data holders and institutional users of official statistics is very fluid and constructive, yet it tends to be an ad-hoc, issue-based and operational-level type of cooperation. System-level issues are not necessarily addressed as part of a collective effort.

The setting of the National Development Programme Bulgaria 2030 and the government's e-strategy offer the opportunity to start discussing and finding system-level solutions to aspects that hinder the optimal performance of the National Statistical Institute within the Bulgarian statistical system.

To improve beyond compliance with the ES CoP, the peer review team recommends:

R22. The National Statistical Institute, in cooperation with the National Statistical Council, should explore the possibility of a strategic data alliance to elevate the current system-level challenges to society, particularly in the context of the role of data and official statistics for evidence-based policymaking, the push for a data-driven economy and the desired role of statistics in a democratic society. This alliance should go beyond the current programming and operational partnerships and include a broader range of actors. (Improvement-related: ES CoP, Indicators 10.4, 10.2 and 2.1)

5.3 VIEWS OF THE NSI, AS THE NATIONAL COORDINATOR OF THE NSS AND THE PEER REVIEW, ON THOSE RECOMMENDATIONS WHERE THEY DIVERGE FROM PEER REVIEW EXPERTS' ASSESSMENT

None

ANNEX A – AGENDA OF THE VISIT

Timing	Topic	Participants
Day 1- 28 March 2022		
9:30-9:45	Preparatory meeting	<p>The peer review expert team: All</p> <p>NSI: National PR Coordinator and Deputy President of NSI PR Communication Officer and Head of International Cooperation Department State Expert at General Methodology, Analysis and Coordination of Statistical Surveys Directorate Data protection officer (DPO) Chief Expert at International Cooperation Department Senior Expert at International Cooperation Department Senior Expert at International Cooperation Department</p>
09:45-10:00	Welcome and introduction	<p>The peer review expert team: All</p> <p>NSI team: National PR Coordinator and Deputy President of NSI PR Communication Officer and Head of International Cooperation Department State Expert at General Methodology, Analysis and Coordination of Statistical Surveys Directorate Data protection officer (DPO) Chief Expert at International Cooperation Department Senior Expert at International Cooperation Department Senior Expert at International Cooperation Department</p>
10:00-11:00	Presentation of the National Statistical System	<p>The peer review expert team: All</p> <p>NSI and guests: Advisor at the political cabinet to the Deputy Prime Minister for Good Governance President of NSI</p>

		<p>National PR Coordinator and Deputy President of NSI</p> <p>Deputy President of NSI</p> <p>Secretary General of NSI</p> <p>Director of Business Statistics Directorate</p> <p>Director of Demographic and Social Statistics Directorate</p> <p>Director of Multi-Domain Statistics and User Services Directorate</p> <p>Director of Information Systems and Infrastructure Directorate</p> <p>Director of General Methodology, Analysis and Coordination of Statistical Surveys Directorate</p> <p>Chief Expert at Non-financial National and Regional Accounts Department, Macroeconomic Statistics Directorate</p> <p>Head of Agrostistics Department, Agriculture and Regional Policy Directorate, Ministry of Agriculture</p> <p>Director of Analysis, Planning and Prognosis Directorate, National Social Security Institute</p> <p>State Expert at Expertise of Working Capacity and Accidents at Work Department, National Social Security Institute</p> <p>Deputy Executive Director of Executive Environment Agency, Ministry of Environment and Water</p> <p>Director of Statistics Directorate, Bulgarian National Bank</p> <p>Head of Macroeconomic Statistics Department at the Statistics Directorate, Bulgarian National Bank</p> <p>State Expert at General Methodology, Analysis and Coordination of Statistical Surveys Directorate</p> <p>Data protection officer (DPO)</p>
11:00-11:15	Coffee break	
11:15-12:30	<p>Coordination and cooperation (ES CoP principle 1bis)</p>	<p>The peer review expert team:</p> <p>All</p> <p>NSI:</p> <p>National PR Coordinator and Deputy President of NSI</p> <p>Director of Multi-Domain Statistics and User Services Directorate</p> <p>Director of Information Systems and Infrastructure Directorate</p>

		PR Communication Officer and Head of International Cooperation Department State Expert at General Methodology, Analysis and Coordination of Statistical Surveys Directorate Data protection officer (DPO)
12:30-13:30	Lunch	
13:30-14:45	Professional independence and the Law on Official Statistics and related legislation	<p>The peer review expert team: All</p> <p>NSI: National PR Coordinator and Deputy President of NSI PR Communication Officer and Head of International Cooperation Department State Expert at General Methodology, Analysis and Coordination of Statistical Surveys Directorate Chief Legal Advisor at Legal Activities Department Senior Expert at International Cooperation Department Director of Business Statistics Directorate Director of Demographic and Social Statistics Directorate Data protection officer (DPO) Director of Multi-Domain Statistics and User Services Directorate Director of Information Systems and Infrastructure Directorate</p>
14:45-15:00	Coffee break	
15:00-16:15	Programming, planning and resources	<p>The peer review expert team: All</p> <p>NSI: National PR Coordinator and Deputy President of NSI State Expert at General Methodology, Analysis and Coordination of Statistical Surveys Directorate Chief Expert at General Methodology, Analysis and Coordination of Statistical Surveys Directorate Chief Legal Advisor at Legal Activities Department Secretary General of NSI Head of Financial-Accounting Activities Department Chief Accountant</p>

		Acting Head of Human Resources Department Director of Business Statistics Directorate Director of Demographic and Social Statistics Directorate Director of Information Systems and Infrastructure Directorate Data protection officer (DPO)
16:15	Peer review expert team discussion	
Timing	Topic	Participants
Day 2 – 29 March 2022		
9:00-10:15	Quality (organisational structure, tools, monitoring)	<p>The peer review expert team: All</p> <p>NSI: National PR Coordinator and Deputy President of NSI State Expert at General Methodology, Analysis and Coordination of Statistical Surveys Directorate Director of Information Systems and Infrastructure Directorate Director of Business Statistics Directorate Director of Demographic and Social Statistics Directorate Director of Multi-Domain Statistics and User Services Directorate Head of Environmental and Energy accounts Department, Macroeconomic Statistics Directorate Chief Expert at Information Systems and Infrastructure Directorate Data protection officer (DPO)</p> <p>Other participants/Observers: Head of Health and Justice Statistics Department Head of Education and Culture Statistics Department Head of Relations with Users and e-Services Department</p>
10:15-10:30	Coffee break	
10:30-11:45	Dissemination and confidentiality	The peer review expert team: All

		<p>NSI: National PR Coordinator and Deputy President of NSI Data protection officer (DPO) Director of Multi-Domain Statistics and User Services Directorate Director of Information Systems and Infrastructure Directorate Chief Expert at Information Systems and Infrastructure Directorate Chief Expert at International Cooperation Department responsible for Media Relations PR Communication Officer and Head of International Cooperation Department State Expert at General Methodology, Analysis and Coordination of Statistical Surveys Directorate</p> <p><u>Other participants/Observers:</u> Head of Relations with Users and e-Services Department Chief Expert at International Cooperation Department</p>
11:45-12:45	Lunch	
12:45-14:00	<p>Methodology, data collection, data processing (administrative data)</p>	<p>The peer review expert team: All</p> <p>NSI: National PR Coordinator and Deputy President of NSI Director of General Methodology, Analysis and Coordination of Statistical Surveys Directorate Director of Business Statistics Directorate Director of Demographic and Social Statistics Directorate Director of Multi-Domain Statistics and User Services Directorate Director of Information Systems and Infrastructure Directorate Head of Consumer Prices, Housing prices and PPP Department, Macroeconomic Statistics Directorate Chief Expert at Non-financial National and Regional Accounts Department, Macroeconomic Statistics Directorate State Expert at General Methodology, Analysis and Coordination of Statistical Surveys Directorate</p>

		<p>Other participants/Observers: Data protection officer (DPO) Head of Statistics on Foreign Trade in Goods Department Head of Health and Justice Statistics Department Head of Education and Culture Statistics Department</p>
14:00-14:15	Coffee break	
14:15-15:30	Meeting with junior staff	<p>The peer review expert team: All</p> <p>NSI: Senior Expert at International Cooperation Department Senior Expert at International Cooperation Department State Expert at Short-term Business Statistics and Transport Statistics Department, Business Statistics Directorate Chief Expert at Education and Culture Statistics Department, Demographic and Social Statistics Directorate Junior Expert at Statistics on Population and Housing fund Department, Demographic and Social Statistics Directorate Senior Expert at Information Systems and Application Software Department, Information Systems and Infrastructure Directorate Chief Expert at Regional Statistics and Monitoring Indicators Department, Multi-Domain Statistics and User Services Directorate Chief Expert at Non-financial National and Regional Accounts Department, Macroeconomic Statistics Directorate</p>
15:30	Peer review expert team discussion	
Timing	Topic	Participants
Day 3 – 30 March 2022		
09:00-09:15	General opening session with all ONAs	<p>The peer review expert team: All</p> <p>NSI:</p>

		<p>National PR Coordinator and Deputy President of NSI State Expert at General Methodology, Analysis and Coordination of Statistical Surveys Directorate</p> <p>ONAs: Head of Agrostatics Department, Agriculture and Regional Policy Directorate, Ministry of Agriculture State Expert at Agrostatics Department, Ministry of Agriculture Chief Expert at Agrostatics Department, Ministry of Agriculture Director of Analysis, Planning and Prognosis Directorate, National Social Security Institute State Expert at Expertise of Working Capacity and Accidents at Work Department, National Social Security Institute Chief Expert at Expertise of Working Capacity and Accidents at Work Department, National Social Security Institute Actuary, Statistics, Actuarial Analysis and Prognosis Department at the Analysis, Planning and Prognosis Directorate, National Social Security Institute Deputy Executive Director of Executive Environment Agency Director of Monitoring and Assessments of the Environment Directorate, Executive Environment Agency Head of Waste Monitoring Department, Executive Environment Agency</p> <p>Other participants/Observers: PR Communication Officer and Head of International Cooperation Department</p>
09:15-10:30	<p>Meeting with ONA1 - Agrostatics Department, Directorate General for Agriculture and Regional Policy (DGRDP), Ministry of Agriculture</p>	<p>The peer review expert team: All</p> <p>ONA: Head of Agrostatics Department Agriculture and Regional Policy Directorate, Ministry of Agriculture State Expert at Agrostatics Department, Ministry of Agriculture Chief Expert at Agrostatics Department, Ministry of Agriculture</p>

		<p>NSI: National PR Coordinator and Deputy President of NSI State Expert at General Methodology, Analysis and Coordination of Statistical Surveys Directorate Head of Accounts and Prices in Agriculture and Forestry Department, Macroeconomic Statistics Directorate PR Communication Officer and Head of International Cooperation Department</p>
10:30-10:45	Coffee break	
10:45-12:00	<p>Meeting with ONA2 - Analyses, Planning and Prognosis Directorate, "Medical Expertise of Working Capacity and Accidents at Work" Department, National Social Security Institute (NSSI)</p>	<p>The peer review expert team: All</p> <p>ONA: Director of Analysis, Planning and Prognosis Directorate, National Social Security Institute State Expert at Expertise of Working Capacity and Accidents at Work Department, National Social Security Institute Chief Expert at Expertise of Working Capacity and Accidents at Work Department, National Social Security Institute Actuary, Statistics, Actuarial Analysis and Prognosis Department at the Analysis, Planning and Prognosis Directorate, National Social Security Institute</p> <p>NSI: National PR Coordinator and Deputy President of NSI State Expert at General Methodology, Analysis and Coordination of Statistical Surveys Directorate Head of Labour Market Statistics Department, Business Statistics Directorate; Chief Expert at International Cooperation Department</p>
12:00-13:00	Lunch	
13:00-14:15	<p>Meeting with ONA3 - "Monitoring and Assessment of the Environment" Directorate, Executive Environment Agency (ExEA)</p>	<p>The peer review expert team: All</p> <p>ONA: Deputy Executive Director of Executive Environment Agency</p>

		<p>Director of Monitoring and Assessments of the Environment Directorate, Executive Environment Agency Head of Waste Monitoring Department, Executive Environment Agency</p> <p>NSI: National PR Coordinator and Deputy President of NSI State Expert at General Methodology, Analysis and Coordination of Statistical Surveys Directorate Head of Environmental and Energy accounts Department, Macroeconomic Statistics Directorate PR Communication Officer and Head of International Cooperation Department</p>
14:15-14:30	Coffee break	
14:30-15:45	Progress and plans for the future	<p>The peer review expert team: All</p> <p>NSI: National PR Coordinator and Deputy President of NSI Director of Business Statistics Directorate Director of Demographic and Social Statistics Directorate Director of Multi-Domain Statistics and User Services Directorate Director of Information Systems and Infrastructure Directorate Head of Consumer Prices, Housing prices and PPP Department, Macroeconomic Statistics Directorate Chief Expert at Non-financial National and Regional Accounts Department, Macroeconomic Statistics Directorate State Expert at General Methodology, Analysis and Coordination of Statistical Surveys Directorate</p> <p>Other participants/Observers: PR Communication Officer and Head of International Cooperation Department Data protection officer (DPO)</p>
15:45-16:00	Coffee break	
16:00-17:00	Administrative and new data sources	<p>The peer review expert team: All</p>

		<p>NSI: National PR Coordinator and Deputy President of NSI Director of Business Statistics Directorate Director of Demographic and Social Statistics Directorate Director of Multi-Domain Statistics and User Services Directorate Director of Information Systems and Infrastructure Directorate State Expert at Housing Prices and PPP Department, Macroeconomic Statistics Directorate State Expert at General Methodology, Analysis and Coordination of Statistical Surveys Directorate Chief Expert at Information Systems and Infrastructure Directorate Data protection officer (DPO)</p>
17:00	Peer review expert team discussion	
Timing	Topic	Participants
Day 4 – 31 March 2022		
09:00-10:15	Meeting with main data providers - administrative data and new data sources	<p>The peer review expert team: All</p> <p>Data providers: Chief Expert at Intrastat Directorate, National Revenue Agency Head of Strategic analyses and prognosis and development of reference infrastructure Department, Information systems and analytic activity, Directorate of National Customs Agency to the Ministry of Finance Head of Department in Budget and Financial Parameters Directorate, National Health Insurance Fund Representative of the Electronic Information Processing Department, Civil Registration and Administrative Services General Directorate, Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works Director of Analysis, Planning and Prognosis Directorate, National Social Security Institute Director of Information Technologies and Spatial Data directorate; Geodesy, Cartography and Cadastre Agency</p>

		<p>Chief Expert at Planning and Statistics Department, Coordination and Information-Analytical Activities Directorate, Ministry of Interior Secretary General of the National Centre for Information and Documentation National PR Coordinator and Deputy President of NSI Director of Information Systems and Infrastructure Directorate State Expert at General Methodology, Analysis and Coordination of Statistical Surveys Directorate Data protection officer (DPO)</p> <p>Other participants/Observers: Expert at the Policies for Strategic Development Department, Ministry of Education and Science Junior Expert at the Policies for Strategic Development Department, Ministry of Education and Science Head of Design and Development of information systems and components of information systems sector at the Communication and Information Systems Directorate, Ministry of Interior</p> <p>NSI: Director of Business Statistics Directorate Director of Demographic and Social Statistics Directorate Director of Multi-Domain Statistics and User Services Directorate Chief Expert at International Cooperation Department</p>
10:15-10:30	Coffee break	
10:30-11:30	Meeting with main users – Media	<p>The peer review expert team: All</p> <p>Media representatives: Director General of the Bulgarian Telegraph Agency Host of the "Referendum" Current Affairs Programme, Bulgarian National Television; Journalist, BTV Media Group Business Editor, Dnevnik.bg Journalist, Nova Broadcasting group Business Editor, 24 Hours Newspaper</p>

		<p>NSI: National PR Coordinator and Deputy President of NSI State Expert at General Methodology, Analysis and Coordination of Statistical Surveys Directorate</p> <p>Other participants/Observers: PR Communication Officer and Head of International Cooperation Department Chief Expert at International Cooperation Department Chief Expert at International Cooperation Department responsible for Media Relations Data protection officer (DPO)</p>
11:30-11:45	Coffee break	
11:45-12:45	<p>Meeting with main users – business associations and federations and trade unions,</p>	<p>The peer review expert team: All</p> <p>Business Users: Executive Director of Bulgarian Industrial Capital Association Member of the Tax and Legal Committee Confederation of Employers and Industrials in Bulgaria Deputy Chairman of the Bulgarian Industrial Association and Chief Financial Director Chief Legal Expert at the Legal Directorate, Bulgarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry Expert Analyst, Bulgarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry Economic Advisor, Trade Union Confederation "Podkrepa" Deputy Director of the Institute of Social and Trade Union research, Confederation of Independent Trade Unions in Bulgaria</p> <p>NSI: National PR Coordinator and Deputy President of NSI State Expert at General Methodology, Analysis and Coordination of Statistical Surveys Directorate Data protection officer (DPO)</p> <p>Other participants/Observers:</p>

		PR Communication Officer and Head of International Cooperation Department Chief Expert at International Cooperation Department Director of Business Statistics Directorate
12:45-13:30	Lunch	
13:30-14:30	Meeting with main users – Ministries and other public/private institutions (including Central Bank as a user)	<p>The peer review expert team: All</p> <p>Government Users: Director of Information Systems Department at the Central Coordination Unit Directorate (EU Funds Coordination), Council of Ministers Senior Research Fellow, Business Cycle, Public Finances, Economic Freedom, Competition, Poverty and Development Institute for Market Economics Director of Statistics Directorate, Bulgarian National Bank Head of Macroeconomic Statistics Department at the Statistics Directorate, Bulgarian National Bank Director of Economic Policy Directorate, Ministry of Economy and Industry Senior Expert "Municipality Administration", National Association of Municipalities in the Republic of Bulgaria</p> <p>NSI: National PR Coordinator and Deputy President of NSI State Expert at General Methodology, Analysis and Coordination of Statistical Surveys Directorate Data protection officer (DPO)</p> <p>Other participants/Observers: Director of Multi-Domain Statistics and User Services Directorate PR Communication Officer and Head of International Cooperation Department Chief Expert at International Cooperation Department</p>
14:30-14:45	Coffee break	
14:45-16:00	Meeting with main users – Scientific community	<p>The peer review expert team: All</p> <p>Scientific users:</p>

		<p>Professor at Economic Research Institute, Bulgarian Academy of Science Chair of the General Scientific Meetings, Institute for Population and Human Studies, Bulgarian Academy of Science Assoc. Prof. at the Department of Statistics and Econometrics, Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" Assoc. Prof. at the Applied Informatics and Statistics Faculty, University of National and World Economy Head of Statistics and Applied Mathematics Department, D. A. Tsenov Academy of Economics</p> <p>NSI: National PR Coordinator and Deputy President of NSI State Expert at General Methodology, Analysis and Coordination of Statistical Surveys Directorate Data protection officer (DPO)</p> <p>Other participants/Observers: Director of Multi-Domain Statistics and User Services Directorate Chief Expert at International Cooperation Department</p>
16:00-17:00	Peer review expert team discussion	
Timing	Topic	Participants
Day 5 – 1 April 2022		
09:00-9:30	Feedback session to ONA1	<p>The peer review expert team: All</p> <p>ONA: Head of Agrostistics Department, Agriculture and Regional Policy Directorate, Ministry of Agriculture Chief Expert at Agrostistics Department, Ministry of Agriculture</p> <p>NSI: National PR Coordinator and Deputy President of NSI State Expert at General Methodology, Analysis and Coordination of Statistical Surveys Directorate</p>

09:30-10:00	Feedback session to ONA2	<p>The peer review expert team: All</p> <p>ONA: Director of Analysis, Planning and Prognosis Directorate, National Social Security Institute State Expert at Expertise of Working Capacity and Accidents at Work Department, National Social Security Institute</p> <p>NSI: National PR Coordinator and Deputy President of NSI State Expert at General Methodology, Analysis and Coordination of Statistical Surveys Directorate</p>
10:00-10:30	Feedback session to ONA3	<p>The peer review expert team: All</p> <p>ONA: Deputy Executive Director of Executive Environment Agency Director of Monitoring and Assessments of the Environment Directorate, Executive Environment Agency</p> <p>NSI: National PR Coordinator and Deputy President of NSI State Expert at General Methodology, Analysis and Coordination of Statistical Surveys Directorate</p>
10:30-10:45	Coffee break	
10:45-12:45	Clarifications, remaining or additional issues and focus areas	<p>The peer review expert team: All</p> <p>NSI: National PR Coordinator and Deputy President of NSI Director of Business Statistics Directorate Director of Multi-Domain Statistics and User Services Directorate Director of Information Systems and Infrastructure Directorate PR Communication Officer and Head of International Cooperation Department</p>

		<p>State Expert at General Methodology, Analysis and Coordination of Statistical Surveys Directorate Data protection officer (DPO)</p> <p>Other participants/Observers: Chief Expert at International Cooperation Department Senior Expert at International Cooperation Department Senior Expert at International Cooperation Department</p>
12:45-13:45	Lunch	
13:45-14:45	Peer review expert team discussion	
Day 6 – 4 April 2022 (via Zoom)		
9:00-11:00	Peer review expert team discussion	
11:00-12:00	Lunch	

12:00-13:15	<p>Meeting with the senior management of the NSI: conclusions and recommendations - PART 1</p>	<p>The peer review expert team: All</p> <p>NSI, ONAs, government officials: Advisor at the political cabinet to the Deputy Prime Minister for Good Governance President of NSI National PR Coordinator and Deputy President of NSI Deputy President of NSI Executive Director of Executive Environment Agency Deputy Executive Director of Executive Environment Agency Deputy Governor of NSSI Director General of the "Agriculture and Regional Policy" General Directorate, Ministry of Agriculture Head of Agrostatics Department, Agriculture and Regional Policy Directorate, Ministry of Agriculture State Expert at Agrostatics Department, Ministry of Agriculture Director of Analysis, Planning and Prognosis Directorate, National Social Security Institute State Expert at Expertise of Working Capacity and Accidents at Work Department, National Social Security Institute PR Communication Officer and Head of International Cooperation Department Head of Financial-Accounting Activities Department State Expert at General Methodology, Analysis and Coordination of Statistical Surveys Directorate</p> <p>Other participants/Observers: Chief Expert at International Cooperation Department Senior Expert at International Cooperation Department Senior Expert at International Cooperation Department Data protection officer (DPO)</p>
13:15-13:30	Coffee break	

13:30-14:30	Meeting with the senior management of the NSI: conclusions and recommendations - PART 2	<p>The peer review expert team: All</p> <p>NSI and government officials: Advisor at the political cabinet to the Deputy Prime Minister for Good Governance President of NSI National PR Coordinator and Deputy President of NSI Deputy President of NSI PR Communication Officer and Head of International Cooperation Department Head of Financial-Accounting Activities Department State Expert at General Methodology, Analysis and Coordination of Statistical Surveys Directorate</p> <p><u>Other participants/Observers:</u> Chief Expert at International Cooperation Department Senior Expert at International Cooperation Department Senior Expert at International Cooperation Department Data protection officer (DPO)</p>
14:30	END OF PEER REVIEW VISIT	

ANNEX B – LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

BNSI Management

Mr. Sergey Tsvetarsky, President of NSI;
Ms. Diana Yancheva, National PR Coordinator and Deputy President of NSI;
Mr. Bogdan Bogdanov, Deputy President of NSI;
Mr. Tsvetan Nanov, Secretary General of NSI

BNSI directors

Mr. Anastas Troianski, Director of Business Statistics Directorate;
Ms. Antoaneta Ilkova, Director of Multi-Domain Statistics and User Services Directorate;
Ms. Magdalena Kostova, Director of Demographic and Social Statistics Directorate;
Mr. Valentin Chavdarov, Director of General Methodology, Analysis and Coordination of Statistical Surveys Directorate;
Mr. Youriy Stamenov, Director of Information Systems and Infrastructure Directorate

Other BNSI experts

Ms. Aneta Fasulkova, Head of Financial-Accounting Activities Department;
Ms. Albena Dancheva, Head of Consumer Prices, Housing prices and PPP Department, Macroeconomic Statistics Directorate;
Ms. Daniela Simeonova, PR Communication Officer and Head of International Cooperation Department;
Ms. Desislava Mancheva, Head of Relations with Users and e-Services Department;
Ms. Evelin Jordanova, Head of Health and Justice Statistics Department;
Ms. Gergana Cheshmedjieva, Head of Environmental and Energy accounts Department, Macroeconomic Statistics Directorate;
Ms. Girgina Nikolova, Head of Accounts and Prices in Agriculture and Forestry Department, Macroeconomic Statistics Directorate;
Ms. Nevena Karabasheva, Acting Head of Human Resources Department;
Ms. Silviya Kavgadzhyska, Head of Statistics on foreign trade in goods Department;
Mr. Svilen Kateliev, Head of Education and Culture Statistics Department;
Mr. Todor Davidkov, Head of Labour Market Statistics Department;
State Expert at General Methodology, Analysis and Coordination of Statistical Surveys Directorate;
Data protection officer (DPO);
Chief Expert at Non-financial National and Regional Accounts Department, Macroeconomic Statistics Directorate;
Chief Expert at General Methodology, Analysis and Coordination of Statistical Surveys Directorate;
Chief Expert at Information Systems and Infrastructure Directorate;
Chief Expert at International Cooperation Department responsible for Media Relations;
Chief Accountant;
Chief Expert at International Cooperation Department;
Chief Legal Advisor Department Legal Activities

Junior Staff

Junior Expert at Statistics on Population and Housing fund Department, Demographic and Social Statistics Directorate;
Senior Expert at International Cooperation Department;
Chief Expert at Regional Statistics and Monitoring Indicators Department, Multi-Domain Statistics and User Services Directorate;
State Expert at Short-term Business Statistics and Transport Statistics Department, Business Statistics Directorate;

Chief Expert at Non-financial National and Regional Accounts Department, Macroeconomic Statistics Directorate;
Chief Expert at Education and Culture Statistics Department, Demographic and Social Statistics Directorate;
Senior Expert at International Cooperation Department;
Senior Expert at Information Systems and Application Software Department, Information Systems and Infrastructure Directorate

ONAs

Ms. Diana Atanasova, Head of Agrostistics Department, Agriculture and Regional Policy Directorate, Ministry of Agriculture;
State Expert at Agrostistics Department, Ministry of Agriculture;
Chief Expert at Agrostistics Department, Ministry of Agriculture;
Chief Expert at Expertise of Working Capacity and Accidents at Work Department, National Social Security Institute;
Mr. Dragomir Draganov, Director of Analysis, Planning and Prognosis Directorate, National Social Security Institute;
Actuary, Statistics, Actuarial Analysis and Prognosis Department at the Analysis, Planning and Prognosis Directorate, National Social Security Institute;
State Expert at Expertise of Working Capacity and Accidents at Work Department, National Social Security Institute;
Ms. Veselina Roshleva, Deputy Executive Director of Executive Environment Agency;
Ms. Madlena Stanimirova, Director of Monitoring and Assessments of the Environment Directorate, Executive Environment Agency;
Ms. Evgeniya Petkova, Head of Waste Monitoring Department, Executive Environment Agency

Officials

Ms. Rossitsa Karamfilova-Blagova, Executive Director of Executive Environment Agency;
Mr. Vesela Karaivanova-Nacheva, Deputy Governor of NSSI;
Mr. Nikolay Marinov, Director General of the Agriculture and Regional Policy General Directorate, Ministry of Agriculture;
Advisor at the Political Cabinet to the Deputy Prime Minister for Good Governance

Other Stakeholders

Data Providers

Chief Expert at Intrastat Directorate, National Revenue Agency;
Head of Strategic analyses and prognosis and development of reference infrastructure Department, Information systems and analytic activity, Directorate of National Customs Agency to the Ministry of Finance;
Head of Department in Budget and Financial Parameters Directorate, National Health Insurance Fund;
Representative of Electronic Information Processing Department, Civil Registration and Administrative Services General Directorate, Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works;
Chief Expert at Planning and Statistics Department, Coordination and Information-Analytical Activities Directorate, Ministry of Interior;
Head of Design and Development of information systems and components of information systems Sector at the Communication and Information Systems Directorate, Ministry of Interior;
Director of Analysis, Planning and Prognosis Directorate, National Social Security Institute;
Expert at the Policies for Strategic Development Department, Ministry of Education and Science;
Junior Expert at the Policies for Strategic Development Department, Ministry of Education and Science;
Director of Information Technologies and Spatial Data directorate; Geodesy, Cartography and Cadastre Agency;

Secretary General of the National Centre for Information and Documentation

Media

Director General of the Bulgarian Telegraph Agency;
Host of the "Referendum" Current Affairs Programme, Bulgarian National Television;
Journalist, Nova Broadcasting group;
Journalist, BTV Media Group;
Business Editor, 24 Hours Newspaper;
Business Editor, Dnevnik.bg

Business associations, federations, and trade unions

Executive Director of Bulgarian Industrial Capital Association;
Member of the Tax and Legal Committee; Confederation of Employers and Industrials in Bulgaria (via Zoom);
Deputy Chairman of the Bulgarian Industrial Association and Chief Financial Director;
Chief Legal Expert at the Legal Directorate, Bulgarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry;
Expert Analyst, Bulgarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry;
Economic Advisor, Trade Union Confederation "Podkrepa";
Deputy Director of the Institute of Social and Trade Union research, Confederation of Independent Trade Unions in Bulgaria;

Ministries and other public/private institutions

Director of Information Systems Department at the Central Coordination Unit Directorate (EU Funds Coordination), Council of Ministers;
Director of Statistics Directorate, Bulgarian National Bank;
Head of Macroeconomic Statistics Department at the Statistics Directorate, Bulgarian National Bank;
Director of Economic Policy Directorate, Ministry of Economy and Industry;
Senior Expert "Municipality Administration", National Association of Municipalities in the Republic of Bulgaria
Senior Research Fellow, Business Cycle, Public Finances, Economic Freedom, Competition, Poverty and Development Institute for Market Economics;

Scientific community

Professor at Economic Research Institute, Bulgarian Academy of Science;
Chair of the General Scientific Meetings, Institute for Population and Human Studies, Bulgarian Academy of Science;
Assoc. Prof. at the Department of Statistics and Econometrics, Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski";
Assoc. Prof. at the Applied Informatics and Statistics Faculty, University of National and World Economy;
Head of Statistics and Applied Mathematics Department, D. A. Tsenov Academy of Economics