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**Peer review on the implementation
of the
European Statistics Code of Practice**

Country visited: Latvia

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The review team visited the Latvian Central Statistical Bureau (CSB) on 7-9 March 2007 and met with CSB management, staff and stakeholders¹. The objective of the peer review was to assess the degree of compliance with principles 1-6 and 15 of the European Statistics Code of Practice.

The review team was impressed by the professionalism shown by CSB managers and staff. This was also shown in the respect for the organisation from users of statistics and the media. In practice, CSB is clearly seen to act independently and objectively in the collection, processing and publication of statistics.

The legal basis for the work of the CSB is set out in the Law on Statistics and the CSB Statute. These acts establish many of the important principles (impartiality, objectivity, mandate for data collection, statistical use of administrative data, statistical confidentiality).

However, some aspects of state administration laws in Latvia limit the formal independence of public agencies, including official statistics. As a result of this, the legal structure for official statistics is inconsistent with the principle of Professional Independence under the European Statistics Code of Practice. In particular, the requirement that statistical questionnaires must be agreed by the Cabinet of Ministers is not consistent with an independent statistical system². The review team had similar concerns about the requirement that the State Programme of Statistical Information must be agreed by the Cabinet of Ministers. Accordingly, the team has recommended that CSB, together with national legal services, should continue to examine the options available for the adoption of a legal mechanism which will more clearly demonstrate professional independence.

The statistics published by CSB are presented in a clear and accessible form, with a growing emphasis on publication and retrieval of statistics via the CSB website. There is a clear separation between policy statements and CSB's statistical releases. The website was upgraded in November 2006 and it includes details of the methodology (in English and Latvian) across the full range of statistics. However, large portions of the website are only available in Latvian. This is an issue in the context of international and EU comparison of statistics.

The development of electronic dissemination via the CSB website is the end-result of a strategic approach to the use of IT by a National Statistical Institute. CSB has implemented an Integrated Statistical Data Management System (ISDMS) comprising a data warehouse and statistical processing systems. The ISDMS is being used to process 72 surveys. The review team considers the ISDMS to be an example of good practice in the European Statistical System.

Compared with other National Statistical Institutes, CSB is a relatively small office, with 472 staff and 106 persons not on the regular staff (altogether 578 employees) at the end of 2006. The resources available to CSB have been improving, with a

¹ The full agenda is given at Annex A and the attendance list at Annex B.

² This is described in more detail under Principle 1.

significant increase in funding in 2007 (basic budget increasing from LVL 3.9m in 2006 to LVL 6.9m in 2007 and total budget from LVL 4.7m to LVL 8.5m)³. This will help CSB to address statistical and organisational development needs. However, the extent to which funding is based on external sources (such as EU transition facilities) may be a risk to the continuity of some statistical activities. The projected value of foreign financial assistance in 2007 is over LVL1.2m.

CSB has prepared a draft HR strategy which addresses the key issues in relation to retaining and building the statistical and IT skills base needed by a National Statistical Institute. In its meetings with CSB managers and staff, the review team found a positive and enthusiastic work environment, with a high percentage of senior women managers.

CSB has set out a work programme for implementation of a formal quality system between 2007 and 2009 and has appointed a quality manager. The development of formal documented procedures will further underpin existing good practices.

CSB has also prepared a draft three-year rolling strategy document, which will be subject to annual approval by the Minister for Economy. A quarterly reporting process will track the implementation of key performance indicators. This new strategy development process will provide a stronger mechanism for implementing strategic changes.

The review team encourages CSB's plans in the areas of quality management, HR, IT and overall strategy.

³ Approximate equivalent in Euro: basic budget increasing from € 5.5m in 2006 to € 9.8m in 2007 and total budget from € 6.7m to € 12.1m.

2. INTRODUCTION

With the adoption of the European Statistics Code of Practice, the Statistical Programme (SPC) committed itself to adhering to its principles. At its meeting on 25 May 2005, the SPC endorsed a stepwise monitoring procedure for the implementation of the Code over three years during which countries' self-assessments should be combined with elements of peer review, benchmarking and monitoring on the basis of the explanatory indicators added to each principle of the Code.

During December 2005 / January 2006 the National Statistical Institutes and Eurostat have completed their self-assessments, the results have been summarised by Eurostat in a report submitted to the Economic and Financial Committee in May 2006 which has been published on the Eurostat website.

As a next step towards implementation of the Code, the European Statistical System is organising peer reviews to complement the self-assessments starting with 2006. They are considered a vital element for the implementation of the Code of Practice given their capacity to encourage the sharing of best practice and to contribute to transparency in what is, essentially, a self-regulatory approach. This approach is designed to enhance accountability and to help building trust in the integrity of the European Statistical System, its processes and outputs.

The Code of Practice peer reviews follow a common methodology focusing on the institutional environment and dissemination part of the Code comprising the following principles: (1) Professional independence, (2) Mandate for data collection, (3) Adequacy of resources, (4) Quality commitment, (5) Statistical confidentiality, (6) Impartiality and Objectivity and (15) Accessibility and Clarity. In principle, the peer review is limited to the National Statistical Institute and its co-ordination role within a dispersed national statistical system. A short document provided by the National Statistical Institute which summarises key aspects of the functioning of the national statistical system is published together with this report.

During a three days visit on-site and on the basis of information material provided by the National Statistical Institute and Eurostat prior to the review, peer reviews yield a report assessing compliance with the Code of Practice at indicator level and by principle following a four point assessment scale. The report includes a refined set of improvement actions covering all principles of the Code which are being used to feed the monitoring process of the implementation of the Code in the European Statistical System.

While the peer reviewers will undertake to base their assessment to the extent possible on factual information, it is worth noting some of the limitations of the peer review process. For example, peer reviewers are dependent upon the resources made available to them (though experienced reviewers can be expected to identify where appropriate information is not forthcoming). In addition these reviews are conducted on a strategic, organisation-wide and system wide basis. Accordingly it is not straightforward to ascertain that certain practices or behaviours or systems operate in all statistical domains.

3. FINDINGS PER PRINCIPLE

Principle 1: Professional Independence

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

Overall assessment: The review team was satisfied that the practices and work culture of CSB are professionally independent. This was strongly confirmed throughout our meetings with CSB and with data providers, data users and the mass media. However, while professional independence is supported by the provisions of the Official Statistics Law and the CSB Statute, some aspects of the legal basis give cause for concern in relation to independence.

As a consequence of the State Administration Structure Law and the Administrative Procedure Law, since 2005 all questionnaires to be issued to businesses by CSB⁴ must be approved by the Cabinet of Ministers. This means that the statistical authority is formally not independent in relation to the production of statistics and this is a cause for concern. At the same time, the CSB did point out that there is a practical benefit in terms of enabling strong enforcement of the obligations on businesses to make statistical returns.

There are concerns also in relation to the annual State Programme of Statistical Information, which is subject to approval by the Cabinet of Ministers.

The review team considers it necessary to find a legal mechanism which will more clearly demonstrate the CSB's professional independence. An inter-ministerial working group has been examining this question. The team recommends that CSB, together with national legal services, continue to examine the options available for this.

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

Assessment: Largely met

Comments: Section 3(4) of the Official Statistics Law specifies that the methodology and outputs of official statistics shall be objective and independent of political processes and interest groups. Section 5 sets out the mandate of the Central Statistical Bureau (CSB). The functions, tasks and rights of CSB are further elaborated in the CSB Statute, including its functions in relation to implementing the State Programme of Statistical Information (Section 4.1), collection, processing and analysis of statistical information (Section 4.2) and publication and dissemination of aggregated statistical data (Section 4.3).

⁴ The State Administration Structure Law affects public agencies which issue mandatory notices to third parties (including requirements for the return of statistics).

As described in the overall assessment above, the requirement that statistical questionnaires must be approved by the Cabinet of Ministers is not consistent with the European Statistics Code of Practice. The process for approval of the State Programme of Statistical Information gives similar cause for concern. While these are important questions of principle, the team was satisfied that there has been no political or other external interference in the production of statistics.

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

Assessment: Fully met

Comments: The President of the CSB holds the same rank as the highest-ranking head of a public agency (about equivalent to Under-Secretary of State level). Appointment is for a 4-year renewable term and selection is by open competition based on professional selection criteria. In all the review team's discussions with staff, management and external stakeholders, the President of CSB was held in high regard.

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

Assessment: Fully met

Comments: The Statistical Law and the CSB Statute clearly underpin this principle. The review team was fully satisfied from its discussions that, in practice, the CSB acts independently in relation to methods, standards, procedures and all statistical dissemination matters.

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

Assessment: Partly met

Comments: The situation described under indicator 1.1 also means that, formally, the CSB is not legally independent in relation to statistical methods, standards and procedures. The review team supports efforts to find a legal solution which more clearly demonstrates the institutional independence of official statistics. While this is an important question, the team was fully satisfied that there have been no attempts to interfere with the statistical compilation process and that the CSB has sole responsibility for the content and timing of statistical releases. This was confirmed in discussions with junior staff.

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

Assessment: Fully met

Comments: The annual State Programme of Statistical Information sets out comprehensively the list of statistical activities of the CSB and of other Ministries and Agencies. It is approved by the Cabinet of Ministers. A summary report of progress, together with the CSB financial statement, is submitted each year to the Ministry of Economics. The CSB's new 3-year rolling strategy will in addition focus on medium-term performance indicators for new activities and for organisational capacity building. CSB confirmed that a quarterly reporting process will track the implementation of key performance indicators.

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

Assessment: Fully met

Comments: There is clear separation between statistical releases and political statements or policy interpretation of statistics. Representatives of users and the media confirmed this and CSB staff were well-briefed on the distinction. Statistical releases and announcements by the CSB clearly include the CSB logo. The team had the opportunity to attend a CSB press conference on GDP results on 9 March 2007, and see in practice how high-profile statistical releases are explained to the media.

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

Assessment: Fully met

Comments: While the review team did not learn of any serious cases of criticism or misuse of statistics, it was clear from the discussions with users and the media that CSB intervenes when necessary, to explain statistical interpretation. The review team suggested that a written policy within CSB should be prepared and made available to all staff.

Principle 2: Mandate for Data Collection

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

Overall assessment: The Official Statistics Law provides the CSB with a very clear mandate for the collection of data from businesses and households. It also provides

for the use of administrative data for statistical purposes (Sections 5(2)5, 9(1) and 17.2) and there has been significant progress in using administrative data sources. The legislation makes it obligatory for businesses and natural persons to submit information free of charge to CSB and to other institutions working with official statistics (Sections 10 and 17.1).

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

Assessment: Fully met

Comments: The Official Statistics Law provides the CSB with a very clear mandate for the collection of data from businesses and households (Sections 10 and 17.1). Data providers were well aware of the obligations to provide statistical returns.

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

Assessment: Fully met

Comments: The Official Statistics Law gives a clear mandate for statistical use of administrative data. However, it has not been possible to fully realise the potential of this mandate, as practical systems and procedures for the statistical use of administrative records needed to be put in place. Since 2003, the CSB has concluded bilateral agreements on the use of administrative records with numerous public institutions, including the State Revenue Service. This has improved the availability of records for statistical use. Better co-ordination of administrative records across public agencies would yield further benefits for statistics. Currently, a total of 95 administrative files are being used by CSB for statistical purposes. The draft 3-year strategy document also includes targets relating to the use of administrative data to lessen the response burden on businesses.

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

Assessment: Fully met

Comments: Under law, businesses and natural persons are obliged to provide information (Section 10 of Official Statistics Law). The Census of Population is also obligatory. There is a legal enforcement mechanism for non-response (Sections 21 and 22). In a small number of cases, sanctions have been imposed on businesses for non-response.

Principle 3: Adequacy of Resources

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

Overall assessment: While there are some difficulties, notably in relation to staff turnover, the review team found a generally positive situation in relation to financial, human and IT resources.

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

Assessment: Largely met

Comments: Funding for CSB has increased significantly in 2007. The basic budget of CSB has been increased from LVL 3.9m in 2006 to LVL 6.9m in 2007; and the total budget from LVL 4.7m to LVL 8.5m.⁵ This will help CSB to implement its new 3-year rolling strategy, which is subject to Ministerial approval. In the longer term, the extent to which some funds come from EU transition and other facilities may be a risk to the continuity of some statistical activities.

Compared with other National Statistical Institutes, CSB is a relatively small office, with 472 staff and 106 persons not on the regular staff (altogether 578 employees) at the end of 2006. High staff turnover has been a problem and, at the time of this review, there were 21 vacancies published on the CSB website.

The office has prepared a draft HR strategy dealing with some key issues. While CSB previously found it difficult to compete with other employers, recent improvements in salary levels and conditions of employment have made it more competitive when compared with other public institutions. Despite the high turnover of younger staff, it seems likely that these improvements will help to make careers in CSB more attractive. However, CSB also depends on the education system to provide graduates with the necessary statistical skills. To source the necessary future skills, the review team recommends that the CSB work with the educational system to build awareness and training for careers in statistics.

CSB has also implemented well-structured IT systems for statistical processing, involving a data warehouse and standardisation of statistical processing software. There are opportunities for CSB to realise further benefits in future from this investment in IT.

⁵ Approximate equivalent in Euro: basic budget increasing from € 5.5m in 2006 to € 9.8m in 2007 and total budget from € 7m to € 12.1m.

Indicator 3.2: The scope, detail and cost of European Statistics are commensurate with needs.

For European level reply

Indicator 3.3: Procedures exist to assess and justify demands for new European Statistics against their cost.

For European level reply

Indicator 3.4: Procedures exist to assess the continuing need for all European Statistics, to see if any can be discontinued or curtailed to free up resources.

For European level reply

Principle 4: Quality commitment

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

Overall assessment: While a formal certified system for quality management is not in place, the CSB has committed resources to introducing a TQM system for statistics. This is being supported by the EU transition facility, under a twinning arrangement with the German statistical service. CSB has set out a work programme for implementation of a quality system between 2007 and 2009. While the timetable appears ambitious, it is realistic. A quality management structure, including an assigned quality manager, has been put in place to manage the transition. The perception of users and the media is that the quality of CSB statistical services is of a high standard.

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

Assessment: Partly met

Comments: While CSB does not yet have a systematic framework for monitoring quality, it is clear that the ESS quality components are taken into account in the production of statistics. Quality reports for statistical products are regularly prepared in the frameworks required by EU regulations on statistics.

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

Assessment: Partly met

Comments: While formal processes are not in place, there was good evidence from discussions with managers and junior staff that quality is monitored at all stages in the statistical process. This was also confirmed by the academic users of statistics.

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

Assessment: Partly met

Comments: While CSB managers show a good awareness of statistical quality considerations and the trade-offs between different criteria, this is not yet supported by formal processes.

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

Assessment: Partly met

Comments: While a formal certified system for quality management is not in place, the CSB has committed resources to introducing a TQM system for statistics. A quality management structure, including an assigned quality manager, has been put in place. CSB plans to implement the new quality system between 2007 and 2009. This project will address the gap in documentation relating to quality management.

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

Assessment: Partly met

Comments: While there was generally positive feedback from users about the quality of CSB statistical outputs, formal processes to review outputs are not in place. There are consultations with experts, mainly on an ad-hoc basis, in relation to the most important outputs.

Principle 5: Statistical confidentiality

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

Overall assessment: CSB has taken all the necessary administrative, technical and organisational steps to ensure the confidentiality of statistical data. Statistical confidentiality is guaranteed by law. Respect for statistical confidentiality is a core value of CSB which is demonstrated by staff at all levels, and is recognised by government institutions, data providers and data users.

Indicator 5.1 Statistical confidentiality is guaranteed in law.

Assessment: Fully met

Comments: Statistical confidentiality is guaranteed in the Official Statistics Law (Articles 3 (2), 18, 20 (2), 22).

Indicator 5.2 Statistical authority staff signs legal confidentiality commitments on appointment.

Assessment: Fully met

Comments: All CSB staff sign a confidentiality declaration on appointment. This declaration is counter-signed by the Head of Unit.

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

Assessment: Fully met

Comments: Under Section 22 of the Official Statistics Law, any failure by employees of State or local government institutions working with official statistics, or by data collectors, to observe requirements relating to statistical confidentiality is an offence. It was confirmed that the legislative acts provide for penalties, which can be substantial.

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

Assessment: Fully met

Comments: Information about the protection of confidentiality in the production and dissemination processes is made available to staff and to users of anonymised microdata. CSB is planning to improve its internal documentation and to provide more information about statistical confidentiality on its website. Survey respondents are informed that the data they provide will be treated as confidential.

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

Assessment: Fully met

Comments: Access to individual data is restricted so that only those staff who need it for the purposes of their job are granted access. There are a range of IT network security measures and other technical controls to minimise the possibility of unauthorised access.

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

Assessment: Fully met

Comments: Anonymised microdata from some household surveys have been provided on CD for research purposes. The number of requests for use of microdata for research purposes is small (10 per year approximately). The whole process is under the supervision of the confidentiality committee and there are written rules concerning the use of microdata. Data on businesses are not provided.

Principle 6: Impartiality and objectivity.

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

Overall assessment: The procedures implemented by CSB are in line with good practices and recognised as such by users. The legislative framework includes positive statements on this principle but the legislative issues described under Principle 1 (approval of questionnaires and the statistical programme at political level) are a weak point.

The Official Statistics Law does state that “official statistics shall be objective” (Section 3(2)) and that “the methodology to be used and the information prepared for official statistics shall be objective and independent of political processes and interest groups” (Section 3(4)). It is difficult to reconcile these positive statements with the legislative procedures described under Principle 1.

In the context of European statistics and international comparisons, more information needs to be made available in English.

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

Assessment: Fully met

Comments: The review team's interviews with CSB management, staff and external stakeholders all confirmed the objectivity of official statistics. Users are confident that statistics are compiled on an objective basis determined by statistical considerations only.

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

Assessment: Largely met

Comments: Section 3(3) of the Official Statistics Law states that the methods and procedures for acquiring and processing statistical data shall be scientifically based. However, in line with indicator 1.1, the process for Cabinet approval of questionnaires is a weak point in relation to statistical sources and techniques. Users are confident that choices of sources and statistical techniques are informed by statistical considerations only.

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

Assessment: Fully met

Comments: No serious errors have occurred over the past few years. Users were aware of some corrections to the explanatory text in releases, which were handled professionally by CSB. Staff show a good awareness of how they would deal with correcting and publicising possible errors but there are no written procedures for this eventuality. The development (already under way) of a written procedure for dealing with errors and of a written revisions policy would strengthen existing good practice in this area.

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

Assessment: Largely met

Comments: Information on methods and procedures is available in structured form on the CSB website for all surveys. Some documentation in English is not available. A number of users expressed their need for more precise information. The need for more information on methods and procedures was also mentioned in the qualitative feedback given by respondents to CSB's customer satisfaction survey, at the start of 2007.

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

Assessment: Fully met

Comments: The release calendar is published annually for the year ahead. The CSB website also includes a release calendar for the current month and the next 10 days, on the homepage. Procedures for updates are established. Users confirmed their awareness of the release calendar. The standard release time is 13:00.

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

Assessment: Fully met

Comments: All users have equal access to statistical releases at the same time. There is no privileged access and this policy appears to be known and generally accepted. No leaks are known to have occurred in recent years.

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

Assessment: Fully met

Comments: The approach taken by CSB ensures objectivity in the content of statistical releases and statements made in Press Conferences. The review team had an opportunity to see this in practice, at the press conference on GDP results on 9 March 2007. Users strongly confirmed that CSB releases and statements are objective and non-partisan.

Principle 15: Accessibility and clarity

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

Overall assessment: In general, the accessibility and clarity of statistics published by CSB is of a high standard, with statistical releases available both in printed form and on the web. The design of major publications, such as the Statistical Yearbook of Latvia (also available on interactive CD), is of a high standard.

Comprehensive information is published via the CSB website, including: statistical releases; menu-driven systems for extracting tables from statistical databases; and information on the methodology of each survey. Users were generally very happy with the clarity and accessibility of statistics published by CSB, although some users had difficulties finding information. This was confirmed by the customer satisfaction survey conducted at the start of 2007 (85% found information easy to obtain, 11% had difficulties). More information on the usage of the website and procedures to follow up on user comments would be helpful in planning the future development of the site.

While a lot of information on the CSB website is available in English, many important parts of the site are provided in Latvian only. In the context of European and international comparisons, this is an issue which needs to be addressed.

From the review team's meetings, it appears that CSB is working well with the users of statistics. A more formal dialogue with users would be mutually beneficial and participation in the Latvian Statistical Association provides an opportunity to build greater links between the users and producers of statistics; and to promote awareness of official statistics.

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

Assessment: Largely met

Comments: CSB releases and publications are of a high standard and the website presents a wide range of statistical information, including releases, interactive tables and methodological information. Further development of the website, in line with the W3C Web Content Accessibility Guidelines, would make statistics more accessible for persons with a disability.

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

Assessment: Largely met

Comments: While there was generally positive feedback from users about the CSB website, which was upgraded in November 2006 some users said they have difficulties navigating the site and finding the specific information they want. The CSB may be able to help users with transitional difficulties in using the features of the new site. The website provides comprehensive information in Latvian but not all of this is translated into English. Major publications, such as the Statistical Yearbook of Latvia, continue to be available in hardcopy. The Yearbook is also published in interactive CD format, as are the data from the CSB online databases.

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

Assessment: Fully met

Comments: Users confirmed that many of their requirements for additional tables or more detailed statistics were met by CSB. The metadata pages on the CSB website give the name of the CSB contact person for each statistical series and draw attention to the availability of tailor-made data requests. A more active approach to publicising what additional analysis is available would be helpful to users and promote greater use of statistical data.

Indicator 15.4: Access to microdata can be allowed for research purposes. This access is subject to strict protocols.

Assessment: Fully met

Comments: As described under Indicator 5.6, CSB has given access to microdata for statistical research purposes in a small number of cases (about 10 per year) for household survey data. The process for granting research access to microdata is supervised by the confidentiality committee and is subject to strict protocols. However, the availability of microdata for statistical research and the protocols for its use need to be publicised more clearly and included on the CSB website.

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

Assessment: Largely met

Comments: The metadata published on the CSB website includes information on sources, measurement units, definitions, methodology, periodicity, dissemination methods and timetables, availability of tailor made data requests, and the name of the CSB contact person.

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

Assessment: Largely met

Comments: The majority of users expressed satisfaction with the methodological information available. Methodology and definitions for most statistical series are made available on the CSB website. However, some more expert users would like to see more detailed information on particular points. The information provided by CSB does not yet include some elements of the ESS quality criteria for official statistics.

4. CO-ORDINATION ROLE OF THE NATIONAL STATISTICAL INSTITUTE

The CSB is at the centre of the system for official statistics in Latvia. It is the main producer and co-ordinator of official statistics. Other institutions with a significant role in the production of official statistics include the Ministry of Finance; the Bank of Latvia; the Ministries of the Interior, Health, Welfare and Culture; the Employment State Agency; the Citizenship and Migration Board; the Latvian Environment, Geology and Meteorology Agency; and the Health Statistics and Medical Technologies State Agency.

The Official Statistics Law sets out the overall legal framework for the collection and production of official statistics by these bodies. Section 4 of the law specifically mentions the Central Statistical Bureau and the Bank of Latvia; and refers to “other State or local government institutions dealing with separate official statistics matters”.

The obligations arising under the Official Statistics Law, for example relating to protection of statistical confidentiality, apply to all of these institutions.

The central role of the CSB in the national statistical system is set out in more detail in other sections of the law. Section 5 refers, *inter alia*, to CSB's functions in relation to the "implementation of a unified State policy in the field of management, compilation, analysis and publication of statistical information"; "harmonisation of the statistical indicators to be included in State registers and other information systems"; and "co-ordination of the activities of State and local government institutions regarding matters of statistics". Section 7 provides for the co-ordination of classifications. Section 9 gives CSB a supervisory role over data collection instruments and the office keeps an annual register of data collection surveys and questionnaires.

The State Programme of Statistical Information is prepared each year by CSB, for approval by the Cabinet of Ministers. The draft programme is circulated by the CSB to the Ministries and other bodies involved in official statistics, before finalisation. In total, about 60 other institutions are consulted by CSB when preparing the annual programme.

The Official Statistics Law also gives a clear mandate for statistical use of administrative data. Since 2003, the practical implementation of this mandate has been improved and the CSB has concluded bilateral agreements on the use of administrative records with numerous public institutions, including the State Revenue Service. The CSB's draft 3-year strategy document includes targets to further improve the statistical use of administrative records, in co-operation with other institutions.

5. GOOD PRACTICES TO BE HIGHLIGHTED

The ISDMS (Integrated Statistical Data Management System) is an example of a modern, well-structured IT system for statistical processing. The system involves a data warehouse and standardised statistical processing software, which is being used by CSB in 72 surveys. There are opportunities for CSB to realise further benefits in future from this strategic investment in IT and the review team considers the ISDMS to be an example of good practice in the European Statistical System.

CSB's draft HR strategy addresses the key issues in relation to retaining and building the statistical and IT skills base needed by a National Statistical Institute. These professional skills will be vital in implementing the improvement actions set out in chapter 7 of this report. The preparation of a comprehensive HR strategy is an example of good practice by CSB in addressing these issues.

In the discussion of accessibility and clarity, the review team found evidence of good linkages and communications between CSB, academia and the Latvian Statistical Association. This makes a positive contribution to user dialogue and can potentially assist in providing the skills base need by CSO into the future (see recommendations below).

6. RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE PEER REVIEW TEAM

The Peer Review Team endorses the list of improvement actions set out in chapter 7 of this report. In addition, the team makes the following two recommendations:

1. The requirement that statistical questionnaires must be agreed by the Cabinet of Ministers is not consistent with the principle of Professional Independence. The review team recommends that CSB, together with national legal services, should continue to examine the options available for the adoption of a legal mechanism which will more clearly demonstrate professional independence.
2. To source the necessary future skills needed by a National Statistical Institute, the review team recommends that CSB work with the educational system to build awareness and training for careers in statistics. To this purpose, the continued building of links with the Latvian Statistical Association will also be helpful.

7. LIST OF IMPROVEMENT ACTIONS BY PRINCIPLE OF THE CODE

Principle 1: Professional Independence

Improvement actions

Timetable

CSB, together with national legal services, should examine the options available and propose a legal mechanism which more clearly demonstrate the CSB's professional independence. 2007-2008

Principle 2: Mandate for Data Collection

Improvement actions

Timetable

CSB to prepare a report for the Minister of Economics, describing practical problems and proposing solutions in relation to the use of administrative registers. 2007

Principle 3: Adequacy of Resources

Improvement actions

Timetable

Complete the draft CSB Human Resource (HR) and Training and Development Strategy. 2007

Implement the new HR strategy with new approaches to staff selection, induction, professional training and career development. 2007-2009

Implement the Balanced Scorecard to align resource utilisation with the needs of the CSB. 2007-2009

Work with higher education establishments to put in place a training programme and to promote career opportunities in official statistics. Ongoing

Continue to build active links with the Latvian Statistical Association, to promote awareness of the CSB among key stakeholders and potential employees. Ongoing

Principle 4: Quality commitment

Improvement actions

Timetable

Identify and document statistical and organizational processes in accordance with TQM standards. 2007-2009

Work out strategic aims for quality management in respect of finances, clients, internal processes and human resources. 2007-2009

Document CSB's quality guidelines and make them known to the public. 2007

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|--|------------------|
| Principle 4: Quality commitment | |
| Improvement actions | Timetable |
| Set up a system to inform staff about quality questions. | 2007 |
| Set up an information system for the documentation of quality. | 2008 |
| Set up a questionnaire testing system (laboratory) involving potential respondents and experts. | 2007 |
| | |
| Principle 5: Statistical Confidentiality | |
| Improvement actions | Timetable |
| Document confidentiality principles for aggregated data. | 2007 |
| Draft the official order on access and action rights of CSB employees in relation to confidential data. | 2007 |
| Draft a written data security policy for the CSB. | 2007 |
| Draft the anonymization criteria and user protocols for the statistical use of anonymised microdata and make them known to data users. | 2007 |
| | |
| Principle 6: Impartiality and objectivity | |
| Improvement actions | Timetable |
| Prepare a data revision manual. | 2007-2008 |
| Provide comprehensive information on data collection methods and procedures applied in statistics. | 2007-2009 |
| Prepare and make public the plan for updating of external statistical databases. | 2007-2009 |
| | |
| Principle 7: Sound Methodology | |
| Improvement actions | Timetable |
| Organize courses in statistical theory. | Ongoing |
| Improve the circulation to other staff in CSB of information obtained in international workshops and working groups. | Ongoing |
| Improve the methodological descriptions of surveys and the documentation of procedures. | 2007-2009 |
| Provide an enlarged quality report, also including detailed descriptions of survey methodology. | 2007-2009 |

Principle 8: Appropriate Statistical Procedures
Improvement actions

Timetable

Improve the concordance of definitions and concepts in collaboration with institutions responsible for administrative registers. 2007-2009

Work out a list of indicators in administrative data sources to be used for statistical purposes and a conformity description of the statistical indicators. 2007

Establish a telephone interviews centre. 2007

Principle 9: Non-Excessive burden on respondents
Improvement actions

Timetable

Continuously promote the use of e-reporting systems. Ongoing

Investigate and measure survey response burdens. 2007-2009

Improve sample selection methods, with particular emphasis on small and medium size enterprises (SMEs). Ongoing

Review the use of available administrative data sources, with a view to improving the quality of statistical indicators and reducing the burden on respondents. 2007-2009

Increase the statistical use of administrative data sources (from the State Revenue Service, State Social Insurance Agency and other institutions). 2007-2009

Make greater use of mathematical methods for data imputation. 2007-2009

Principle 10: Cost Effectiveness
Improvement actions

Timetable

Improve the annual evaluation of the work performance of civil servants and employees, using a competency-based approach. 2007-2009 (*See note.*)

(Note: This depends on national legislation that will guide this process; first draft should be ready by autumn 2007.)

Train and enable statisticians to extract summaries and analysis from the ISDMS, with programming work done by IT specialists (to use the system to its full potential). Ongoing

Improve the functionality and utilisation of the e-reporting system. 2007

In line with draft 3-year strategy (and actions under Principle 9) aim to exclude from statistical questionnaires information that is available in state registers. Ongoing

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|---|------------------|
| Principle 10: Cost Effectiveness | |
| Improvement actions | Timetable |
| | |
| Principle 11: Relevance | |
| Improvement actions | Timetable |
| Keep data users informed about possibilities to obtain statistical information, by extending information in the homepage, organizing workshops for data users, etc. | 2007 |
| Develop greater co-operation with data users informing them about the principles of calculation of indicators, methodology and data collection methods. | 2007 |
| | |
| Principle 12: Accuracy and Reliability | |
| Improvement actions | Timetable |
| Improve the instructions for respondents on filling out statistical questionnaires and the procedures for verification of data reliability. | 2007 |
| Document a methodology of accuracy assessment (supported by relevant training and staff participation). | 2007 |
| Assess the accuracy of each survey. | 2008 |
| Alter data collection/storage methods where necessary, so that all information necessary for calculating accuracy indicators is recorded. | 2009 |
| Integrate accuracy assessment for each survey indicator into the data processing and quality reporting systems. | 2010 |
| | |
| Principle 13: Timeliness and Punctuality | |
| Improvement actions | Timetable |
| Improve communication with the respective data users' groups and explain principles and methodology of calculating indicators and internationally-defined concepts and terminology. | Ongoing |
| Investigate possibilities for faster publication timetables, including the publication of preliminary estimates. | Ongoing |
| | |
| Principle 14: Coherence and Comparability | |
| Improvement actions | Timetable |
| Continue to examine reasons for data discrepancies in indicators that are obtained from different surveys or administrative data sources. | Ongoing |
| Investigate possibilities of improving administrative data sources. | Ongoing |

Principle 14: Coherence and Comparability

Improvement actions

Timetable

Deepen the analysis of Latvian statistical data by comparing them with corresponding data of other countries (e.g. mirror statistics). From 2007

Principle 15: Accessibility and clarity

Improvement actions

Timetable

Ensure the full availability of all indicators included in the National Programme of Statistical Information, in the CSB internet databases. 2007-2009

Prepare and make publicly available information on data quality (in line with the steps set out under Principle 4). 2007-2009

Provide the public with information on the availability and protocols for use of anonymised microdata for statistical research purposes. 2007-2009

Organize regular workshops and conferences for data users and mass media. Ongoing

8. ANNEX A: PROGRAMME OF THE VISIT

PEER REVIEW PROGRAMME

Riga, Latvia, 7-9 March, 2007

Wednesday, 7 March

DISCUSSION WITH INTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS

- 09:15 – 09:30** Welcome and introduction of programme, organisational matters
09:30 – 10:00 Presentation of CSB draft strategy
- 10:00 – 11:30** Meeting with management and senior staff - Principles 1, 2, 3
Principle 1: Professional Independence
Principle 2: Mandate for Data Collection
Principle 3: Adequacy of Resources
- 11:30 – 12:00** Meeting with management and senior staff - Principle 5
Principle 5: Statistical Confidentiality
- 12:00 – 12:30** Meeting with management and senior staff - Principles 6, 15
Principle 6: Impartiality and Objectivity
Principle 15: Accessibility and Clarity
- 12:30 – 14:00* **Lunch break**
- 14:00 – 15:00** Interview with DG and Quality manager, Principle 4
Principle 4: Quality Commitment
- 15:00 – 16:00** Meeting with junior staff, principles 1-6, 15
- 16:00 – 17:00** Short presentations on:
Results of Survey on the Use of Official Statistics
CSB home page (LV part)

Thursday, 8 March DISCUSSION WITH EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS

09:00 – 10:00 **Meeting with other national data producers and main users - 1**
(Ministries, National Central Bank etc.)

10:00 – 11:00 **Meeting with other national data producers and main users – 2**
(Ministries, other institutions)

11:00 – 12:00 **Meeting with other national data producers and main users – 3**
(Representatives from university and other academic institutions)

12:00 – 14:00 *Lunch break*

14:00 – 15:15 **Meeting with media**

15:15 – 16:30 **Meeting with representatives of respondents**

17:00 - 22:00 Drafting of report

Friday, 9 March CONCLUSIONS

08:30 - 10:00 Finalization of draft report

10:00 – 12:15 **Meeting with CSB management to discuss main findings of draft peer review report and to review list of improvement actions for all principles**

12:15 – 13:00 *Coffee break*

13:00 – 14:30 **Press release on GDP 2006 results**

9. ANNEX B: LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

CSB

Mrs. Aija Žīgure, President
Mr. Kaspars Misāns, Vice President
Ms. Jolanta Supe, Head of Statistical Methodology and Organisation Division
Ms. Ārija Ņukša, Deputy Head of Statistical Methodology and Organisation Division
Mrs. Maranda Behmane, Director of Social Statistics Department
Mrs. Ilze Skujeniece, Director of Business Statistics Department
Mrs. Dace Tomase, Director of Macroeconomic Statistics Department
Mrs. Ilzīte Gramberga, Director of Agricultural and Environmental Statistics Department
Mrs. Inga Kunstvere, Director of Price Statistics Department
Mr. Norberts Tālers, Director of IT Department
Mr. Uldis Ainārs, Director of Information, Publishing and Printing Department
Mr. Mārtiņš Liberts, Head of Mathematical Support Division
Mr. Madars Deaks, Head of Legal Division
Ms. Liene Āboliņa, Senior Officer of Household Budget Statistics Section
Ms. Andra Lazdiņa, Deputy Head of Environment and Energy Statistics Section
Ms. Natalja Zvonkova, Senior Officer of Trade and Services Statistics Section
Mrs. Alla Vanaga, Deputy Head of National Accounts Section
Ms. Vita Ķibilde, Senior Officer of Consumer Price Indices Section
Ms. Ieva Upeniece, Senior Officer of EU Affairs Coordination Division
Mr. Pāvels Onufrijevs, Head of IT Technological Section
Ms. Sanda Roze, Senior Officer of Information Centre

National data producers and main users – Ministries and national institutions

Mrs. Ligita Agleniece, State Treasury
Mrs. Ilze Meldere, State Treasury
Mr. Jānis Malzubris, Ministry of Finance
Mrs. Gunta Pinķe, Ministry of Economy
Mr. Agris Caune, Bank of Latvia
Mrs. Lija Strašuna, Hansabanka

Mr. Jānis Misiņš, Health Statistics and Medical Technologies State Agency
Mrs. Maruta Grīnberga, Ministry of Agriculture
Mrs. Aija Budreiko, Ministry of Agriculture
Mrs. Iveta Ozoliņa, Ministry of Agriculture
Mr. Ralfs Spāde, State Regional Development Agency
Mr. Raivis Bremšmits, Ministry of Regional Development and Local Government
Mrs. Inta Rozenšteine, Ministry of Transport

National data producers and main users

- Universities and academic institutions

Mr. Edvīns Vanags, Latvian Statistical Institute

Mrs. Biruta Sloka, University of Latvia

Mrs. Valda Bratka, Latvian State Institute of Agrarian Economics

Mr. Armands Vēveris, Latvian State Institute of Agrarian Economics

Mr. Ģirts Briģis, Rīgas Stradiņš University

- News media

Mrs. Anete Skurbe, Baltic News Service (BNS)

Mrs. Velta Dzene, Newspaper "Dienas Bizness"

Mr. Juris Paiders, Newspaper "Neatkarīgā Rīta Avīze"

Mrs. Lidiya Dārziņa, Newspaper "Komersanta Vēstnesis"

Mrs. Marina Kirtovskaja, Russian Newspaper "Business un Baltija"

- Respondents and business organisations

Mrs. Skaidrīte Ruskule, "Latvijas Finieris"

Mrs. Ņina Molčanova, "Rīgas piena kombināts"

Mr. Henriks Danusēvičs, Latvian Trade Association