

PEER REVIEWERS' RECOMMENDATIONS AND *STATISTICS BELGIUM'S* IMPROVEMENT ACTIONS IN RESPONSE TO THE RECOMMENDATIONS

Peer reviewer's recommendations and improvement actions in response to the recommendations

Developing the institutional standing and capacity of Statistics Belgium

- 1. The Director General of Statistics Belgium should be enabled to comment publicly on budget issues related to the statistical activities of Statistics Belgium. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principles 1 and 3)***

Current situation:

The Director General of Statistics Belgium has, up to now, never commented publicly on the budget of Statistics Belgium.

Improvement action 1 *Implementation of the revision of regulation 223/2009*

Statistics Belgium will communicate to the relevant authorities that the final peer review on Statistics Belgium recommends enabling the Director General of Statistics Belgium to comment publicly on budget issues related to the statistical activities of Statistics Belgium, and that, with the revision of the European statistical law in mind, Statistics Belgium proposes to launch a dialogue striving to prepare a statement referencing to this principle as part of the Commitment on Confidence in Statistics.

Timeline:

Second half of 2015: submission of the proposal to relevant authorities.

Q1 2016 will be proposed as start of the dialogue

2. *The staffing profile in Statistics Belgium should be adjusted to meet in a more effective manner the needs of a modern national statistical institute by increasing the proportion of highly skilled managerial and professional staff in the overall workforce. (European statistics Code of Practice, indicators 3.1 and 7.5)*

Current situation:

Even if the proportion of highly skilled staff has increased in recent years, it is still largely under the average in the ESS.

Improvement action 2 *Increase the proportion of highly skilled staff*

Each year, when the staffing procedure of the Federal Public Service Economy (FPS Economy) is discussed and decided upon, Statistics Belgium will formulate its proposal in order to increase, in a budgetary neutral manner, the proportion of highly skilled managerial and professional staff in the overall workforce.

Timeline:

Yearly from 2015 onwards

3. *The imminent retirement of a significant number of older, and lower skilled staff, in Statistics Belgium should be used as an opportunity to increase the absolute number of more highly skilled staff in a budgetary neutral manner. (European statistics Code of Practice, indicators 3.1 and 7.5).*

Current situation:

The absolute number of highly skilled staff is insufficient to fulfil all tasks.

Improvement action 3 *Increase the absolute number of highly skilled staff*

Each year, when the staffing procedure of the FPS Economy is discussed and decided upon, Statistics Belgium will formulate its proposal in order to increase, in a budgetary neutral manner, the absolute number of more highly skilled staff.

Timeline:

Yearly from 2015 onwards

4. *Statistics Belgium should prepare and publish an annual statistical work programme and also issue periodic reports on progress made. (European statistics Code of Practice, indicator 1.5).*

Current situation:

Although a statistical programme for the entire Belgian statistical system is published and Statistics Belgium has its own internal planning system, Statistics Belgium does not publish a specific work programme or progress reports.

Improvement action 4 *Publish a statistical work programme and progress reports*

Statistics Belgium will prepare and publish an annual statistical work programme and a yearly progress report.

Timeline:

Yearly from Q4 2016 onwards: annual statistical work programme for the following year. Proof Of Concept during the first year.

Yearly from 2017 onwards: yearly progress reports. Proof Of Concept during the first year.

5. *The position of Statistics Belgium should be strengthened so that there is no question mark, perceived or otherwise, over its professional independence. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principle 1)*

Current situation:

There is no need to modify the current position of Statistics Belgium as a directorate-general of the FPS Economy.

Improvement action 5 *Divergent view*

Statistics Belgium has a divergent view on this recommendation and therefore no improvement action is foreseen.

Timeline:

N.A.

6. *The Director General of Statistics Belgium should be explicitly assigned, in respect of the agency's statistical outputs, sole responsibility for deciding on the statistical methods, standards and procedures, and on the timing and content of statistical releases. (European statistics Code of Practice, indicator 1.4).*

Current situation:

The Director General of Statistics Belgium has in practice full responsibility.

Improvement action 6 *Divergent view*

Statistics Belgium has a divergent view on this recommendation and therefore no improvement action is foreseen.

Timeline:

N.A.

7. *Statistics Belgium should optimise its logo and website so as to emphasise in a public manner its professional independence. (European statistics, indicator 1.6 and Principle 1).*

Current situation:

Press releases are presented under the logo of the FPS Economy with textual reference to Statistics Belgium. Similarly, the website of Statistics Belgium is part of and interrogated via a website where the FPS Economy logo dominates.

Improvement action 7 *Optimise logo and website*

Within the upcoming reform of the website of the FPS Economy, Statistics Belgium will obtain a specific sub-site stating in full its professional independence.

Timeline:

Q4 2017, estimated to be implemented by Q4 2018

Improving statistical quality within Statistics Belgium and its service to users

8. Statistics Belgium should build on its existing work in relation to quality indicators and develop a formal quality management system, including quality guidelines and supporting frameworks, to systematically review and report on its statistical processes and outputs. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principle 4)

Current situation:

A standard set of quality indicators covering all quality dimensions has been developed, based on data gathered from statisticians. The indicators have been evaluated by the Quality Management Unit in respect of about one hundred products as part of two pilot exercises. On the other hand, no standard quality reports or self-assessment tools have been designed so far to enable the systematic use of the indicators.

Improvement action 8 *Set up a quality management system*

Develop and implement a formal quality management system.

Timeline:

Q1 2016: Unify planning, quality and monitoring initiatives into a common broader action

2017 - 2019: Develop and implement a formal quality management system

Milestones:

- Q4 2016: Proof Of Concept standardised description of input, process and output of certain key statistics
- From Q2 2017 onwards: Description of input, process and output applied to other statistics
- Q4 2017: Quality standards or quality objectives for output in place
- Q4 2018: Guidelines on how to monitor processes ready
- From Q1 2018 onwards: Review of key statistics in accordance with the procedures that were developed
- Q4 2019: Quality management system fully in place

9. Statistics Belgium should give priority to strengthening its Methodology Unit as a key corporate resource in ensuring the soundness of its methodology and the cost-effectiveness of its statistical processes. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principles 7, 8 and 9)

Current situation:

Like most units in Statistics Belgium, the methodology unit is understaffed.

Improvement actions 9.1 to 9.3: *Find additional methodological resources within or outside of Statistics Belgium*

9.1: The potential of methodological resources within the organisation will be activated through reallocation of tasks.

9.2: Each year, when the staffing procedure of the FPS Economy is discussed and decided upon, Statistics Belgium will formulate its proposal in order to increase the absolute number of more highly skilled staff (e. g. methodologists) in a budgetary neutral manner.

9.3: Statistics Belgium will increasingly cooperate with the regional statistical offices and academia on methodological issues.

Timeline:

9.1: From Q1 2016 onwards

9.2: Yearly from 2016 onwards

9.3: From Q1 2017 onwards, partially depending on the activities of the Interfederal Statistical Institute.

10. Statistics Belgium should build on its existing approach and put in place a systematic programme for reviewing and developing all its statistical outputs and processes. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principles 7, 8 and 9)

Current situation:

Even if Statistics Belgium started an ambitious programme of reviewing outputs and processes, this is not sufficiently focussed.

Improvement action 10 *Give focus to output and process review*

Statistics Belgium will prioritise the outputs and processes to be reviewed and developed within its strategic objectives and the limits of its resources. An evaluation procedure will be put in place. The prioritised outputs and processes will then be reviewed accordingly.

Timeline:

Q4 2017: evaluation procedure in place

from Q1 2018 onwards: review prioritised outputs and processes

11. Statistics Belgium should establish procedures to consult regularly and raise statistical awareness among users and potential users of official statistics. (European statistics Code of Practice, indicators 11.1 and 11.3)

Current situation:

Due to budget and staff constraints, there is not much outreach towards users and potential users.

Improvement action 11.1 *Web survey*

Statistics Belgium will organise a regular web survey of statistics users.

Improvement action 11.2 *Create joint task forces with academia and main users*

In the slipstream of the Census 2011, Statistics Belgium has started a programme to create joint task forces with academia and main users. This programme will be enlarged.

Improvement action 11.3 *Restyling of popular publications*

The only subsisting publication on paper will be restyled in order to attract potential users of the website. On the other hand, the upcoming reform of the website will be used to make it more attractive for potential users.

Improvement action 11.4 *Structural dialogue with stakeholders*

Statistics Belgium will hold yearly meetings with stakeholders on topics like burden on respondent, administrative simplification, timeliness of publications, and organise regular ad hoc meetings on specific topics and statistics.

Timeline:

11.1: yearly as of 2016

11.2: from second half of 2015 onwards

11.3: from Q4 2015 to Q4 2018

11.4: Annually as of the first meeting on 5 May 2015

12. Statistics Belgium should develop and publish policies for handling errors and revisions. (European statistics Code of Practice, indicators 6.3 and 6.6)

Current situation:

Even if errors and revisions are treated on a case by case basis, no revision policy as such is defined and there is no systematic analysis of revisions.

Improvement action 12 *Define a revision policy*

Statistics Belgium will define a revision policy and publish it on its website.

Timeline:

By end of 2017.

13. Statistics Belgium should review and streamline its policies and practices for releasing data and communicating them to users. (European statistics Code of Practice, indicators 6.5, 6.6, 6.7 and 6.8)

Current situation:

Although a release calendar exists, it is not comprehensive and indicates only deadlines.

Improvement action 13 *A more comprehensive and precise release calendar*

Statistics Belgium will make its release calendar as comprehensive as possible and fix release dates according to good practices in other Member States.

Timeline:

End of 2016.

14. In order to facilitate better interpretation of its data, Statistics Belgium should produce and publish more in depth analyses of its statistical outputs. (European statistics Code of Practice, indicator 15.1)

Current situation:

Due to the scarcity of skilled resources, there is only a limited number of user friendly analyses available on the website.

Improvement action 14 *Increase the number of available analyses*

In the slipstream of the Census 2011, a programme was started to make more in-depth analyses available. This programme will be set forth for other domains.

Timeline:

Continuously until end 2019.

15. The proposed Interfederal Statistical Institute should take the initiative and put in place a more user-oriented solution (for example, through a common portal) for handling and disseminating all official statistics produced in Belgium. (Coordination role and European statistics Code of Practice, principles 10, 11, 15).

Current situation:

There is not a common platform/website through which all the official statistics can be accessed in a user friendly manner.

Improvement action 15 *Create a common platform/website*

Statistics Belgium will propose to the Interfederal Statistical Institute to create a common platform/website. As already pointed out in the 'Diverging views' on the Peer Review Report, the timeline for the outcome is beyond the power of Statistics Belgium.

Timeline:

Q4 2016

16. Statistics Belgium, in conjunction with the Privacy Commission, should review the arrangements for granting researchers access to statistical microdata so that access can be provided in a more streamlined and timely manner. (European statistics Code of Practice, indicator 15.4)

Current situation:

Statistical law and privacy legislation allow access to microdata for researchers, but the rules, procedures and protocols that must be followed are time consuming.

Improvement action 16 *Discussion with Privacy Commission*

Statistics Belgium will launch the discussion with the Privacy Commission on a simplification of procedures for frequent and/or similar demands.

Timeline:

Q4 2016. The timing of the discussions depends on partners. As already pointed out in the 'Diverging views' on the Peer Review Report, the timeline for the outcome is beyond the power of Statistics Belgium.

Greater coordination of the production of public statistics in Belgium

17. An operational concept of public statistics, as implicitly envisaged in the Belgian statistical law, should be defined in an agreed manner taking into account the current federal, regional, community and European statistical contexts and priorities, as well as the need to satisfy agreed quality criteria. (Coordination)

Current situation:

There is no such concept explicitly defined in law or otherwise.

Improvement action 17 *Definition of official statistics*

Statistics Belgium will initiate the drawing up of an operational concept of public statistics in conjunction with the proposed Interfederal Institute of Statistics.

Timeline:

Q2 2016 launching of the discussion (conditional upon the installation of the board of the ISI). As already pointed out in the 'Diverging views' on the Peer Review Report, the timeline for the outcome is beyond the power of Statistics Belgium.

18. The proposed Interfederal Statistical Institute, in conjunction with the National Accounts Institute, should be assigned the responsibility for coordinating the production of all public statistics in Belgium. (Coordination)

Current situation:

The Interfederal Statistical Institute (ISI) does not yet exist. The basic legislation is being drawn up.

Improvement action 18 *Prepare the coordination function of the ISI*

Statistics Belgium will initiate the appropriate process to grant the coordinating function to the ISI.

Timeline:

Q2 2016 launching of the discussion (conditional upon the installation of the board of the ISI). As already pointed out in the 'Diverging views' on the Peer Review Report, the timeline for the outcome is beyond the power of Statistics Belgium.

19. The proposed Interfederal Statistical Institute should be empowered to designate, in line with statistical legislation and the Code of Practice, all statistical producers that are entitled to produce public statistics as defined(Coordination)

Current situation:

The ISI does not yet exist. The basic legislation is being drawn up.

Improvement action 19 Prepare the empowerment of the ISI to designate producers of official statistics

Statistics Belgium will launch the discussion within the ISI concerning the empowerment of the ISI to designate producers of public statistics as defined.

Timeline:

Q2 2016 launching of the discussion (conditional upon the installation of the board of the ISI). As already pointed out in the 'Diverging views' on the Peer Review Report, the timeline for the outcome is beyond the power of Statistics Belgium.

20. The proposed Interfederal Statistical Institute should draw up and publish an annual statistical programme, which should inter alia cover the following: the identification of statistical outputs; the assignment of primary responsibility for the individual outputs; the setting of standards; the monitoring of the achievement of programme objectives; and the agreement of funding arrangements and priorities. (Coordination)

Current situation:

The ISI does not yet exist.

Improvement action 20 Initiate a statistical programme

Statistics Belgium will initiate the appropriate process to grant the responsibility for drawing up and publishing a statistical programme to the ISI.

Timeline:

Q2 2016 launching of the discussion (conditional upon the installation of the board of the ISI). First Statistical Programme of the ISI expected Q4 2016, but this is beyond the power of Statistics Belgium.

21. The proposed Interfederal Statistical Institute should be assigned adequate secretarial and other staffing resources and facilities in order to undertake its mandate in a comprehensive and proactive manner. (Coordination)

Current situation:

The ISI does not yet exist.

Improvement action 21 *Propose staffing of the ISI*

Statistics Belgium will propose the structure and staffing of the ISI secretariat to the Board of Directors of the ISI.

Timeline:

Q2 2016 launching of the discussion (conditional upon the installation of the board of the ISI). As already pointed out in the 'Diverging views' on the Peer Review Report, the timeline for the outcome is beyond the power of Statistics Belgium.

22. The leadership of the proposed Interfederal Statistical Institute should be entrusted to a Chairperson and Co-Chairperson, one of whom should be, on an ex officio basis, the Director General of Statistics Belgium. (Coordination)

Current situation:

In the cooperation agreement on the ISI, the leadership of the ISI is entrusted to a rotating Chairperson.

Improvement action 22 *Propose a Co-Chairmanship for the ISI*

Statistics Belgium will propose a Co-Chairmanship in line with the recommendation to the appropriate partners.

Timeline:

Q2 2016 launching of the discussion (conditional upon the installation of the board of the ISI). As already pointed out in the 'Diverging views' on the Peer Review Report, the timeline for the outcome is beyond the power of Statistics Belgium.

23. *Appropriate legislative and other measures should be adopted at federal and regional/community levels to facilitate the implementation of the Belgian statistical programme and to bind all parties to working in accordance with the principles etc. of the statistical legislation and CoP. (Coordination)*

Current situation:

The Interfederal Statistical Institute does not yet exist.

Improvement action 23 *Propose relevant action*

Statistics Belgium will submit this recommendation to the Board of Directors of the ISI.

Timeline:

Q2 2016 launching of the discussion (conditional upon the installation of the board of the ISI). As already pointed out in the 'Diverging views' on the Peer Review Report, the timeline for the outcome is beyond the power of Statistics Belgium.

24. *Appropriate measures should be adopted to ensure that Statistics Belgium has full access to relevant administrative data at all levels without restrictions. Access to administrative data for statistical purposes should also be assured for all other statistical authorities to the extent that this is necessary for the implementation of their statistical mandates.*

Current situation:

Although access to administrative data is granted by law, it is often cumbersome or even impossible in practice.

Improvement action 24 *Launch a dialogue to adapt legislation*

Statistics Belgium will launch a dialogue striving to bring legislation at all relevant levels in line with the revised 223/2009 regulation, in particular with article 17a.

Timeline:

Q2 2016 launching of the discussion (conditional upon the installation of the board of the ISI). Timing of discussion depends on partners. As already pointed out in the 'Diverging views' on the Peer Review Report, the timeline for the outcome is beyond the power of Statistics Belgium.

25. The mandate, composition and working arrangements of the Higher Council on Statistics should be reviewed and clarified in the context of it providing more effective input from users and advice on the overall system of public statistics in Belgium. (Coordination)

Current situation:

The role and structure of the Higher Council of Statistics is not adapted to the new statistical environment.

Improvement action 25 *Initiate the discussion for a new mandate for the Higher Council of Statistics*

Statistics Belgium will initiate the discussion for a new mandate for the Higher Council of Statistics.

Timeline:

Q2 2016 launching of the discussion (conditional upon the installation of the board of the ISI). Timing of discussion depends on partners. As already pointed out in the 'Diverging views' on the Peer Review Report, the timeline for the outcome is beyond the power of Statistics Belgium.