



PEER REVIEWERS' RECOMMENDATIONS AND STATISTICS NETHERLANDS' IMPROVEMENT ACTIONS IN RESPONSE TO THE RECOMMENDATIONS

Peer reviewers' recommendations and improvement actions in response to the recommendations

4.2.1 Maintaining the institutional environment

Reduced budgetary resources

1. *The budgetary authorities should provide Statistics Netherlands with the requisite resources to enable it to implement the agreed statistical programme on a sustainable basis, while continuing to adhere to the highest quality statistical standards. (European statistics Code of Practice, indicator 3.1 and Principle 4)*

Current situation:

Between 2009 and 2011 the budget of Statistics Netherlands, provided through the Ministry of Economic Affairs, remained virtually static at around €189 million. Since then there has been a rapid decline in the allocated budget, to €150 million in 2015 – a fall of over 20% in the space of four years. Further reductions are envisaged in the period up to 2018 - with a decrease of €7 million between 2015 and 2018 already agreed. A further additional reduction of €13 million is still under discussion. Over the entire period, 2011 to 2018, Statistics Netherlands must therefore cope with a reduction of between one quarter and one third of its budget.

In addition to this - because of the economic crisis and the need to reduce the government budget – the agreement assuring that Statistics Netherlands receives additional financial resources from the Ministry of Economic Affairs for the implementation of new EU obligations is under pressure.

Statistics Netherlands is confident that it can cope with the already agreed reduction of €7 million, without having to reduce the quality of its statistical outputs to any significant extent. However, this will imply a limited reduction in the scope of the statistical programme. In addition, Statistics Netherlands has launched an extensive efficiency programme, e.g. through the introduction of “Lean 6 Sigma”.

Meeting the additional proposed reduction of € 13 million will not, however, be possible without significant reductions to the scope of the statistical programme. Regarding the pressure on the necessary additional resources for the implementation of new EU obligations, Statistics Netherlands would like to underline that there is also a responsibility of the European Commission to intensify efforts to reduce statistical demand and to achieve results in effective negative priority-setting at European level, thereby helping Statistics Netherlands to maintain enough resources to meet national user needs.

Improvement action 1 **Continue negotiations with the Ministry of Economic Affairs on the provision of requisite resources for Statistics Netherlands**

Statistics Netherlands and the Central Commission for Statistics will continue negotiations with the Ministry of Economic Affairs. A final decision has yet to be taken.

Timeline:

On-going process, timeline depends on the decision-makers.

2. Statistics Netherlands should endeavour to secure additional resources to invest in the upgrading of its information technology infrastructure in order to have a modern processing environment capable of meeting in the most cost effective manner the ever increasing demand for more sophisticated statistical products. (European statistics Code of Practice, indicators 3.1 and 10.2)

Current situation:

Statistics Netherlands acknowledges that it will be necessary to invest a significant amount in the renewal/upgrading of its information technology infrastructure and information services in the coming years. This stems from the recurring need to keep up-to-date and also to have the necessary infrastructure capable of handling the challenges posed by "big data", technological innovation and to meet the needs of the innovation of the statistical processes. In scope are infrastructure, applications, people and processes.

Improvement action 2 Invest in upgrading of information technology infrastructure

"Towards a state-of-the-art data and information infrastructure" is incorporated as one of the 10 targets in the Strategic Agenda of Statistics Netherlands. Several projects are carried out to meet the goals of this target, e.g. development of a new infrastructure for data collection and modernisation of the application portfolio. Modernisation of the application portfolio by means of reduction of legacy, business process redesign and modernisation of applications (flexible and component-based) is a continuous process via portfolio management and proactive maintenance.

Timeline:

Continuous process until 2020.

Retirement

- 3. Statistics Netherlands should put in place in a timely manner appropriate recruitment and other human resource management strategies to maintain its skills and knowledge bases in order to address the imminent retirement of a large cohort of highly experienced staff in the short to medium term. (European statistics Code of Practice, indicators 3.1, 7.5 and 7.6)**

Current situation:

Statistics Netherlands is an aging organisation. Although the average age of 50.7 years (end of 2014) does not convey the full extent to which its age distribution is skewed towards the older age groups. Almost half of all staff are aged 55 or over and half of these again are over 60. At the other extreme, fewer than 20% of staff are younger than forty. In the foreseeable future, an estimated 3 to 4% of staff will leave every year on age grounds. This will have a significant impact on an organisation that has traditionally had a relatively low staff turnover rate and that is under increasing pressure to reduce overall staff numbers in response to its declining budget.

Therefore “Implement a strategic HRM plan” is incorporated as one of the 10 targets in the Strategic Agenda of Statistics Netherlands.

Improvement action 3: **Employment strategy & HR target points**

Implementation of a strategic HRM plan is part of the Strategic Agenda of Statistics Netherlands. The strategic HRM plan consists of seven coherent Human Resources target points, including a new employment strategy aimed at branding Statistics Netherlands on the labour market and implementing targeted recruitment.

Timeline:

2015-2018: The implementation of the strategic HR plan has already started in 2015 and will run until 2018.

Impact of Civil Service reform

- 4. The relevant national authorities should ensure that, in the context of the Central Commission for Statistics ceasing to exist (as envisaged as part of the wider Civil Service Reform Agenda), appropriate replacement statistical governance and advisory structures are put in place so that the needs of the statistical system can continue to be met in an effective manner. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principles 1 to 6 and Coordination)**

Current situation:

In line with the government policy to reduce the number of Autonomous Administrative Authorities (AAAs), it is proposed to abolish the Central Commission for Statistics as part of this wider Civil Service reform. A final decision has not yet been taken. At this moment (September 2015) the legislative proposal is at the stage of first reading in Parliament.

Improvement action 4 Putting in place an appropriate governance and advisory framework

The Ministry of Economic Affairs is primarily responsible for how appropriate governance for national statistics is laid down in national legislation. Depending on Parliament's decision on the drafted revision of the Statistics Netherlands Act as proposed, appropriate measures will have to be taken to ensure a governance and advisory framework for Statistics Netherlands which meets the conditions of the European statistics Code of Practice. At the moment it is not possible to outline which appropriate measure it is envisaged to take. This depends on the final decision of the Parliament. Parliament can make amendments on the current proposal.

Timeline:

Depends on the moment the legislative proposal is adopted. An indication on how long it would take to put in place new governance and advisory structures cannot be given. It is expected that the period between the final decision of the Parliament and the moment the revised Act shall enter into force will be long enough ($\pm 6 - 12$ months) to put in place the new governance and advisory structures.

Access to administrative type data held by private entities

5. *Statistics Netherlands should endeavour to amend the Statistics Netherlands Act so that it has a mandatory right of access to administrative type data held by private entities where such access is required for the production of official statistics in the implementation of the statistical programme. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principle 2)*

Current situation:

The Statistics Netherlands Act authorises the DG to use for statistical purposes registers maintained by legal persons (i.e. private or public entities), provided such registers result from a task “regulated by or by virtue of the law or which are wholly or partially financed, directly or indirectly, (by) funds provided by the State or from the proceeds of levies imposed by or by virtue of the law”.

However, Statistics Netherlands does not have a legal right to use registers or transaction-type data that are held by legal persons where such data are not covered by legal provisions or financed by public funds.

Improvement action 5 Access to data held by private entities

The Ministry of Economic Affairs is responsible for changes in the Statistics Netherlands Act. Statistics Netherlands will bring the proposal to start a working group to investigate the possibilities and conditions for a mandatory right of access to administrative-type data held by private entities and the possibilities for embodiment in Statistics Netherlands Act to the attention of the Ministry of Economic Affairs.

Timeline:

Proposal to the Ministry: before 1/2016

Possible follow-up will depend on the Ministry of Economic Affairs.

4.2.2 Strengthening quality management and assurance

Quality reports and reviews involving external experts

6. *Statistics Netherlands should put a greater emphasis on providing a consolidated view of the quality of its statistical outputs and prepare and publish related reports that are in line with European Union standards. (European statistics Code of Practice, indicator 4.3)*

Current situation:

Overall, the system of process quality assurance can be seen as a particular strength of Statistics Netherlands.

However, despite the availability of extensive information on process quality, there is no systematic focus on the preparation of detailed quality reports on statistical outputs that could draw on these and other sources in a consolidated manner. Metadata with some information on quality are published in Dutch on the web, linked to the statistical outputs, but they do not cover all the quality criteria laid down in European legislation and/or in the quality declaration of Statistics Netherlands. Furthermore, in spite of the fact that Statistics Netherlands regularly prepares and sends quality information to Eurostat in different forms (Euro-SDMX Metadata Structure (ESMS), ESS Standard for Quality Reports (ESQR), or other specific quality reports) in English, they are not available on the Statistics Netherlands website.

Improvement action 6 **Quality reports**

Statistics Netherlands has decided to publish quality reports on the website if they are requested by Eurostat.

Publication of quality reports will also be part of the ISO-certification process (see recommendation 8).

Timeline:

The quality reports requested by Eurostat will be published on the website before 1/2017.

Quality reports will be published in the same pace as foreseen in the ISO certification process.

That is:

One statistical process will be certified before 1/2016

At least three processes of the data collection unit and at least four other key processes will be certified before 1/2017.

Certification of the other key statistics/processes: to be decided by the Board of Directors before 12/2016

7. Statistics Netherlands should involve to a greater extent, and in a more structured manner, external experts as appropriate in the assessment of its key products and processes. (European statistics Code of Practice, indicator 4.4)

Current situation:

While the Peer Review team is satisfied that there is a strong focus in practice on the quality of statistical outputs throughout Statistics Netherlands, it believes that there are significant benefits to be gained from preparing more quality assessments of statistical outputs that are based on a consolidated examination of quality across the entire production chain.

The Peer Reviewers are also of the opinion that, in line with indicator 4.4 of the CoP, Statistics Netherlands should involve to a greater extent, and in a more structured manner, external experts as appropriate in the assessment of its key statistics.

Currently, Statistics Netherlands has several advisory boards who advise the senior directors and even more expert groups around different themes. All these groups consist of external experts from all different areas of society. Statistics Netherlands will continue using this structure in future.

Improvement action 7 Involving external experts

Involving external experts to a greater extent and on more systematic basis will also be part of the ISO-certification process (see recommendation 8).

Timeline:

Involvement of external experts in the certification process:

One statistical process will be certified before 1/2016.

At least three processes of the data collection unit and at least four other key processes will be certified before 1/2017.

Certification of the other key statistics/processes: to be decided by the Board of Directors before 12/2016.

Quality management system

- 8. Statistics Netherlands should take measures to embed more deeply its quality management and assurance procedures throughout the organisation and consider also, in the context of external communication, the adoption of recognised industry standard quality assurance/certification systems. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principle 4)**

Current situation:

Statistics Netherlands has a strong commitment to quality as outlined in its published quality declaration (CoP Principle 4). The very comprehensive Quality Guidelines 2014 serve as a quality assurance framework at process level. Based on an object-oriented quality and risk management model, the guidelines integrate the quality requirements set down in the CoP, in European and national legislation and in adhering to international statistical standards. The guidelines, which have been developed and refined over the past 5 years, form a solid basis for the quality assurance of processes. They are implemented in practice through a comprehensive and integrated system of self-assessment and quality audits.

Accordingly, the Peer Review team expected that there would be a deep awareness at all levels within Statistics Netherlands of the importance of the Guidelines and their implementation in practice. However, evidence of such awareness did not come through uniformly to the team during its meetings with Statistics Netherlands staff – this was particularly the case in the meeting with junior staff. Accordingly, the Peer Reviewers consider that measures should be taken to embed more deeply the quality management and assurance procedures throughout the organisation.

Many of the elements of a formal and externally certified total quality management system (such as International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO) 9001 or European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM)) are followed in the quality management procedures applied in Statistics Netherlands. For example, many of the elements of the Quality Guidelines are similar to those of ISO 9001. Up to now Statistics Netherlands has not sought to adopt any of these well-known total quality management systems but the Peer Reviewers were informed that active consideration is now being given to seeking ISO 9001 certification. The Peer Review team would support this initiative as it considers it would help, on the one hand, to foster a greater awareness of quality within Statistics Netherlands and, on the other, assist it in communicating its commitment to quality to a wider external audience.

Improvement action 8 ISO 9001:2015 certification

Statistics Netherlands will seek to adopt the ISO 9001 certification. In 2015 one statistical process will be certified. In 2016, Statistics Netherlands will certify at least three processes of its Data Collection Unit and at least four other key processes. Its ambition is to certify at least the other key statistics/processes in the coming years.

Timeline:

One statistical process will be certified before 1/2016

At least three processes of the data collection unit and at least four other key processes will be certified before 1/2017.

Certification of the other key statistics/processes: to be decided by the Board of Directors before 12/2016

4.2.3 Improving the service to users

9. *Statistics Netherlands should further develop and upgrade its dissemination products and tools to improve data accessibility and usability. (European statistics Code of Practice, indicators 15.1 and 15.2)*

Current situation:

Users highly appreciate and value the quantity and quality of the service provided by Statistics Netherlands. Positive comments were made on the website (information, key figures, publications, release calendar, a product catalogue organised by theme and by dossier, and information based on policy-related analyses) and especially in regard to StatLine (cost-free databank of detailed figures). The relatively new Statistics Netherlands Twitter account has also proved to be very effective with over 100,000 followers.

On the other hand different users, both expert and casual, experience that finding and accessing the required information can sometimes be difficult, particularly in regard to using StatLine, which is not considered to be user friendly even by expert users. The problem with StatLine is not with its functionality, but with the fact that it was developed almost twenty years ago using a technology that has now been superseded by recent developments (discontinuation of some statistics, especially long time series, graphics and other visual representations of the data because of the use of old technology).

Improvement actions 9.1 and 9.2: [New website & improving StatLine](#)

Statistics Netherlands is planning to improve data accessibility and usability by:

- 9.1: Launch of a new website.
- 9.2: Planned project on improvement of user-friendliness of Statline.

Timeline:

9.1: The new website will be launched before 7/2016.

9.2: before 7/2016 we will launch a simple app to view the data on the most important subjects.

In the meanwhile we are developing apps that are expected to improve the user-friendliness of the web interface (StatLine) before 1/2018.

10. Statistics Netherlands should systematically publish on its website the available English versions of its metadata reports, particularly those provided to Eurostat using the Euro-SDMX Metadata Standard (ESMS) format. (European statistics Code of Practice, indicators 15.1 and 15.5)

Current situation:

Statistics Netherlands' website contains a substantial amount of content in English. However there are some omissions in terms of limited availability of metadata in English. Also the ESMS reports, which are prepared in English and forwarded to Eurostat, are not systematically or readily available on the website. It would be of considerable benefit to foreign users to have these reports readily available on the Statistics Netherlands website.

Improvement action 10 [Publication on website of available English versions of metadata reports](#)

Statistics Netherlands is planning to improve the availability of English versions of its metadata reports, particularly those already provided to Eurostat or other international organisations.

Timeline:

Before 1/2017

11. Within the possibilities of the Dutch privacy law and the Statistics Netherlands Act, Statistics Netherlands should aim for more flexible procedures in granting access to confidential microdata for scientific purposes. (European statistics Code of Practice, indicator 15.4)

Current situation:

In recent years, Statistics Netherlands has made recurring procedures (for instance starting a Remote Access project) less cumbersome. As a result, the number of users of this facility has grown steadily. In spite of this, users represented on the user board have urged us to take further steps. They also told the peer review committee about their wishes.

Improvement action 11: Implementation of a revised set of procedures

A concept for a revised set of procedures has been drafted and will be discussed in the Board of Directors of Statistics Netherlands. This should result in a revised policy with procedures that improve the user-friendliness of and the time needed for current procedures. The revised set of procedures will also be discussed in the Remote Access user board.

Timeline:

The new policy will be defined before 4/2016. It will be implemented before 12/2016.

12. Statistics Netherlands should facilitate the increasing number of foreign researchers accessing its microdata for scientific purposes by providing more metadata in English language. (European statistics Code of Practice, indicator 15.5)

Current situation:

Not all metadata are provided in English. The vast majority of users have always been Dutch. There is an increasing call for English documentation. Not only from users and customers from outside the Netherlands, but also from the research community within the Netherlands. This community is becoming much more globally oriented, and uses English as its default language.

Improvement action 12: Providing more metadata in English

Statistics Netherlands has the ambition to improve the availability of metadata in the English language. However, realisation depends on available resources.

As first step it will be investigated whether - and to which extent - there is room for these improvements within the budget framework. Translation of metadata is being pursued within the confines of the budget.

Timeline:

Investigation of possibilities to meet the needs of foreign researchers will take place before February 2016.