



Statistisk sentralbyrå
Statistics Norway

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

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

Legal aspects (Current situation description and improvement action for recommendations 1 to 5 are presented en bloc)

- 1. The responsible authorities should amend the statistical legislation with regard to the definition of the term "official statistics". (European statistics Code of Practice, Principles 4, 7, 12, 13 and 15.)**
- 2. The responsible authorities should amend the statistical legislation to clarify the Board's status and the accountability of the Board members. (European statistics Code of Practice, indicators 1.1, 1.2, 1.3 and 1.4.)**
- 3. The responsible authorities should amend the statistical legislation to more precisely define the responsibilities of the Director General. (European statistics Code of Practice, indicators 1.1, 1.2, 1.3 and 1.4.)**
- 4. The responsible authorities should amend the statistical legislation to strengthen Statistics Norway's coordination role. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principles 4 and 11, coordination.)**
- 5. The responsible authorities should incorporate the establishment, composition and mandate of the Statistics Council in the statistical legislation. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principles 4, 12, 14 and 15, coordination.)**

Current situation:

The Statistics Act concerning official statistics and Statistics Norway from 1989 emphasizes Statistics Norway as a professionally autonomous institution. It has given Statistics Norway a mandate for data collection from individuals, business entities and government sources. In particular it ensures access to public administrative data systems. The act does not mention EU, but states that Statistics Norway is responsible for international statistical cooperation. After 1994 European regulations have been added as regulations to the Norwegian Statistics Act.

It is stated in the law that “official statistics are statistics which are made available to the public by Statistics Norway or another state agency”. If all statistics produced by other government entities automatically should be defined as official statistics is however unclear.

The Norwegian statistical system is rather centralized, and statistics produced by Statistics Norway are regarded as official (not research results). However, with several other producers of “European statistics” there is a need for a more precise definition of official statistics. This is also called for in the new strategy of Statistics Norway 2014 – 2017.

The role of the Board is described in the present Statistics Act, and a more detailed description is given in recent instructions for the Board given by the Ministry of Finance. As for the responsibilities of the DG this is also described in the Statistics Act, while details about engagement and dismissal are given in other laws concerning public administration in general. The statistics council was established in 2004, to improve the coordination of statistics production in Norway. The council is not mentioned in the Statistics Act.

Amending the legislation is a responsibility of the Parliament. The initiative for a revision of legal texts may be taken by the Ministry of Finance and Statistics Norway may advise the Ministry in this process.

Improvement action 1-5: Legal issues

1-5. Raising the issue of updating the legal framework with regard to the items mentioned in recommendations 1 – 5 with the Ministry of Finance, and providing the necessary background information.

Timeline:

Actions 1-5.: Q4 2015

Central monitoring

6. Statistics Norway should centrally monitor the actions of the Other National Authorities producing European statistics on data delivery and cooperation with Eurostat. (European statistics Code of Practice, indicators 4.1, 4.2, 13.1 and 13.3, coordination.)

Current situation:

Statistics Norway produces the vast majority of all European statistics on behalf of Norway. In 2015 there are 12 other national authorities (ONAs) who deliver data to Eurostat, but the volume of the delivery varies greatly. A majority of the authorities are also member of the National Statistics Council of statistics producers. Per January 2015 the producers of European statistics are:

- 1) Directorate of Fisheries
- 2) Nordic Institute for Studies in Innovation, Research and Education
- 3) Norwegian Directorate of Immigration
- 4) Norwegian Environmental Agency
- 5) Norwegian Agricultural Economics Research Institute
- 6) Norwegian Labour Inspection Authority
- 7) Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration
- 8) Norwegian Institute of Public Health
- 9) Norwegian Agriculture Agency
- 10) Norwegian Food Safety Authority (not member of Statistics Council)
- 11) Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion (not member of Statistics Council)
- 12) National Police Immigration Service (not member of Statistics Council)

Each ONA is responsible for the transfer of data to Eurostat in the agreed format, and they participate in relevant Eurostat meetings and are also eligible to apply for Eurostat grants. Statistics Norway together with the EFTA Statistical Office is responsible for the administration of meeting participation and for grant administration. Statistics Norway does also offer support regarding data transmission.

Statistics Norway is to some extent already monitoring and following-up on data deliveries from ONAs and cooperation with Eurostat. Information about the activity of ONAs and data reporting is to some degree monitored through bilateral contact and cooperation. Furthermore, some central monitoring is done since Statistics Norway receives tables from the EFTA Statistics Office yearly on inclusion rates and hence compliance concerning all EEA-relevant statistics. Missing data deliveries may be followed-up by Statistics Norway, also with the ONAs (there are examples of this). Furthermore, Eurostat is conducting compliance checks and Statistics Norway has taken measures to increase compliance also in fields where ONAs have been responsible. Statistics Norway may monitor data transmission from ONAs via EDAMIS.

Improvement actions 6.1 to 6.3: Monitor actions of ONAs

6.1. Include in the already existing annual reporting for relevant authorities in the Statistics Council the following:

- Legal acts on statistics in the EEA-agreement that applies to each authority's statistics production
- Information on data delivery (tables and methods)
- Meeting participation

6.2. Extend the Statistics council annual report with a chapter describing production of European statistics in Norway.

6.3. A systematic monitoring of ONAs deliveries through the EDAMIS system.

Timeline:

Actions 6.1, 6.2 and 6.3: Q1 2016

7. *Statistics Norway should strengthen its coordination of the Other National Authorities producing European statistics in planning and monitoring European statistics actions. (European statistics Code of Practice, indicators 4.1 and 4.2.)*

Current situation:

Statistics Norway participates as a member of the ESS in the preparation of the European Statistical Programme. On the basis of the European Statistical Programme an EEA/EFTA Statistical programme is established annually. The ONAs have taken part in the preparations at working group level and similar.

Improvement actions 7.1 to 7.3: *Strengthen coordination*

7.1. Establish contact points in the ONAs for European and other international matters.

7.2. Include in the annual reporting from the ONAs to Statistics Norway a short report on specific statistical actions and projects resulting from European initiatives. These reports should include the statistical as well as budgetary challenges and response burden.

7.3. Inform and consult the ONAs in the process of preparing the European Statistical Programme where relevant and consult the ONAs regarding relevant new modules in the EEA/EFTA Statistical programme.

Timeline:

Actions 7.1 and 7.2: Q1 2016

Action 7.3: Q2 2016

Quality management

8. Statistics Norway should enhance quality management by improving the completeness and public accessibility of product quality documents. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principle 4.)

Current situation:

A general quality declaration exists and is published on www.ssb.no, but not general quality guidelines. Information on product quality is insufficient in “About the statistics” for many statistics. On the updating of “About the statistics” see action under recommendation 13.

Improvement action 8: Quality information on www.ssb.no

8. More general quality information will be established and published on www.ssb.no, in accordance with Code of Practice and other good practices. This includes general quality guidelines (covering all products) with framework, description of organization for quality coordination and tools such as quality reviews (see actions 10.1 – 10.3), in addition to guidelines on more specific guidelines covering all statistics, for example on errors and revisions (mentioned in 9).

Timeline:

Action 8: Q4 2016

9. Statistics Norway should enhance quality management by improving internal communication of responsibilities and streamlining the division of work on quality management tasks. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principle 4.)

Current situation:

Coordination of quality work is the responsibility of the central staff of Director General shared with the Division for Corporate Governance. A new strategy for methodological work determines quality as one of the main tasks of the Division for Methods within the Department of Data Collection. This department is also responsible for quality reports for administrative registers used in statistics production. The Department of Communication is responsible for central information on quality on www.ssb.no (e.g. for guidelines on errors and revisions) and establishing indicators on errors, timeliness and punctuality, while the statistics producing units are responsible for quality information on the level of statistics (“About the statistics”). There is a need for clarification of responsibilities of quality management tasks and streamlining the division of work in this area.

Statistics Norway is currently implementing a Lean project that should be mentioned in this connection. In this project all departments are reviewing their work, with emphasis on reducing unnecessary activities (“waste”) and streamline their production processes. Training on Lean management is an important subject in the implementation. As for quality work in general, the objective is to create a culture for continuous improvement.

Improvement action 9: Quality management roles

9. Clarify and communicate responsibilities of quality management tasks with descriptions of roles and organisation.

Timeline:

Action 9: Q2 2016

10. Statistics Norway should enhance the institution-wide monitoring system for quality management by implementing regular quality reviews, including documentation updates. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principle 4.)

Current situation:

Quality reviews have been carried out in 2011 – 2013 and are taken up again in 2015. Guidelines on treatment of errors and revisions are currently found on Intranet. New developments of documentation should be seen in connection with the action on quality management streamlining (recommendation 9).

Improvement actions 10.1 to 10.3: Quality reviews

- 10.1. Establish a plan with guidelines for systematic quality reviews based on the Code of Practice
- 10.2. Improve the system for monitoring and follow up of action plans after quality reviews
- 10.3. Update documentation on quality management including evaluation criteria for quality reviews in Statistics Norway

Timeline:

Actions 10.1, 10.2 and 10.3: Q2 2016

Dissemination

11. Statistics Norway should enhance the content of the dissemination policy document. (European statistics Code of Practice, indicators 6.1, 6.3, 12.3, 13.2 and 15.1.)

Current situation:

A new communications strategy has recently been made available on www.ssb.no in Norwegian and English. Most of the updated principles for dissemination in Statistics Norway are available on Statistics Norway's intranet, but not on www.ssb.no.

Improvement action 11: Dissemination principles

- 11. The updated principles for dissemination will be made available on www.ssb.no both in Norwegian and English

Timeline:

Action 11: Q4 2015

(Current situation description and improvement actions for recommendations 12 to 13 are presented en bloc)

12. Statistics Norway should develop and regularly update metadata content and improve access for the public. (European statistics Code of Practice, indicators 4.3, 6.4, 7.2, 10.2, 10.4, 15.1 and 15.5.)

13. Statistics Norway should reconstruct the content and elaborate a regular update procedure for the “About the statistics” webpages of statistical releases. (European statistics Code of Practice, indicators 6.1, 6.3, 12.3, 13.2, 15.1, 15.5, 15.6 and 15.7.)

Current situation:

There are different systems for storing and retrieving metadata: Classifications are documented in the Classification database (Stabas), variables are documented in the variables database (Vardok) and concepts related to specific statistics are published in "About the statistics". However, we do not have a separate Concepts database. Metadata systems have not been further developed later years, and their updating is of varying quality. The internal quality reviews have shown that many of the “About the statistics” were not updated satisfactorily. There is also a need to restructure this system to improve user friendliness and the content of data about quality.

Improvement actions 12-13.1 to 12-13.5: Metadata

12-13.1. Decide upon and establish central responsibilities for monitoring and follow-up of updating of the various metadata systems

12-13.2. Develop guidelines for process management including metadata updating at the relevant statistics production steps (following the GSBPM)

12-13.3. Restructure “About the statistics” and assure necessary updating

12-13.4. Develop a new classification database.

12-13.5. Facilitate better user access to the metadata systems on www.ssb.no

Timeline:

Action 12-13.1: Q4 2015,

Action 12-13.2 and 12-13.3: Q4 2016

Action 12-13.4 and 12-13.5: Q4 2017

14. Statistics Norway should create a comprehensive publications catalogue to provide users with better accessibility to the statistical content and with information on its availability. (European statistics Code of Practice, indicators 6.5, 13.4 and 15.1.)

Current situation:

All publications and articles are available on www.ssb.no, but there is no comprehensive catalogue.

Improvement action 14: Accessibility of publications

14. Provide users with better accessibility to content and information on www.ssb.no, also about publications by a catalogue, an improved advance release calendar and/or equivalent solutions.

Timeline:

Action 14: Q4 2016

(Current situation description and improvement actions for recommendations 15 to 17 are presented en bloc)

- 15. Statistics Norway should offer clear and complete information to users about the conditions of paid and free-of-charge services. (European statistics Code of Practice, indicators 15.3 and 15.4.)**
- 16. Statistics Norway should reconsider its pricing policy for the provision of microdata. (European statistics Code of Practice, indicators 5.6 and 15.4.)**
- 17. Statistics Norway should enhance the transparency of the microdata provision procedure to ensure equal treatment of researchers, especially with regard to pricing and timeliness of service. (European statistics Code of Practice, indicators 5.6, 6.4 and 15.4.)**

Current situation:

The pricing policy of Statistics Norway is clear: Data are free, but users that need tailor-made statistics or microdata have to cover the marginal costs involved (working hours needed - prices are calculated based on salaries in different groups and an average overhead). Free shorter consultations are subject to consideration on a case-by-case basis. Calculation of working hours for similar assignments has varied a bit, and this might have been perceived as inconsequential by the users.

All data released on www.ssb.no including data from the Statbank are free. All figures that are published as part of the statistics releases should be available from the Statbank. The coverage of data in the Statbank is in general very good, but an increase will reduce the need for tailor-made tables.

The process of granting access to microdata can be quite time consuming, since both legislation and regulations on microdata access are strict and complex. Moreover, earlier prices for microdata access were much too low to cover all of Statistics Norway's costs, and increased prices in 2013 have caused dissatisfaction among users.

For historical reasons, one institution with a lot of researchers asking for similar data from year to year, in practice has had easier access to such data than other, smaller institutions. Equal treatment of all users is important for Statistics Norway, and it has been decided to stop arrangements that may hinder this.

Improvement actions 15-17.1 to 15-17.5: Pricing policies and access to microdata

- 15-17.1. Revise and improve the websites on pricing policies, with clear information on what is to be found free of charge on www.ssb.no and Statbank.
- 15-17.2. Revise and improve the website on access to microdata with e.g. more variable lists complete with metadata, and a web-based system to apply for access. These are Lean improvements that will standardize processes and lead to lower prices.
- 15-17.3. Further improve coverage of data in the Statbank by systematic follow up of subject-matter divisions.
- 15-17.4. Remote access: Complete the RAIRD project (Remote Access Infrastructure for Register Data, will make microdata access easier and in many cases based on self-service and accordingly cheaper).
- 15-17.5. Implement equal treatment of research institutions by improving the routines and considering further centralization of microdata deliveries.

Timeline:

Action 15-17.1: Q4 2015

Action 15-17.2: Q4 2016

Action 15-17.3: Action is ongoing and will be implemented gradually

Actions 15-17.4.and 15-17.5: Q1 2018

Resources

18. Statistics Norway should harmonise cost accounting practices across the organisation and enhance the use of this information for management purposes. (European statistics Code of Practice, indicators 10.1, 10.4, 11.1 and 11.2.)

Current situation:

Statistics Norway applies a series of performance indicators to monitor its activities; indicators on users and use of statistics, production, quality and use of resources including costs. Cost accounting is based on a data base of products linked to the system for registration of man-hours worked. In this system it is also possible to distribute man-hours by main processes in the GSBPM, but this is optional for each division. A harmonized cost accounting across the institution presupposes data of good quality in this register, and that it is widely used for management purposes. In the Lean projects the importance of measuring use of resources in the production process is emphasized, and man-hours worked on each product provide important input to the quality reviews. This leads to increased demands for reports on man-hours worked, and more attention on how man-hours are distributed. To ensure more useful reports on use of resources, one suggested project for the next phase of Lean projects is to go through and adjust the catalogue of products, and make sure that the organization uses the catalogue according to the instructions.

Improvement actions 18.1 to 18.3: Internal management information

- 18.1. Monthly report to the Directors meeting on completeness of distributed man-hours.
- 18.2. Consider compulsory registration of man-hours on main processes distributed according to the GSBPM.
- 18.3. Adjust the catalogue of products and improve instructions, to make it easier to understand and ensure useful reports for following the use of resources according to Statistics Norway's strategy and the needs of management on all levels.

Timeline:

- Actions 18.1 and 18.2: Q4 2015
- Action 18.3: Q4 2016

19. Statistics Norway should elaborate further, specific plans to ensure a smoother, more balanced transmission of competences and experience between retiring and newly recruited staff. (European statistics Code of Practice, indicators 3.1, 7.5 and 7.6.)

Current situation:

In recent years, the recruitment of new staff has been low and internal rotation has been promoted. Among younger employees almost all have higher education, but this is not the case in the older age group. Nevertheless the transmission of competences and experience between the two groups is important. Statistic Norway's HR strategy states that collaboration is a source of development, and that it is fundamental to respect each other's professionalism and share knowledge with colleagues.

All new employees are given a senior employee as a mentor in their introductory period in addition to a mandatory 4 day introductory course. It is a current project to improve the "onboarding" of new employees to Statistics Norway, to ensure that new employees are given the right competencies and support to quickly do their job in a competent way.

Also, as a step in knowledge sharing, documentation of all routines is emphasized.

21. Statistics Norway should enrich the training opportunities and manage individual training plans more consistently. (European statistics Code of Practice, indicators 3.1, 7.5 and 7.6.)

Current situation:

Training is a topic in the annual development dialogue between employees and managers. The internal training program consists of about 30 courses annually, with topics within statistical methods, dissemination, ICT, IT systems like SAS, and communication. The courses are quite popular, and one person works full time with coordination and administration of courses and identifying training needs. The courses have been arranged on demand in the past years and dependent on sufficient participation (minimum 6).

Improvement actions 19/21.1 to 19/21.3 (including actions for recommendation 19): Competence and training

19/21.1. Enhance the plan for internal training with defined priorities to fulfil the strategy and support career paths.

19/21.2. Undertake systematic competence mapping.

19/21.3. Develop competence plans for each employee following clear career paths.

Timeline:

Actions 19/21.1, 19/21.2 and 19/21.3: Q4 2016

20. Statistics Norway should improve horizontal and vertical internal communication, expand staff mobility and enhance the involvement of staff in office matters. (European statistics Code of Practice, indicators 3.1, 7.5 and 7.6.)

Current situation:

Statistics Norway has a well-developed formal cooperation between management and employees through regular meetings with representatives of labour unions (there are four in Statistics Norway). Job satisfaction among staff is in general high. However, satisfaction decreased during the last years.

In the 2014 staff survey 71 percent of the employees reported that they were quite satisfied or very satisfied with their job, compared to 80 percent in the corresponding survey in 2012 (no survey in 2013). This survey was repeated in February 2015, and 74 percent reported that they were quite or very satisfied then. During the period 2012 – 2014, the share that quite often or more often experiences negative stress increased from 13 to 20 percent. The corresponding figure for 2015 is 19 percent.

The cultural gap analyses carried out in the Lean project points in the same direction as recommendation 20 when it comes to communication. Communication is an important subject in Lean, both in the training of leaders and in the projects on different production processes where employees take part.

Improvement actions 20.1 to 20.5: Staff involvement and mobility

20.1. Management development for all managers and group leaders especially on the HR-dimension. Management development is included in the Lean project, with emphasis on creating a culture for continuous improvements. It will include courses, seminars and mentoring.

20.2. More information about “SSB-issues” on the internal web pages.

20.3. Lean for continuous improvement (implementation of project to be finalized by Q2 2016)

20.4. Consider establishing a “junior council” (younger employees from all departments).

Timeline:

Actions 20.1. and 20.2: Q1 2016

Action 20.3: Q2 2016

Action 20.4: Q4 2016

22. Statistics Norway should consolidate the mid-term plan on information technology, by further integrating information technology solutions and common tools, and achieving a better balance of the resources allocated between different development actions. (European statistics Code of Practice, indicators 3.1, 7.5, 7.6, 10.2 and 10.4.)

Current situation:

During last year, Statistics Norway developed a new IT strategy, emphasizing on streamlining of statistics production by implementing a common production platform and solutions covering the whole production chain including metadata. IT functions have been reorganized, among others by establishing a separate staff unit responsible for development and prioritization by portfolio management of projects.

Improvement actions 22.1 and 22.2: IT solutions

22.1. Develop a master plan for further work on common IT solutions in Statistics Norway
22.2. Develop a plan to strengthen Statistics Norway's information resource management

Timeline:

Actions 22.1 and 22.2: Q4 2015

23. Statistics Norway should decide on the scope of information technology audits and security checks, and carry them out regularly. (European statistics Code of Practice, indicators 5.5, 7.1, 7.6, 10.2 and 10.4.)

Current situation:

Statistics Norway has had external audits covering parts of IT and security from time to time (also from the Auditor General of Norway), but not regularly. However, the need for security checks is considered continuously. IT security was improved in 2014 by completion of a major project establishing a production platform that distinguishes administrative functions from production.

Improvement actions 23.1 and 23.2: Technology and security

- 23.1. Develop a plan for information technology audits and security checks
- 23.2. Carry out audits and checks in accordance with the plan

Timeline:

- Action 23.1: Q2 2016
- Action 23.2: Q1 2017 and onwards

24. Statistics Norway should develop visualisation tools and competences in the area of infographics. (European statistics Code of Practice, indicators 3.1, 7.5, 7.6, 10.2, 10.4 and 15.4.)

Current situation:

Statistics Norway has published several infographics during the last year. Communications and IT are cooperating in this area and have developed more competence in the area of visualization of statistics during 2014. More infographics on topic pages and in a number of statistical releases have been published in Q1/2015.

Improvement actions 24.1 to 24.3: Infographics

24.1. Continue and expand the ongoing work with infographics

24.2. Build competence within the area

24.3. Develop a plan for development and improved competence in the area of infographics and interactive visualisations

Timeline:

Actions 24.1, 24.2: Actions already on-going, continuous tasks

Action 24.3: Q2 2016