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European Statistical System Code of Practice Peer Reviews:

The peers' guide

(Version 1.2)

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1 Introduction

This chapter briefly explains the purpose of this guide and the political background of the European Statistical System peer reviews.

1.1 How to use the peer review guide?

This guide is intended to help the members of the peer review team in preparing the peer review and complements an information workshop organised by Eurostat on 27 September 2006 in Brussels. The guide is designed to be of practical help and to support the application of the common ESS peer review methodology.

The guide incorporates the lessons learned during the two pilot peer reviews and taking into account the conclusions of the Eurostat Task Force on the implementation of the Code of Practice. It was amended following the first ESS peer reviews.

The guide is structured in a way that provides both the background and framework for the ESS peer reviews and a practical step-by-step approach to conducting the peer reviews and to peer review reporting. As far as existent, direct links have been included to reference documents for the benefit of the reader of the electronic version of this document. Alternatively, and as a general background to the peer review, it is recommended to visit the

[Eurostat website on quality](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/quality) including most of the documents and information on the European Statistical System implementation of the Code of Practice:

<http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/quality>

Please read this guide carefully and do not hesitate to contact Martina Hahn or Solveiga Eidukynaitė, Eurostat Unit 02, with any questions you may have. Any suggestions on how to improve this guide are also welcome!

1.2 What is the background of the European Statistical System peer reviews?

In February 2005 the Statistical Programme Committee adopted the European Statistics Code of Practice and committed itself to adhering to its principles. The [Code of Practice](#) presents an ambitious, holistic approach to quality in statistics covering the institutional environment, statistical processes and statistical outputs¹. It has the dual purpose of, on the one hand, improving trust and confidence in statistical authorities by proposing certain institutional and organisational arrangements, and, on the other hand, reinforcing the quality of the statistics they produce and disseminate, by promoting the coherent application of best international statistical principles, methods and practices by all producers of official statistics in Europe.

At its meeting in May 2005 the Statistical Programme Committee agreed a stepwise monitoring procedure for the implementation of the Code over three years during which countries' self-assessments should be paired with elements of peer review, benchmarking and monitoring on the basis of the explanatory indicators added to each principle of the Code. A final report will be submitted to the European Parliament and to the Council in 2008.

As a first step, in 2005 the National Statistical Institutes and Eurostat carried out a comprehensive self-assessment against the principles and indicators of the Code of Practice using the common [Code of Practice self-assessment questionnaire](#) which had been developed by the SPC Task Force on the implementation of the Code of Practice.

The results of these self-assessments have been summarised in a [report to the Economic and Financial Committee](#) published on the Eurostat quality website. It gives a preliminary insight into adherence to the Code, highlights some good ESS practices and describes the progress so far in implementing the Code. At its meeting of 10 May 2006 the EFC Sub-Committee on Statistics welcomed the report and stressed that the exercise should be continued with peer reviews until the end of 2007.

The self-assessments provide the central basis for the ESS-wide peer reviews with the interviews following the structure of the self-assessment questionnaire and by allowing a National Statistical Institute to position itself in relation to ESS practices. Further elements of an assessment basis are referred to in chapter 3 on the peer review methodology.

¹ For more information on the European Statistics Code of Practice please consult the Eurostat quality website: <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/quality>

2 Framework for the ESS peer reviews

This chapter discusses the objectives and scope of the ESS peer reviews in terms of both the parts of the Code of Practice covered and the extent to which the peer review should go beyond the national statistical institute. Finally, it briefly explains the composition of the peer review teams.

2.1 What is the purpose of the peer review?

The European Statistical System peer reviews conducted in the framework of the implementation of the Code of Practice, serve the following objectives:

Most importantly, the peer reviews introduce an external element in the implementation of the Code of Practice which otherwise follows a basically self-regulatory approach. It thus contributes to transparency of the process and accountability of those involved in it.

While the National Statistical Institute's self-assessment will provide the basis, the peer reviews are expected to go beyond this initial exercise, adding value by raising issues from a peer's perspective, going into more detail where needed and assessing the situation of the NSI in the national context. Areas for improvement and related actions identified in the self-assessments will be confirmed and given more concrete shape with peers contributing to their prioritisation where needed.

At the same time, countries – assisted by the peers - benefit from more detailed overviews of the results of the first European Statistical System self-assessments positioning themselves in the European Statistical System with regard to the degrees and modes of adherence to the Code's principles. The peer review could thus stimulate a knowledge transfer from which all parties involved could benefit by identifying benchmarks and sharing best practices. Peers and participating NSIs are therefore called upon to highlight good practices to be brought to the attention of the European Statistical System.

As a result the peer reviews yield a report at country level focussing on the principles reviewed. The report also includes a refined set of improvement actions, covering all principles of the Code which are being used to feed the process of monitoring the implementation of the Code in the European Statistical System.

Peer reviews contribute to a more complete picture of adherence to the Code at European Statistical System level, identifying any common difficulties or gaps in compliance with the Code. These issues will be taken up at Statistical Programme Committee level.

2.2 What is the scope of the peer review?

The peer review exercise covers all European Union Member States. The European Union Candidate Countries and the European Economic Area – European Free Trade Association Countries will also participate. The reviews are carried out during a three-day country visit by teams of three persons comprising two experts from National Statistical Institutes and one from Eurostat.

The scope of the peer reviews is limited to the parts of the Code dealing with the institutional environment and dissemination, based on the following principles and indicators:

Box I: European Statistics Code of Practice: Principles and Indicators covered by the ESS peer reviews

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.*

Indicators

- The independence of the statistical authority from political and other external interference in producing and disseminating official statistics is specified in law.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- The statistical work programmes are published and periodic reports describe progress made.
- Statistical releases are clearly distinguished and issued separately from political/policy statements.
- The statistical authority, when appropriate, comments publicly on statistical issues, including criticisms and misuses of official statistics.

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.*

Indicators

- The mandate to collect information for the production and dissemination of official statistics is specified in law.
- The statistical authority is allowed by national legislation to use administrative records for statistical purposes.
- On the basis of a legal act, the statistical authority may compel response to statistical surveys.

Principle 3: Adequacy of Resources - *The resources available to statistical authorities must be sufficient to meet European Statistics requirements.*

Indicators

- Staff, financial, and computing resources, adequate both in magnitude and in quality, are available to meet current European Statistics needs.
- The scope, detail and cost of European Statistics are commensurate with needs.
- Procedures exist to assess and justify demands for new European Statistics against their cost.
- Procedures exist to assess the continuing need for all European Statistics, to see if any can be discontinued or curtailed to free up resources.

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.*

Indicators

- Product quality is regularly monitored according to the ESS quality components.
- Processes are in place to monitor the quality of the collection, processing and dissemination of statistics.
- Processes are in place to deal with quality considerations, including tradeoffs within quality, and to guide planning for existing and emerging surveys.
- Quality guidelines are documented and staff are well trained. These guidelines are spelled out in writing and made known to the public.
- There is a regular and thorough review of the key statistical outputs using external experts where appropriate.

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.*

Indicators

- Statistical confidentiality is guaranteed in law.
- Statistical authority staff sign legal confidentiality commitments on appointment.

- Substantial penalties are prescribed for any wilful breaches of statistical confidentiality.
- 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.
- Physical and technological provisions are in place to protect the security and integrity of statistical databases.
- Strict protocols apply to external users accessing statistical microdata for research purposes.

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.*

Indicators

- Statistics are compiled on an objective basis determined by statistical considerations.
- Choices of sources and statistical techniques are informed by statistical considerations.
- Errors discovered in published statistics are corrected at the earliest possible date and publicised.
- Information on the methods and procedures used by the statistical authority are publicly available.

- Statistical release dates and times are pre-announced.
- 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.
- Statistical releases and statements made in Press Conferences 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.*

Indicators

- Statistics are presented in a form that facilitates proper interpretation and meaningful comparisons.
- Dissemination services use modern information and communication technology and, if appropriate, traditional hard copy.
- Custom-designed analyses are provided when feasible and are made public.
- Access to micro-data can be allowed for research purposes. This access is subject to strict protocols.
- Metadata are documented according to standardised metadata systems.
- Users are kept informed on the methodology of statistical processes and the quality of statistical outputs with respect to the ESS quality criteria.

The scope of the peer review is further limited to European statistics only. While a delineation between European and national statistics can be difficult in practice, the concept of European statistics can be best approximated by the so called "aquis statistique" of which a summary is available in the [Eurostat statistical requirements compendium](#).

As a compromise between keeping the review manageable while at the same time assessing the situation in a dispersed national statistical system, the peer review will also address the **co-ordination role of the NSI within the system**. In principle, this will be done taking into account the relevant legal and policy framework as well as the relating de facto co-ordination mechanism and bodies and their functioning in practice.

Depending on the country's institutional set up² this could imply involving other important producers of national statistics to provide an understanding of how the co-ordination mechanism works in practice. The National Central Bank, while respecting its particular role as a member of the European System of Central Banks not explicitly covered by the Code of Practice, could nevertheless contribute to this insight in its capacity as both a producer and a major user of statistics.

In addition, certain selected additional issues relating to other principles of the Code or specific statistical areas could be reviewed in individual countries taking into account inter alia preferences indicated by NSIs in the reply to the self-assessment questionnaire and the composition of the reviewer team. When agreeing the details of the peer review with Eurostat a NSI may ask for additional issues to be reviewed.

It is not part of the scope of this peer review exercise to review on-site national producers of statistics other than the National Statistical Institute. In principle the peer review is expected to cover the NSI only, including its co-ordination role within the national statistical system. While other national data providers should participate in the review to complete the picture, it would be the role of the NSI to assess their compliance status. To this end, NSIs were asked by Eurostat in May 2006 to report on their plans to extend the implementation of the Code to other national providers of statistics.

² An overview with information on the institutional set-up of national statistical institutes and Eurostat is available on the Eurostat Code of Practice website: <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/quality>

2.3 Composition of the peer review teams

Peer review teams will be proposed by Eurostat drawing from a list of peers which have been nominated by the members of the Statistical Programme Committee in line with the following criteria:

- fluent command of English as this will be the main working language;
- high hierarchical standing, senior management;
- wide experience in official statistics, including in the areas covered by the peer review (comprising principles 1-6 and 15 of the Code of Practice);
- if possible, experience in carrying out peer reviews.

In addition there will be one Eurostat expert to complete the team. As far as possible peer review teams will be composed so to balance characteristics such as language skills, geographical origin, and statistical subject expertise. Priority will be given to peers who already have experience in conducting peer reviews and a certain degree of overlap will be ensured between the various teams in order to promote comparability of the results and to benefit from a learning curve. A chairperson will be appointed from among the members of the team.

Annex I gives an overview of the timing envisaged for the ESS peer reviews.

The composition of the peer review team will be communicated to the head of the NSI to be reviewed prior to launching any further steps.

In line with personal preferences and background, peer review teams divide among each other the principles to be reviewed. The co-ordination role of the NSI can either be covered in relation to one or more specific principle or be reviewed separately, basically depending on the individual countries' national set-up. Once the tasks are allocated between the members of the peer review team, they will review NSI practices on the basis of the information made available prior to the peer review and make themselves familiar with the issues covered by the respective principles of the Code. It is important that European standards and good practices are taken into account as far as possible. Annex III provides some background information by principle for the preparation of the team members. For each principle (and the NSI's co-ordination function), team members reflect upon questions for the relevant (groups of) interlocutors with the aim to collect evidence for the NSI's policies and practices to be assessed in the report. Annex II gives some examples to inspire the teams.

2.4 The role of the chair of the peer review team

For each peer review team Eurostat will propose a chair from among the team members to facilitate the organisation of the process. It is the chair's responsibility to ensure the proper functioning of the team. This will involve, inter alia, agreeing the distribution of work within the team, defining the work schedule and taking an overall responsibility for the peer review report, including that it is being produced in an independent manner. The chair will be the main contact for Eurostat with regard to the preparation of the review and in finalising the report.

2.5 Eurostat peer review desk

Unit O-2 of Eurostat has established a peer review desk (Martina Hahn and Solveiga Eidukynaitė) to be contacted for all questions related to the peer reviews. The desk co-operates closely with the NSIs and the peer review teams in preparing and managing the peer review and in providing quality assurance for the process and the results. This will involve in particular:

- collection of relevant information prior to the peer review,
- guidance with regard to the definition of the peer review programme
- assistance in ensuring the Eurostat methodology is applied in such a way that assessments can be compared from one report to another. This may include advice to the peer review team to revise the preliminary assessment of individual indicators.

3 ESS peer review methodology

During March and April 2006 two pilot peer reviews were carried out in the Czech Republic and the Netherlands - to test the peer review methodology which was finalised taking into account the comments of the SPC Task Force on the Implementation of the Code of Practice at its meeting of 17 May 2006. The Eurostat peer review information workshop on 27 September 2006 and the first ESS peer reviews yielded further refinements.

In the framework of the UN Committee for the Co-ordination of Statistical Activities Eurostat co-operates with international organisations to exploit synergies with related exercises, such as the IMF Data Review of Standards and Codes or the UN ECE activities in non-EU ECE member countries. The Eurostat approach was presented at the Conference on Data Quality for International Organisations held on 27-28 April 2006 in Newport, UK at which one session was devoted to peer review methodology. It was agreed that Eurostat would co-operate closely with the IMF which would take on board the results of the ESS peer reviews covering the institutional framework part of future Data Reviews of Standards and Codes, or their updates, to be carried out in NSIs belonging to the ESS. This is reflected in the peer review methodology e.g. requesting NSIs to carry out a user satisfaction survey prior to the peer review based on a common questionnaire adapted from the IMF.

3.1 Information basis

In line with the peer review framework agreed at Statistical Programme Committee level, English is the main language of the peer review. During the Eurostat peer review workshop on 27 September 2006, the participants underlined that especially when discussing issues related to dissemination of statistical information and documentation, languages used will have to be evaluated. The Code of practice does not specify as a clear requirement that information shall be available for instance in English, in addition to national language. However, in view of boosting the integration of a European Statistical System, it is difficult to give a high level of compliance, if information – e.g. on the NSI website - is provided in the national language (provided that this is not English) only.

Each peer review team will receive a standardised information package from Eurostat comprising:

- The NSI's reply to the self-assessment questionnaire (including a tentative list of improvement actions for all principles of the Code) and information on how it has been filled in
- A detailed overview of the NSI's position in relation to the ESS average based on the self-assessments of all NSIs and Eurostat
- Information on the NSI institutional set-up
- Reports produced under similar exercises, like the IMF Data Review on Standards and Codes carried out in 15 of the participating countries or the Global Assessments carried out by Eurostat in 10 countries in the run-up to their accession to the European Union
- Information on the countries' compliance with European Union statistical legislation

The NSI will provide the following documents as far as possible in English language together with any other documents considered useful for the preparation of the visit:

- Brief description (no more than 2 pages) of the national statistical system to be annexed to the peer review report
- Statistical Law
- Other relevant legislation including on the Statistical Council and on access to administrative data
- Results of user satisfaction survey (see below)
- Organisation chart
- NSI policy documents (vision, mission statement, data protection, confidentiality, dissemination, quality, process / project management, training, master plan / future strategy, etc.)
- Annual report(s) of the NSI / business plans
- National Code of Practice
- Service level agreements or similar documents describing access to administrative data or co-operation within the national statistical system
- Statistical Programme, list of surveys
- List of which administrative data are used for which statistics
- Information on staffing, staff recruitment and training
- Copy of the last advertisement for the post of the head of the NSI
- Information on finance and budgeting
- Publication plan
- Brief information on strategic bilateral co-operation projects with other NSIs/peers
- Any other information

Prior to their peer review, NSIs are requested to carry out a user satisfaction survey on a small scale among main national users or user groups following a common methodology which largely builds upon a corresponding survey requested by the IMF in the framework of the Data Review of Standards and Codes. The survey should focus on the perception of key quality aspects of selected national products forming part of European statistics, such as employment figures, national accounts, etc. The results can provide a broad picture on users' opinion, thus supplementing and helping to focus the discussions during the peer review. If the NSI is already carrying out its own user satisfaction survey, the common questionnaire is not meant to replace or duplicate it.

Wherever members of the peer review team draw upon additional documents they are requested to make them available to the Eurostat, Unit 0-2 peer review desk so that they can

be included in the information package and may serve as guide for the preparation of subsequent peer reviews.

While the NSI's self-assessment is to be seen as the major input for the preparation of the review and for focussing the discussion and recommendations, the success of the peer review largely depends on a careful preparation by the members of the peer review team. It is thus necessary for the peers to carefully examine in advance all supporting material mentioned above which documents as far as possible the responses to the self-assessment, including the NSI's website and information on media coverage of the NSI, etc. To review e.g. the NSI's dissemination practices it is recommended to benchmark specific products (e.g. press release on consumer price index or unemployment) with other NSI's practice and to check in how far press releases can be clearly identified as products of the NSI. Information on public interventions of the NSI on statistical issues can be useful for assessing the NSI's professional independence, etc.

It is important to note that the information packages provided by Eurostat and the NSI may include sensitive information intended for the members of the peer review team only. Peers must use it only in the framework of the peer review and must not distribute it any further without the explicit consent of the NSI.

3.2 Assessment basis

In line with the objectives of the peer reviews, NSI compliance with the Code of Practice is to be assessed against the selected principles of the Code at indicator level. In order to ensure a common interpretation of the Code referring to ESS standards and to put the indicators into concrete, the Eurostat Code of Practice Questionnaire as filled in by the NSI during its self-assessment serves as the central assessment basis for the peer reviews. The [Questionnaire](#) can be downloaded in three languages from the [Eurostat quality website](#).

Ahead of the review, the peer review team will receive details from Eurostat on how the NSI compares to the ESS average for each question in the Code of Practice Questionnaire. This information is a useful starting point for identifying possible gaps or areas for improvements or – equally important – for highlighting good practices.

During the peer review the members of the team will have to establish to what extent implementation of the Code is a reality in the NSI and adduce concrete evidence to underpin their assessment. To this end a supporting list of questions for each group of interlocutor has been drafted by a member of the SPC Task Force on the Implementation of the Code of Practice which could inform the work of the peer review teams. These questions are included in Annex II. For each indicator the list of questions will have to be developed by the team prior to each peer review in a flexible manner to tailor it to the institute visited, on the basis of a desk review of existing material. While peers should select those questions that are considered relevant for the specific groups being interviewed, the approach chosen should make sure that all the principles and indicators are reviewed and evidence is collected so that the final assessment is reached on a fair basis that is comparable with other peer reviews.

The box below gives an example illustrating the relationship between the Code, the Code of Practice Questionnaire and the list of questions per group of stakeholders:

A European Statistics Code of Practice (extract Principle 1, indicator 7):

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.*

Indicators

(...)

(7) statistical authority, when appropriate, comments publicly on statistical issues, including criticisms and misuses of official statistics.

B Code of Practice Questionnaire (extract principle 1 Q 11):

As the statistical authority, do you have a specific policy to intervene publicly on statistical issues, in case of

- a ... criticism of official statistics
 Yes No.....
- b ... misuses of official statistics
 Yes No.....
- c ... misinterpretation of official statistics
 Yes No.....
- d If yes, please state briefly the policy

C Supporting list of questions by interlocutor (extract principle 1, indicator 7):

- 1.7 **Users** Do you see evidence that your NSI speaks publicly when the reputation of official statistics is threatened?
- Other producers** Are you able decide to speak publicly when the reputation of your statistics is threatened?
- Management** How do you judge on which occasions to react to public threats to the reputation of your statistics? Do you distinguish between criticism from politicians, and from the media?
- Junior staff** Do you feel pleased or embarrassed when you see your DG arguing in public about statistical matters?

Annex III provides some additional background information comprising ESS standards in the areas covered by the peer review which are recommended to complement the assessment basis and outlines some important elements of principles 1-6 and 15 reflecting the discussions during the Eurostat peer review workshop of 27 September 2006.

The indicators of the Code of Practice vary regarding their complexity to assess and to verify compliance. Thus, some can easily be checked and verified, whereas others require more in-depth analysis to get a proper understanding of the degree of compliance. This should be taken into account when allocating time during the peer review.

Identification of good or best practices should become a systematic by-product of the review. This does not need to be at the indicator level; it could concern a particular process or product: It should also serve as an inspiration for other NSIs. Good/best practices should be given prominence at the end of the review process and in the report.

3.3 Peer review report

The peer review report will follow a standardised format assessing the level of compliance with the Code of Practice for each indicator of the principles covered and addressing the NSI's co-ordination role in the statistical system. An agreed list of improvement actions covering all principles of the Code will be annexed to the report. Annex IV outlines the structure of the

peer review report. Eurostat, Unit 0-2 peer review desk provides [two types of templates](#) for the members of the peer review team.

Based on the experience with the two pilot peer reviews, and together with the SPC Task Force on the implementation of the Code of Practice, Eurostat has developed a reporting scale (fully/largely/partly/not met) as a standardised language for distinguishing between the different degrees to which the indicators of the Code of Practice are reflected in the NSI's practices. It promotes a common basis for the assessment across peer review teams and NSIs. Thus, in case of doubt, peer review teams are encouraged to discuss the application of the scale with the Eurostat peer review desk to arrive as far as possible at an assessment consistent with other peer reviews. To allow for possible adjustments – including on the basis of suggestions by the Eurostat peer review desk - it is important that the peer review team emphasizes **the preliminary character of the assessment** prior to the finalisation of the report after the peer review. The reporting scale should be applied at the level of the individual indicator and be followed by a brief textual explanation giving factual proof by quoting references, including hyperlinks or giving examples. This text part should also address the degree to which the policies are actually implemented and are subject to regular reviews.

It is important to ensure that the assessment is based on factual information. Where possible, the references (e.g. statistical law, websites etc.) should be quoted and hyperlinks included. The assessment should be restricted to the NSI. Observations concerning other national producers of statistics can be included in the descriptive text. A description of the reporting scale is included in Annex V.

To improve the readability of the report, an overall qualitative and descriptive assessment **per principle** should be added to the assessment of the individual indicators, to reflect the NSI's main strengths and weaknesses. A certain weighting of the indicators according to critical importance might be necessary when giving the overall assessment of the degree of compliance with the principle.

Where full compliance with the Code has yet to be achieved, NSIs identify **improvement actions** and indicate a timetable. This has already begun as a part of the NSIs' self-assessment. Given their importance as the central basis for Eurostat's monitoring of compliance with the Code, peers are requested to pay particular attention to the improvement actions envisaged by the NSIs for each principle. With their different perspective and experience in the area, peers can contribute to formulating improvement actions in an operational way, advice on their priority or propose additional actions. To allow the monitoring of progress over time improvement actions should be directly related to the implementation of the Code, realistic and formulated in the most specific manner possible and be accompanied by a time frame for their implementation. At the same time, the level of detail should be considered in the light of releasing the report on the Eurostat website. **The improvement actions should cover all principles of the Code.** In the report they should be explicitly linked to the individual principles. If actors, other than the NSI, are responsible for their implementation (e.g. the Parliament for passing a new law), the role of the NSI should be specified as far as possible (e.g. "draft proposal for the new law from NSI submitted by end 200x").

To the extent that peers have come across any good or best practices deemed useful to be shared within the ESS, such practice should be highlighted in the report, possibly with a reference to other more detailed information.

Given that the reports are intended for publication, they should be easily readable and as comprehensive as possible. A too synthetic writing could give an oversimplified view of the current situation in the NSI.

To facilitate comprehension of the report to be published on the Eurostat website, it will be accompanied by a short description (1-2 pages) in English of the statistical system to be provided by the NSI.

To prepare the discussion with senior management on the third day of the peer review, a **preliminary** version focussing on the assessment for each indicator and on the list of improvement actions / broad conclusions should be drafted during the first and second days of the peer review. It should be stressed that the objective of the discussion on preliminary findings is to give the NSI an opportunity to *comment* on the **preliminary** assessment by the peers and their recommendations, to *agree* the list of improvement actions and to attach a timetable for their implementation. It should also be noted that the peer review team should be cautious when discussing preliminary assessments so that it is clear that assessments can be still subject to changes, if necessary, until the report is finalised. It is important the team produces an independent report and all steps of the process should be organised in that spirit.

Once the draft peer review report has been finalised by the peer review team, the report will be sent to Eurostat peer review desk which may suggest modifications to the team, e.g. to increase its harmonisation with the other peer review reports. However, it should be noted that certain limitations with regard to the comparability across peer review reports will have to be accepted given the differences in the composition of peer review teams.

Then the report will be sent to the NSI for comments / observations and to provide additional information where needed. The NSI will also be asked to indicate - where still necessary - a time-frame for the implementation of the improvement actions identified. However, while improvement actions should be proposed by and agreed with the NSI, **it should be stressed that ownership of the report (and the assessment) lies with the peer review team, only.**

The finalised report will be published on the [Eurostat website](#) under "ESS compliance with the Code of Practice".

In case the NSI proposes changes to the peer review report that the peer review team can not agree with and no consensus can be reached between the NSI and the team, the NSI will be given the opportunity to have its comments published on the Eurostat website together with the team's final report. This should be done in exceptional circumstances only.

NSIs will be requested to report back to Eurostat on a regular basis on progress in the implementation of the improvement actions.

3.4 Mechanics of the peer review

Before to the peer review begins, the Eurostat, Unit 0-2 peer review desk will contact the NSI to agree the dates of the visit and discuss its likely scope. NSIs will be asked to appoint a contact person for the organisation of the peer review.

Once the names of the members of a peer review team have been communicated to the NSI, Eurostat will launch the peer review process by sending the information package and

arranging a **telephone conference** on behalf of the chair to establish an initial contact among the team members.

The **division of work between the peers** should be agreed before the mission, in order for them to be able to focus the preparations. It is recommended that each member of the review team takes the lead on certain principles. The information included in Annex III should guide the preparation by the team members for the individual principles.

Close contact between the peers and the NSI prior to the visit is necessary in order to arrive at a **peer review program** that is in line with the objectives.

It is recommended to **start** the visit with representatives of the NSI's management being guided through the self-assessment questionnaire. It is necessary to go systematically through the whole list of indicators with management, because ultimately the report has to give a judgement for each individual indicator.

This initial assessment must be substantiated by discussions with both **internal and external representatives**. The selection of stakeholders/ institutions/ persons to be interviewed needs careful consideration in particular with a view to ensuring a proper coverage of partners who can provide an outside view. Small (around 10 persons) representative groups of stakeholders will tend to provide the most useful feedback. It is recommended to meet some journalists as this gives a broader understanding of how the activities of the NSI are perceived from outside the national statistical system.

Good experiences have been made with discussing the implementation of the Code not only with senior management but as well with "**junior staff**" comprising staff with some 2-5 years experience in the NSI and its functioning in the institutional environment but who are not yet part of middle management (The presence of senior member of staff or the NSI's organiser of the peer review at the rather informal discussion is to be discouraged so as not to restrict an open discussion). A range of users should be selected, embracing the major statistical domains and covering primary, secondary (analysts) and tertiary (media) users.

Enough time should be set aside on the third (and final) day to allow **detailed discussion with top management** of a *preliminary* set of recommendations and conclusions including improvement actions for all principles of the Code of Practice. The list of improvement actions will be based on the NSI's own list which will also cover principles that have not been reviewed. As mentioned in the part 3.3 "Peer review report", during the discussion the NSI will have the opportunity to *comment* on the preliminary assessment by the peers and their recommendations and to *agree and validate* the list of improvement actions with a timetable for their implementation. **In maintaining its independence it is important the peer review teams stressed the preliminary character of the assessment on-site and that ownership of the report (and the assessment) lies with the peer review team, only.**

So as not to overburden either the team or the NSI, the review will not exceed three working days. Within this tight schedule the meetings need to be run carefully and suggestions for ad hoc presentations by the NSI should be evaluated primarily for their potential value to the peer review (notwithstanding their undoubted interest on a more general level). In the same vein, lengthy introductory presentations by the organisation/stakeholder interviewed should be avoided.

The peers should lead the discussion. It is recommended that the peer review team operates as a single unit in discussions with the key groups of stakeholders with one team member proposing the questions for which she/he has taken the lead, starting from the self-assessment

questionnaire and the set of questions by interlocutor (see chapter 3.2). To introduce the Code of Practice prior to the interviews, copies of the [Code of Practice brochure](#) in EN/FR/DE can be obtained from Eurostat, unit DDG O-2 (ESTAT-QUALITY@ec.europa.eu) on request.

To take full advantage of the presence of all team members, it is recommended that the teams should spend several hours outside the scheduled meetings discussing the evidence and the emerging conclusions. Use of laptops and memo-sticks is recommended.

Based on the experience gained during the two pilot peer reviews, Annex VI suggests how a peer review programme could be organised subject to necessary adjustments to take account of the situation of individual countries.

A **hotel** close to the NSI or easily accessible by public transport will be proposed to members of the peer review team. For the peers nominated by the SPC, Eurostat will reimburse **travel expenses** according to the rules for reimbursement of expenses for experts invited to Commission meeting. Please contact Eurostat, Unit 0-2 peer review desk for any related questions.

As soon as possible (and not later than 20 working days) after the peer review, the chair of the peer review team will submit a draft peer review report to Eurostat, Unit 0-2 peer review desk which may suggest modifications to the team, e.g. to ensure its harmonisation with other peer review reports. However, it should be noted that certain limitations with regard to the comparability across peer review reports will have to be accepted given the differences in the composition of peer review teams.

After the peer review team has finalised the report, Eurostat peer review desk will send it to the NSI for comments by top management. A finalised version will be published on the Eurostat website as soon as it becomes available.

In case the NSI proposes changes to the peer review report that the peer review team can not agree with and no consensus can be reached between the NSI and the team, the NSI will be given the opportunity to have its comments published on the Eurostat website together with the team's final report. This should be done in exceptional circumstances only.

Annex I: Indicative timetable for the ESS peer reviews

2006	2007
March: 29-31 CZ PILOT	January: 22-24 IE + 24-26 FR
April: 4-6 NL PILOT	March: LV + IS + SE +
	April: PL + LT + BG
	May: SI + DK + HU
	June: NO
	July: BE + SK
	August: FI
September: 27 Information seminar for peers	September: UK
October: 23-25 IT	October: EL + RO
November: 6-8 EE, 22-24 AT	November: ES + DE
December: 13-15 CY	December: PT + LI + LU

Annex II: Questions by interlocutor, proposed for the CoP peer review teams

This list of questions has been drafted by a member of the SPC Task Force on the Implementation of the Code of Practice. It was amended taking into account the experience of the first ESS peer reviews. The list is to be considered as example questions only and is meant to inspire members of the peer review teams to derive their own lists of questions prior to the review as it is important that questions are well tailored to the visited institute.

(Please note that the numbers in the left column refer to the principles and indicators of the Code of Practice)

	Users	Other producers	Management	Junior staff
1.1	Do you perceive the NSI as a professional and independent institution? Is it important to you that your country's NSI is independent from political interference?	Does the political independence of your NSI provide you with support in resisting political influence on your own activity?	Despite your legal political independence do you ever come under political pressure?	To what degree you think you are informed about the legislative framework of the institution? Does the legal status of your NSI affect the way you feel about working for it?
1.2	Do you think that the head of your country's NSI has sufficient status and reputation to resist undue influence and gain the access to others that he/she needs?	Does the status of the head of your NSI provide you with additional representation, or leverage?	Do you think that you have the status to influence other government agencies?	Do you think that the head of your NSI is important enough to be able to represent your interests?
1.3, 1.4	Do you think that the head of your country's NSI has enough professional responsibility for statistical matters, including in relation to methodology, and the timing and content of releases?		Have you ever had to present results for approval of political authorities before dissemination? Has your independence on professional statistical matters been challenged?	If other government agencies try to influence your professional judgement are you confident that your DG will support you?
1.5	Are you aware of the statistical work programme of your country's NSI, and of progress reports?	Do you contribute to a national statistics work programme and progress reports? Do you produce your own work programme?	Are the contents of your work programme and reports ever influenced by non-government users or by politicians? How and when the statistical working programme is evaluated? By whom? What is the procedure if deviations occur?	Does your statistical work programme help you to feel part of your NSI?
1.6	Are you always able to distinguish between statistical		How do you resist pressure to blur the	How do you think that the separation of

	Users	Other producers	Management	Junior staff
	releases and political statements, in your country?		distinction between statistical releases and political comment?	statistical releases from political statements contributes to the reputation of the NSI?
1.7	Do you see evidence that your NSI speaks publicly when the reputation of official statistics is threatened?		How do you judge on which occasions to react to public threats to the reputation of your statistics? Do you distinguish between criticism from politicians, and from the media?	Do you feel pleased or embarrassed when you see your DG arguing in public about statistical matters?

	Users	Other producers	Management	Junior staff
2.1	What advantages do you perceive in there being a legal mandate in respect of statistics?	Does the legal mandate extend to <i>your</i> data collection activity? Are you nevertheless able to imply powers from it?	Would you like to see a strengthening of the mandate?	Does it make it easier in practice to chase non-respondents to surveys if you can refer to a legal mandate?
2.2	Is the existing use of admin records adequate to produce statistics of sufficient quality from the widest range of sources?	Are you able to use admin records from other government agencies, or only from your own department?	Would you like to see an increase in your use of admin records? Is there a clear separation between databases for administrative use and databases for exclusively statistical use?	What practical difficulties do you face in the use of admin records?
2.3	Is the legal mandate to collect data exercised with sufficient vigour and clarity?	How do you judge the circumstances in which to compel response?	How do you judge the circumstances in which to compel response? Could you provide us with the figures of households and enterprises refusing to respond?	Do you have a clear sense of when you are allowed to threaten non-respondents that you will compel response?

	Users	Other producers	Management	Junior staff
3.1	Do you think that your country's NSI is adequately resourced to meet users' needs? Is the distinction between European and national statistics meaningful to you?		Do you think that you are adequately resourced to meet users' needs? Do you explicitly prioritise European Statistics ahead of other statistical production and dissemination, or vice versa?	Do you distinguish between European Statistics and other statistics in your daily production and dissemination work?
3.2	Are you aware of a tension between the need to produce European Statistics, and national statistics?			
3.3	Do you present your country's NSI with business cases to justify your requests for new data?			

	Users	Other producers	Management	Junior staff
4.1	Are you aware of the quality of the statistical products of your country's NSI?	Do you find the ESS quality components a useful way of considering quality?	Do you find the ESS quality components a useful way of considering quality?	
4.2	<p>How do you perceive the quality of the statistical products:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - technical statistical quality; - timeliness; - coverage; - responsiveness; - available documentation and explanations. <p>Are you aware of its general approach to quality management?</p>	<p>Are you aware of/ involved in your NSI's activities in the area of data quality assessment?</p> <p>How the coordination with the NSI is assured in order to guarantee the quality of statistical outputs built on several sources?</p>	<p>Are collection, processing and dissemination of statistics organised according to processes and documented?</p> <p>For which types of outputs do you find it most difficult to describe their quality?</p> <p>Do you plan any audit for specific domains in the future?</p> <p>For which stages of the statistical value chain do you find it most difficult to define and measure quality?</p> <p>How coordination with municipalities and regions is assured in order to guarantee the quality of final outputs disseminated by the NSI?</p> <p>How coordination is assured in order to guarantee the quality of statistical outputs built on several sources coming from NSI/ministries?</p>	
4.3			<p>What would you say is your lowest quality statistical product?</p> <p>How do you deal with trade-offs between timeliness/accuracy, timeliness/frequency of revisions in the context outside TQM framework?</p> <p>How do you plan new surveys? Are there feasibility/pilot studies, test of questionnaires, etc, conducted in advance?</p> <p>Do you plan to implement DESAP for the preparation of new surveys?</p>	<p>Are you familiar with the ESS quality components?</p> <p>In what ways do you use them in your day-to-day work?</p> <p>Did you receive training in quality issued when you were recruited?</p> <p>Do you feel able to explain the relationships between different elements of quality to your users?</p>
4.4			<p>Is awareness of quality considerations in your organisation as high as you would like?</p> <p>Are quality guidelines available for all products, in what form? Could you please provide us with the example?</p> <p>Is training of staff on quality issues carried out systematically? What is the length and periodicity of training?</p>	<p>What single action would you most like to take in order to improve the quality of the statistical product you work on?</p>

	Users	Other producers	Management	Junior staff
			<p>Is training on these issues given to newcomers?</p> <p>Does the mobility of staff affect the quality? Is the mobility planned?</p> <p>Are quality guidelines accessible to the public (website, publications)?</p>	
4.5	Do you have an opportunity to influence quality considerations (such as size of revisions versus timeliness)?	Do you have quality audits (external/internal) of your main statistical outputs?	<p>What is the percentage of outputs reviewed by external experts?</p> <p>What are the criteria of selection output for external revisions?</p> <p>How do balance the needs of users for different quality products?</p> <p>How do you use the outcome for the reviews? Do you produce action plans?</p> <p>If your budget was increased by 10% to "improve quality" then:</p> <p>(i) how would you decide what to spend it on?</p> <p>(ii) What would you spend it on?</p>	

	Users	Other producers	Management	Junior staff
5.1	Do you think that statistical confidentiality is managed properly in your country?	Are you aware that anyone has tried to identify an individual from data or a statistical output you have released?	Are you aware that anyone has tried to identify an individual from data or a statistical output you have released?	
5.2			How can you tell if a member of your staff breached their confidentiality commitment?	Do you think that it is important to sign a legal confidentiality commitment?
5.3			Do you always seek to have penalties imposed?	
5.4	Are you aware of the ways in which confidentiality is protected by your NSI?		Do you have a clear view about the amount of risk (of disclosure) your organisation is prepared to accept in making data or statistics available?	<p>To what degree do you think there is a common policy for handling confidential data?</p> <p>Do your organisation's confidentiality protection policies or methods lead to problems in your relationships with users?</p>
5.5	Do confidentiality protection measures impact on your uses of data or statistical outputs?		Do you regularly review your confidentiality protection policy/practices to take account of technological developments?	
5.6	Do you have the opportunity to influence		Would you say that you actively debate with the user	

	Users	Other producers	Management	Junior staff
	<p>statistical producers in the ways in which they protect confidentiality?</p> <p>How do you evaluate the availability of statistics?</p> <p>How do you evaluate the availability of micro data for research?</p>		<p>community about the balance between usability and protection?</p> <p>Do you treat different user communities differently?</p> <p>What do you see as the single biggest risk to confidentiality in your organisation?</p>	

	Users	Other producers	Management	Junior staff
6.1	Do you have any concerns about the objectivity of the NSI in your country?	How do you ensure that decisions on statistical matters are taken in an objective manner? Is there a system-wide policy?	How do you ensure that your staff are objective in their statistical decision making?	Do you feel sufficiently well trained to make objective and high quality statistical decisions?
6.2				
6.3	Are you aware of how the NSI has reacted when an error has been discovered in its data?	What lessons did you draw from your most recent experience of publishing information found to have an error in it? Is there a system-wide policy?	What lessons did you draw from your most recent experience of publishing information found to have an error in it?	If you found an error in a statistic you had published, would you know what to do?
6.4	How useful have you found the NSI's published information about its methods?	Do you systematically engage with users about the quality and accessibility of the information you release about methods and procedures? Is your NSI of help in this regard? Do you have a plan to improve this type of information?	Do you systematically engage with users about the quality and accessibility of the information you release about methods and procedures? Do you have a plan to improve this type of information? What is the percentage of the releases (outputs) on methods and procedures provided on the website? Does this apply for information in your national language only? If yes, what is the percentage of information in English and other foreign languages on the website?	Do you use the information about methods/procedures that you publish, or do you use a more detailed version?
6.5	Do you know where to find a calendar of forthcoming releases?	What lessons did you draw from your most recent experience of missing a pre-announced publication date? Is there a system-wide policy? Under what circumstances would you consider changing a pre-announced publication date?	What lessons did you draw from your most recent experience of missing a pre-announced publication date? Under what circumstances would you consider changing a pre-announced publication date? Is there a systematic	If you think you may not meet a pre-announced publication date, at what stage would you raise the issue with your managers?

	Users	Other producers	Management	Junior staff
			overview of the number of releases before and after planned release time in calendar?	
6.6		If your Minister or your colleague from a policy unit asks for pre-release access to statistical information. How would you deal with this request?	Do all the users get access to statistical releases at the same time? What steps do you take to ensure pre-release access is as limited as you understand it to be?	
6.7		How do you ensure that your staff are objective in their press briefings? Is there a system-wide policy?	Are there clear guidelines regarding who can communicate with the media? How do you ensure that your staff are objective in their press briefings? Does the NSI provide training in communication with the mass media? What do you think will be the major challenges in relation to impartiality and objectivity of official statistics in your country in the future? What could be the major actions to be undertaken in this area?	To what degree do you feel there is a common policy for analysis and presentation in a professional, impartial and relevant way? Did you have training in this area? Do you feel sufficiently well trained to ensure that your written and oral presentation of statistical material is objective?

	Users	Other producers	Management	Junior staff
13.1	Are you concerned about the timeliness of any statistics published by your country's NSI? [Have you made representations to the NSI? Have these been considered?]	Do you meet all deadlines specified by Eurostat? Do you monitor your publication schedules against those of other countries?		What steps do you try to take to improve the timeliness of publications you work upon?
13.2	Do you know where to find the release schedule of statistics published in your country? Are you aware of any problems with this scheduling?	How far in advance do you publish your release schedule? What factors do you take into account in setting the schedule? Have you received representations to change the release schedule?		Have you ever experienced significant difficulties in meeting a pre-announced publication target?
13.4	Do you have any concerns about any changes to pre-announced publication schedules?	Do you have procedures that enable you to judge when and how to change the publication schedule for a particular statistics, as opposed to taking additional steps to stick to the pre-announced timing?		How do you judge when to raise with senior management that there is a risk of delay with a publication?

	Users	Other producers	Management	Junior staff
		Do you tell known users/experts explicitly about any changes to timing?		
13.5	Do you have adequate access to preliminary (aggregate) results? Are the quality limitations flagged up appropriately?	Do you have a policy concerning the dissemination of preliminary (aggregate) results, or do you make assessments on a case-by-case basis? How do you balance users' interests in preliminary results against (other) quality considerations?		

	Users	Other producers	Management	Junior staff
14.1	Are you aware of systematic differences between provisional (short-term) and final (annual) estimates? Is adequate information made available to you to make such assessments?	Do you monitor the size/scale of revisions to key series which you publish? How do use your revisions analyses to: (a) improve users' understanding of the series (b) improve the quality of the statistics ?		Do you think that you receive adequate training to help you assess the coherence and comparability of the statistics you produce? Do you know how your users feel about: a. discontinuities b. classification inconsistencies c. linkages between different but related sources, and concepts?
14.2	Are you satisfied with the information you have about the existence of discontinuities in time series? Are you able to influence your NSI when it is considering making a change that will lead to a discontinuity?	What procedures do you have in place to address difficulties caused to users by breaks in time series? Do you have a policy of documenting time series breaks? Under what circumstances do you consider back-adjusting a series, to make it comparable?		
14.3	Are you aware of any divergence between definitions and classifications used in your country's statistics and those with other countries/Europe?	Are you aware of any divergence between definitions and classifications used in your country's statistics and those with other countries/Europe? Do you seek to ensure that more detailed (than EU) user needs in your country can be met, for example by using more detailed levels of classification or categorisation? Do you ensure that any deviation from EU/international classifications and guidance are clearly indicated to users, and to Eurostat?		
14.4	Do you think that your country's major statistical products (such as National Accounts, labour market, population) are sufficiently coherent? Are you aware of unexplained differences between estimates of related concepts such as unemployment and state benefit receipt, or between the components of population change?	Do you attempt to reconcile systematically estimates from different sources, and about related concepts? When you revise estimates to estimates (e.g. population) do you systematically review related estimates (e.g. unemployment rates)? When releasing detailed economic statistics do you assess their coherence with broader economic trends?		
14.5	Are you aware of attempts to compare data about your country with those of others, in order to improve the quality of the data	Do you attempt to compare data about your country with those of others, in order to improve the quality of the data themselves?		Do you discuss with counterparts in other countries the quality/comparability of your data, with a view to improving

	Users	Other producers	Management	Junior staff
	themselves?	[What improvements have such comparisons led to?]		the data?

	Users	Other producers	Management	Junior staff
15.1	What is the worst example of unclear presentation of official statistics in your country?	What did you do as a result of the last media criticism of the presentation of information in one of your publications or your website? Is there a system-wide policy?	<p>Do you think there is a common understanding within your organisation of what are good principles for user oriented and clear presentation of statistical information?</p> <p>What did you do as a result of the last media criticism of the presentation of information in one of your publications or your website?</p> <p>Do you provide regular internal training in analysis and presentation of statistical information?</p> <p>What do you consider the major challenges in the future regarding access to and understanding/using statistics in a proper way?</p> <p>What do you consider to be the major actions to be undertaken in order to improve the accessibility to information on your website (readability of text, combination of text/graphics/tables, use of different data formats, language)?</p>	Do you feel you have sufficient training in presenting statistics clearly?
15.2	Can you access statistics in the format you want, especially via the internet?	How do you reconcile demands from users who want data presented in different media?	How do you reconcile demands from users who want data presented in different media?	Do you feel you have sufficient IT training to do your job satisfactorily?
15.3	Have you ever requested a tailor-made statistical analysis? Was it satisfactory?	What is your charging policy for tailor-made analyses? Is there a system-wide policy?	What is your charging policy for tailor-made analyses?	
15.5	Have you ever made use of your NSI's published metadata? Was it satisfactory?	How do you gather feedback about statistical metadata?	How do you gather feedback about statistical metadata?	
15.6	Are you content with arrangements for seeking users' views of changes in methodology?	Do you have a formal policy about consulting with users before making a change in methodology?	<p>Do you have a formal policy about consulting with users before making a change in methodology?</p> <p>Do you provide training for users in accessing, using and understanding statistical information?</p>	

	Users	Other producers	Management	Junior staff
Coordination role of NSI	<p>How you perceive the role of the NSI in relation to other producers of official statistics?</p> <p>What specific challenges you see in relation to the implementation of the Code of Practice (independence, legislative framework, mixture of statistical and administrative functions, data, etc) within the country?</p>	<p>How is the statistical activity organised within each organisation?</p> <p>How each organisation perceives its role in the national statistical system?</p> <p>How do you see the role of the NSI in relation to coordination of statistical system and especially in relation to implementing of the Code of Practice?</p> <p>To what degree the NSI assures quality control of other members of the national statistical system?</p> <p>What specific challenges you see in relation to implementing the Code of Practice (independence, legislative framework, mixture of statistical and administrative functions, data, etc) within the country?</p>	<p>To what degree the NSI assures quality control of the statistics produced by other members of the national statistical system?</p> <p>How do you assure the methodological coordination (guidelines, use of shared definitions stored in a common database) within the national statistical system?</p> <p>Do you find the ESS quality components a useful way of considering quality?</p> <p>If yes, does the NSI promote them inside the national statistical system?</p> <p>Are statistical releases produced by the other producers of official statistics other than the NSI accessible for all users at the same time?</p> <p>To what degree are statistics produced outside the NSI available on your website?</p>	<p>What do you consider to be the main challenges in relation to implementing the Code of Practice in your institution – and in the national statistical system as the whole?</p>

Annex III: Background information for and important elements of the principles of the CoP

The list below gives some reference to European Statistical System standards in the areas to be covered by the peer reviews. Moreover some important elements of principles 1-6 and 15 are highlighted reflecting the discussion of the participants of the Eurostat peer review workshop of 27 September 2006. The list is certainly not exhaustive but could guide the preparation of the peer review team

General background information

- ❖ [Overview on the results of the European Statistical System self-assessments](#), Report to the Economic and Financial Committee, Eurostat 2006 (available on the Eurostat website under Quality/Framework)

Principle 1 Professional Independence

Principle 2 Mandate for data collection

Background information:

- ❖ [Overview on NSI institutional set-up](#), Eurostat 2005 (available on the Eurostat website under Quality/Framework)
- ❖ Patterns of a statistical law, Eurostat (available on request from Eurostat, Unit 0-2 peer review desk)
- ❖ [Statistics Act of Ireland](#) (available from the CSO Ireland website)

Important elements:

- The definition of “Professional Independence” is a very broad one, which includes not only the freedom for deciding on standards, methods and procedures but moreover on the content and timing of statistical releases. That means that it goes beyond “Scientific Independence” which is the term used in the European Regulation on Community Statistics and in some national Statistical Laws.
- Professional independence must contain the whole process of the preparation of a statistics including the decisions on concepts and terminology.
- Independence of statisticians ends where the legislator has regulated already parts of the concepts or the methods to be used in a statistics. The same holds true for the decision on the work programme which is in the EU and in most European countries not in the sole responsibility of statisticians.
- Other data providers, especially ministries or even the central banks, will have problems to fulfil principle 1. In that context it is proposed to review the coordination function of a NSI in a statistical system of a country together with Principle 1.
- The most important part of principle 2 seems to be the indicator dealing with the access to administrative records. NSI should use administrative data but should never collect data for administrative purposes for other institutions. The collection of data for statistical and for administrative purposes must be strictly separated.
- For principles 1 and 2 the management of the NSI, possibly in addition the chairperson of the Statistical Council, are considered the most important interlocutors, because they have the most detailed knowledge in that field. But users coming from outside the office can report how they see the situation, whether they trust in the system.
- In particular for principles 1 and 2 it is essential to review whether the concrete practices in a country correspond to the given rules.

Principle 3 Adequacy of Resources

Important elements:

In the framework of the peer review only indicator 3.1 is relevant and should be addressed in the report. The other indicators (indicators 3.2, 3.3, 3.4) refer to ESS practices going beyond an individual NSI. For these indicators an evaluation at European level is needed, thus the assessment of compliance with these indicators will be addressed at Statistical Programme Committee level.

- Resources are made available by politicians / administrations - so resource allocations decisions provide a means of influencing statisticians' actions - much more subtle than direct involvement in the statistical production / dissemination process. Adequacy of resources has many dimensions (magnitude / quality and staff / computing / financial) which cannot be considered independently from each other.
- Most important interlocutors are managers and other data producers. At the same time users often have a sense of adequacy of resources, whether allocated / prioritised sensibly, the skills base of an organisation etc. Important to talk about the need to prioritise. Also potential discussion of related issues such as income / other resource inputs; separate funding streams (e.g. IT, Census); and lengths of budget allocation periods.

- Collect some basic figures on the NSI as far as they have not been reported in the self-assessment questionnaire (validate / update the replies)
- Explore the co-ordinating role of NSI in relation to (for example) seeking resources for other producers

Principle 4 Quality Commitment

Background information:

- ❖ [Quality Declaration of the European Statistical System](#) (available on the Eurostat website under: Quality/Framework)
- ❖ [Standard Quality Indicators](#) (available on the Eurostat website under: Quality/Quality reporting)
- ❖ [DESAP checklist for survey managers](#) (available on the Eurostat website under: Quality/Quality reporting)
- ❖ Other standards available on the Eurostat website under: Quality/Quality reporting/tools and standards and under Quality/ESS practices)

Important elements:

- For the discussion with producers: systematic, balanced approach to quality management, at strategic and product levels, need to make this approach to 'quality management' publicly available; high quality metadata, tested and refined; establishment of a 'quality culture', training provided on a continuous basis etc; should be actively aware of trade-offs, including where products / services are not being provided, and review these decisions actively and regularly. Expect an awareness of limitations, and of a wish-list; need to provide fora / means to seek users' and non-users' views on quality; committed to meeting defined standards; explore the co-ordination role of the NSI in relation to implementing quality standards
- For the discussion with staff: suitable skills - statistical, quality management, communication, need to be encouraged to report quality limitations to senior managers
- For the discussion with users: opportunity to influence decisions (choices) of producers, need for consultation, transparent planning and prioritisation, need to be able to understand the statistics and data made available, need to be satisfied that the producer is competent, takes quality seriously etc., need to be encouraged to provide their external views (eg evidence that they are listened to), should be aware of standards, and any deviations from standards

Principle 5 Statistical Confidentiality

Principle 15 Accessibility and Clarity (indicator 15.4)

Background information:

- ❖ [Council Regulation \(EC\) No 322/97 of 17 February 1997 on Community Statistics](#)
- ❖ [Council Regulation \(Euratom, EEC\) No 1588/90 of 11 June 1990 on the transmission of data subject to statistical confidentiality to the Statistical Office of the European Communities](#)
- ❖ [Regulation \(EC\) No 45/2001 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2000 on the protection of individuals with regard to the processing of personal data by the Community institutions and bodies and on the free movement of such data](#)
- ❖ [Commission Regulation \(EC\) No 831/2002 of 17 May 2002 implementing Council Regulation \(EC\) No 322/97 on Community Statistics, concerning access to confidential data for scientific purposes \(Text with EEA relevance\)](#)

Important elements:

- In particular in this area the peer review process is considered to have an important role in identifying and promulgating "best practice".
- Legal Provisions: information on national legislation in regard to statistical confidentiality with a focus on the following:
 - The existence of dedicated (e.g. as part of Statistical Law) legislation or whether dependant on more general legal acts (e.g. relating to administrative practices or data protection);
 - How the definition of confidential data relates to the EU Statistical Law definition (tighter or more flexible?) – the EU definition, for example, makes reference to "all the means that might reasonably be used" to identify a statistical unit;
 - How "statistical purposes" is defined (e.g. does it include the use for the selection of further samples?);
 - Are exceptions allowed and/or can the protection provisions be superseded by other legislation (e.g. Freedom of Information or security/police imperatives)?
 - The existence of any case law (or instances) relating to the implementation of the law;
 - An assessment of the penalties (or disciplinary procedures) for breaches of the law.
- Reinforcement of legal provisions: evidence should be sought on the following:
 - Whether new staff are made aware from day one of responsibilities and/or sign formal commitments in respect of statistical confidentiality;
 - The existence of relevant Codes of Practice or Protocols;

- The use of appropriate documented procedures across the organisation;
 - The extent to which the protection of data is embedded in the culture and values of the NSI (examples: prominent references in the Corporate Plan; training programmes; attitudes of junior staff.);
 - Whether NSI practices and policies relating to statistical confidentiality are communicated to the public;
 - Public perception of how NSI deals with statistical confidentiality;
- Organisational and technological environments: Prime focus here must be on assessing the extent that there is an awareness of the risks of unlawful disclosure and the extent to which there are measures in place to address them. The peer review cannot be expected to assess the adequacy or otherwise of individual measures but will, however, have to form an impression of overall security. The following issues are considered important:
- Security of NSI buildings;
 - Security and integrity of computer databases;
 - Restrictions on access to databases (e.g. access to individual databases is limited to staff directly concerned);
 - The existence of firewalls etc.
 - Protection of individual data in transmission to the NSI (e.g. from field offices/interviewers or sent electronically from enterprises)
 - Arrangements to cover remote working by staff, outsourcing of processing, joint survey activities with other organisations etc.
 - The existence of a central unit to deal with statistical confidentiality;
 - The extent to which audits are undertaken to monitor compliance with policies and mandatory procedures;
 - The attainment of ISO or other relevant standards.
- Dissemination and microdata access arrangements: The focus of attention here should be on the extent to which the NSI has a disclosure risk strategy in place to handle the trade off between user needs and confidentiality risk in the dissemination of results and in allowing access by researchers to microdata. Issues for consideration include:
- Are methodologies and practices updated to take account of changing circumstances?
 - Are distinctions made in practice between business and personal data in permitting access to microdata?
 - Are distinctions made between categories of users in allowing access to microdata?
 - Are external panels used to review arrangements?
 - Are user/respondent perspectives taken into account in developing procedures?

N.B. Indicator 5.6 is also addressed under Principle 15, indicator 4. Thus assessments of both indicators will be identical.

Principle 6 Impartiality and Objectivity

Important elements:

- The first indicator is rather complex to verify. What does 'statistical considerations' actually mean in practice, and 'pure statistical considerations' will have to be balanced against other considerations such as cost-effectiveness, and non-excessive burden on respondents, which for instance will favour the increased use of administrative sources.
- Several of the indicators related to principle 6 have their counterpart in the IMFs GDDS/SDDS covering economic data, and thus – where available - should be important input to the evaluation.
- With regard to indicator 3 (errors correction) it is important to differentiate between real errors and provisional figures and thus also correction of errors and revised figures are to be handled in different ways.
- With regard to indicator 6 (equal access) it should be noted that the indicator does not prohibit pre-lease in well-defined and controlled and published cases. On the other hand the rule, established by some NSIs, of no pre-lease to anybody, is clearly the most straightforward way to prevent leaks of market sensitive information and enforces the role of the NSI as being impartial and independent. The peer review process could promote convergence between NSIs in this area.
- Indicator 7 (releases and statements objective and non-partisan) to some extent is linked to indicator 1 under principle 15 (proper interpretation and meaningful comparisons). It was noted that there are somewhat different cultures and practices regarding the level of analytical content of releases and statements. Some countries are not providing much more than the pure numbers with some elementary 'statistical' explanations, whereas others strive to set the numbers in an analytical context, possibly with elements of projections and forecasting.

Principle 15 Accessibility and Clarity

Background information:

Standards and guidelines are available on the [Eurostat website](#) under Quality/ESS Practices/ Metadata guidelines or Dissemination guidelines.

- ❖ [Standard for Dissemination of Eurostat metadata](#) (available on the Eurostat website: Quality/ESS practices)
- ❖ [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines](#) (available on the Eurostat website: Quality/ESS Practices)
- ❖ [Best practices for designing websites for dissemination on the internet](#), UN 2001 (available on the Eurostat website: Quality/ESS Practices)
- ❖ [Formats for downloading data on the internet](#), UN 2001 (available on the Eurostat website: Quality/ESS Practices)
- ❖ [Guidelines for statistical metadata on the internet](#), UN 2000 (available on the Eurostat website: Quality/ESS Practices)
- ❖

Important elements:

- This is a principle where there will be room for improvements in most or all NSIs and for which an exchange of practices and benchmarking will be an important element during the ESS peer reviews. To promote this exchange, it is suggested that peers compare and benchmark in a systematic way the dissemination / press releases between NSIs in for instance two areas, such as consumer price indices and unemployment.
- In particular for this principle it is commonly understood that it will be difficult to assess compliance as being at a high level if the information by the NSI was only provided in national language.
- The indicators 5 (metadata) and 6 (users informed on methodology and quality) are partly interlinked and considered relatively complex to assess. Thus, the discussion of these indicators may to a large extent focus on exchange of practices and some benchmarking exercises. Most NSIs might have difficulty in documenting full compliance for these indicators, also given the language issue.
- For this principle the user survey to be carried out by the NSI prior to the peer review will form an important evaluation basis, together with an analysis of the web page of the NSI in question and not least a discussion with representatives from the user community.
- The coordination role of the NSIs can be discussed in relation to principle 15. If in a decentralised system the NSI only presents and only provides access to data/metadata produced by its own institution through its web page, this is a sign of a rather weak coordination which will certainly require an improvement action.

N.B. Indicator 15.4 is already addressed under Principle 5, indicator 6. Thus assessments of both indicators will be identical.

Annex IV Outline of the structure of the peer review report

1. Executive Summary

2. Introduction

3. Findings

Principle 1: Professional Independence

Overall assessment

Assessment by indicator

Principle 2: Mandate for Data Collection

Overall assessment

Assessment by indicator

Principle 3: Adequacy of Resources

Overall assessment

Assessment by indicator

Principle 4: Quality commitment

Overall assessment

Assessment by indicator

Principle 5: Statistical Confidentiality

Overall assessment

Assessment by indicator

Principle 6: Impartiality and objectivity

Overall assessment

Assessment by indicator

Principle 15: Accessibility and clarity

Overall assessment

Assessment by indicator

4. Co-ordination role of the National Statistical Institute

5. Good practices to be highlighted

6. Recommendations of the peer review team

7. List of improvement actions by principle of the Code

Annex A: Programme of the visit

Annex B: List of participants

Annex V: Eurostat Peer review reporting scale



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
EUROSTAT

Deputy Director-General
Unit 0-2: Statistical governance, quality and evaluation



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The scale below is intended to help the peer review team distinguish between different degrees to which the **indicators** of the Code of Practice are reflected in the NSI's practices. It should promote a common basis for the assessment across peer review teams and NSIs. The scale should be applied at the level of the individual indicator and be followed by a brief textual explanation giving factual proof by quoting references, including hyperlinks or giving examples. This text part should also address the degree to which the policies are actually implemented and subject to regular reviews.

In addition to the assessment of the individual indicators an overall qualitative and descriptive assessment **per principle** should be added reflecting the NSI's main strengths and remaining challenges.

Fully met

There is strong evidence that the subject of the indicator is fully reflected in the statistical authority's legal and policy framework and implemented in all instances of significance.

The text should provide factual proof for the assessment. It should further specify the extent to which implementation of the indicator has been validated and the extent to which implementation is monitored.

Largely met

There is evidence that the subject of the indicator is reflected to a significant degree in the statistical authority's legal and policy framework and implemented in the majority of instances.

The way to improve practices is straightforward and mainly involves deploying on a full scale what has already been broadly implemented.

The text should provide factual proof for the assessment. It should further specify the extent to which implementation of the indicator has been validated and the extent to which implementation is monitored.

Partly Met

There is evidence that the subject of the indicator is reflected in the statistical authority's legal and policy framework but that implementation is limited to a minority of instances only.

To improve practices, substantial efforts by the statistical authority (or other relevant actors) are needed. Improvement might concern both the further development of the legal and policy framework and implementation of what has already been established.

The text should provide factual proof for the assessment. It should further specify the extent to which implementation of the indicator has been validated and the extent to which implementation is monitored.

Not met

There is no, or only anecdotal, evidence that the subject of the indicator applies within the statistical authority both concerning the legal and policy framework and the implementation into practice.

Improvement actions will consist of both establishing the legal and policy framework and of putting the framework into practice.

Where applicable, the text could point to action underway to improve the situation.

Annex VI: Peer review programme - proposal³

1st day	Discussion with internal stakeholders
09.30 – 10.00	Welcome and introduction of programme, organisational matters
10.00 – 11.30	Meeting with management and senior staff, Principles 1, 2, 3
11.30 – 12.00	Meeting with management and senior staff, Principle 5
12.00 – 12.30	Meeting with management and senior staff, Principles 6, 15
12.30 – 13.30	Lunch break
13.30 – 14.30	Interview with DG and Quality manager, Principle 4
14.30 – 15.30	Meeting with junior staff, principles 1-6, 15
15.30 – 17.00	For example: Meeting with management to review additional issues on request of NSI or Meetings with Directors from production units to review specific aspects in practice or Presentation of strategic master plan / results of user-satisfaction survey or Meeting with representatives from regional (branch) offices
2nd day	Discussion with external stakeholders (could be grouped together)
09.30 – 10.30	Meeting other national data producers (Ministries, regional offices)
10.30 – 11.30	Meeting with main users / other national data producers (Ministries, National Central Bank)
11.30 – 12.30	Meeting with main users (representatives from Statistical Council etc.)
12.30 – 13.30	Lunch
14.00 – 15.00	Meeting with main users (representatives from university or other)
15.00 – 16.00	Meeting with media
15.00 – 17.00	Meeting with representatives of respondents
3rd day	Conclusions
09.30 – 11.30	Meeting with management to sum-up and detailed review of list of improvement actions for all principles
11.30 – 13.00	Meeting with top management: conclusions, recommendations and follow-up (improvement actions)

³ NSIs' peer review programmes should be tailored to individual countries' situations and be agreed with the peer review teams.