

Peer Review 2013

Iceland

Improvement Action Plan

August 2014

Preview

The Icelandic peer review was conducted by Mr Richard Laux (chair), Ms Marie Bohatá and Ms Marina Gandolfo, with a peer review visit to Reykjavik on 3 – 6 September 2013. Following the visit, the peer review team documented their findings in a report. The final report, including 24 recommendations for improvement, was sent on 23 April 2004. This action plan includes the intended actions that Statistics Iceland will implement to act upon these recommendations and to improve quality and compliance with the ESS CoP.

Improvement Action Plan

Recommendation 1

A Statistical Council, with external stakeholder representation, should be established in the Statistics Law.

Action Plan:

In the Statistics Act, Statistics Iceland decides on statistical projects and prioritises its tasks, taking account of the needs of users and international obligations. Statistics Iceland has several Advisory Committees in order to fulfil this requirement. These User Groups have not always been sufficiently effective and could be complemented by a more strategic Statistical Council. Before end of 2014 the Director-General will discuss this idea with the relevant authorities. There will be discussions on the pros and cons of this arrangement based on the experience from other institutions. The matter will also be discussed with the main users. Further actions will depend on the result of the communication with the ministry and users. As this action requires changes on the Statistical law it needs political approval and has to be presented to the Parliament.

Expected outcome:

Decision whether this council will be established or not will be taken before end of 2014. If decided to establish the council, a bill on the composition and mandate would be presented to Parliament in 2015 or 2016.

Recommendation 2

The remit of the User Groups be reviewed (with users), and the current system of User Groups should be extended to cover other statistical domains.

Action Plan:

Statistics Iceland has Advisory Committee on the Consumer Prices Index, user groups on Labour Market statistics, Price Indices, National Accounts, and Wage (Labour Market) statistics; in addition it is planning to establish further user groups relating to Social Statistics, R&D, Tourism, and Business Statistics.

These User Groups are regarded positively and are used as vehicles for user consultation. However, the User Groups could be more effective and could have a bigger role to play in helping to identify both emerging priorities and negative priorities (work that might be reduced or stopped) and to contribute to and publicly support Statistics Iceland work programme. Starting in 2014 Statistics Iceland will review the remit of user groups enhancing their role in priority settings. This project will also focus on the improvement of the quality management system from a user-perspective (see recommendation 21). This should be finished before the end of 2015.

Expected outcome:

Before end 2015, redefined roles of user groups have been documented and eventual need for new groups have led to their establishment. The first meeting of each redefined user group has been held.

Recommendation 3

Statistics Iceland should establish thematic/topic based groups of producers of, and contributors to, European (and other official) statistics, including owners of registers and administrative data sources.

Action Plan:

This project is expected to start by 2015 and finish by end of 2016, see also recommendations no. 12. According to the Statistical Act, Statistics Iceland shall coordinate official statistical activities. In order to enhance this role the plan is to make agreements with other national producers of statistics. Regular meetings will be held with stakeholders to discuss common interests, coordination and to raise awareness of Statistics Iceland needs. These groups might be two: other national producers, and owners of registers.

Expected outcome:

A document describing the roles of the thematic/ topic based groups first quarter of 2016. The first meetings in all of the groups have been held before the end of 2016.

Recommendation 4

A Methodological Advisory Committee, with external academic and other appropriate representation, should be established. Its remit – ideally the National Statistical System – and roles and responsibilities, and membership, should be publicised.

Action Plan:

Since methodological work has mostly been planned and executed in a de-centralized manner at Statistics Iceland, there has not been a need for a Methodological Advisory Committee. Now, as the planning and documentation of methodology has been shifting to a centralized organization (while the execution will still be de-centralized) the need for such a committee is apparent. Statistics Iceland therefore plans to set up such a committee which will consist of experts both from Statistics Iceland and from other institutions, for example the Central Bank of Iceland, the University of Iceland, major research entities, and relevant national statistical authorities. The

possibility of including experts from other national statistical institutions from the European Statistical System will be examined. This project will start in the first quarter of 2015 when draft rules for nominations to the committee and dismissal of its members will be laid out. The Methodological Advisory Committee will be formed before the end of 2015.

Expected outcome:

Formal cooperation between Statistics Iceland and external experts on methodological issues will be in place before the end of 2015 in order to support harmonization of methods and the provision of appropriate training. The main role of the committee will be to offer guidance on the construction of methodological guidelines, best practices and other relevant matters in the development and implementation of coordinated and harmonized methodology at Statistics Iceland.

Recommendation 5

A plan for the National Statistical System (clearly identifying European Statistics) should be developed and published, and progress reported regularly.

Action Plan:

The Icelandic National Statistical system is highly centralised, with only few actors. Article 3 of the Statistics Act requires Statistics Iceland to coordinate official statistical activities. Statistics Iceland publishes work programme, but there is no similar plan for the National Statistical System as a whole. As the system is highly centralised there is not as much risk of overlap and possible inefficiencies due to double work as could be the case in more decentralised system. However a plan for the National Statistical System would strengthen the coordination role of Statistics Iceland. This project will start in 2015 and be finished before end of 2017 with the publication of a national statistical plan. As a first step there will be discussions with the biggest producer in Iceland, The Central bank of Iceland, with the aim to align the release calendars on published statistics. Meetings with other producers of statistics, on next year's statistical programme, will be held regularly. This would only apply to producers approved as a part of the National Statistical System.

Expected outcome:

Plan or programme for the National Statistical System has been published before the end of 2017 and it will be updated on a regular basis.

Recommendation 6

Membership of the Quality Council should be broadened to include representatives of users and experts.

Action Plan:

Statistics Iceland plans to develop its quality management system to make it more user-oriented (see recommendation 21) utilizing user surveys, user groups (see recommendation 2), and establishing a process for improvement suggestions. In particular, the redefined user groups will

serve the purpose of this recommendation. Do to the nature of the Quality Council and its agenda, there are no plans to broaden its membership.

Expected outcome:

See expected outcomes under recommendations 2 and 21.

Recommendation 7

Membership of the Confidentiality Committee should be broadened to include relevant external experts from, for example, the research community (This would require a revision of article 7C of the "Rules of Procedure").

Action Plan:

The aim is to review the procedure for micro-data access in order to make it more effective for the scientific community and less risky as regards confidentiality. This will primarily be done by simplifying the present structures within Statistics Iceland such as the Confidentiality Committee through renewed mandate, well defined responsibilities and operating procedures as well as by introducing safe IT-solutions. To better reflect user needs for information the Confidential Committee will be extended to include external experts on a permanent basis.

Statistics Iceland has a clear legal mandate and is positively inclined towards further utilization of micro-data. Past years' experiences have however been that the organization has some problems in handling the issue. User opinions stating that applying for micro-data access can be cumbersome are supporting that conclusion. Internal projects regarding services on one hand and on confidentiality on the other, also stress the need to review these procedure.

The action is based on internal work-force and will require active cooperation with users.

In order to verify the results of the action Statistics Iceland will ask internal and external stakeholders to assess the outcome. This will be done through Statistics Iceland's User Satisfaction Survey and through other specific means of assessment. The action is expected to finish by first quarter 2015.

Expected outcome:

Renewed mandate and operating procedures published on Statistics Iceland's web. More effective procedures reflecting user needs will be implemented. The first meeting with broadened external membership has been held by first quarter 2015.

Recommendation 8

Statistics Iceland should discuss with the EFTA secretariat, and if necessary successive Presidencies, the scope to be granted observer status at the Council Working Party for Statistics' meetings.

Action Plan:

This issue will be discussed on EFTA statistical meeting in July 2014. As the EFTA countries are not represented in the Council Working Party for Statistics, Statistics Iceland is sometimes unaware of changes and their effects on regulation that has been approved by the ESS. This is of a growing concern as amendments to statistical regulations have recently been more common in the CWPS

phase. Therefore it would be very helpful to have better information on the process and proposed amendments to statistical regulations.

Expected outcome:

Observer status at the Council Working Party for Statistics' meetings or access to the minutes of the Council Working Party for Statistics, if accepted.

Recommendation 9

Statistics Iceland should publish transparent plans and full descriptions of the role and functions of the Research Unit.

Action Plan:

The Research Unit makes and publishes the national Economic Forecast, which is the basis for the Budget of the Central Government. The Research Unit gets pre-release access to quarterly National Accounts statistics and this access is publicly documented on Statistics Iceland website. More detailed and formal description of the role of the Research Unit is needed and its interactions with other internal and external actors, especially the Ministry of Finance. Finish by end of 2014.

Expected outcome:

Document describing the role and functions of the Research Unit published on the web of Statistics Iceland and its content made clear to the relevant agents by the end of 2014.

Recommendation 10

Statistics Iceland should review formalise and publish all data sharing agreements – and should use this exercise to further enhance its understanding of the quality of administrative data, to explore access to other sources of administrative data, and to provide transparency about flows of data.

Action Plan:

The purpose of the action is to improve Statistics Iceland's governance by coordinating, formalising and restructuring Statistics Iceland's access to administrative data through data sharing agreements. Expected results are enhanced efficiency, increased knowledge of data-owners data management leading to further understanding of the quality of administrative data and better information to users on quality and data flows. Statistics Iceland uses administrative data to produce statistics, as this is both efficient and reduces the burden on respondents. The biggest holders of administrative data are the Tax Authorities, Directorate of Customs and Registers Iceland. Statistics Iceland has also access to register information from a number of other organisations. Some agreements are already in place, but the action will strive towards standardisation and extended use of agreements with all main providers of administrative data. This project will start in 2015 and be finished before end of 2016.

Expected outcome:

Data sharing agreements have been formalised and published on Statistics Iceland's website before the end of 2016.

Recommendation 11

The production of methodological guidelines should be prioritised.

Action Plan:

As the planning, execution and documentation of methodological matters has traditionally been de-centralized at Statistics Iceland, methodological guidelines produced by the institution are few and fragmented. As the structure has shifted to a more centralized setup with regards to planning and documenting methodology, methodological guidelines are imperative. On the other hand, as the resources available to do this type of work are scarce it has to be well planned and be allowed to be more of a long-time goal. In order to keep the scope of the project manageable from the standpoint of the methodological unit of Statistics Iceland, methodological guidelines will, to begin with, be created for five selected methods: statistical disclosure control, seasonal adjustments, data editing, imputation, and weighting. The project started in 2013 by writing guidelines on statistical disclosure control. It is expected to be finished before end of 2017 (see also recommendation 22).

Expected outcome:

Before the end of 2017, the project should result in documented methodological guidelines that have been introduced and explained to employees working in the statistical process along with practical solutions to implement these same guidelines in the production processes of Statistics Iceland.

Recommendation 12

The desirability of transferring responsibility for the production of European Statistics currently produced by small Other National Authorities to Statistics Iceland should be considered.

Action Plan:

The Icelandic National Statistical System is rather concentrated and only few producers, where Statistics Iceland and the Central Bank of Iceland are the far biggest producers. Other producers are very small and do not have the infrastructure to fulfil the requirements set in the CoP, as statistics are only a minor part of their operation. In some cases it is desirable to transfer the responsibility for the production of statistics to Statistics Iceland, but in other instances these institutions have expertise in the relevant field that is essential for the production. Statistics Iceland is in the process of making contracts with other national producers in order to either move statistical production to Statistics Iceland or further formalize the coordination with clear responsibilities. Each case has to be evaluated and this action is also connected to recommendation no. 3. This project will start with a review of other producers in 2015 and be

finished by end of 2015. Early 2014, statistics on research and development was transferred to Statistics Iceland

Expected outcome:

Before the end of 2015, formal agreements will be made with other producers of European statistics (Central Bank of Iceland, The Environment Agency of Iceland, and National Energy Authority); in some other cases the production will be moved to Statistics Iceland.

Recommendation 13

A benchmarking exercise should be undertaken as part of reviewing Statistics Iceland's business model.

Action Plan:

Statistics Iceland has developed its process model that applies to all of its processes. In the case of the statistical production process the model is almost identical to with the GSBPM version 5.0. To fully implement the model it needs to be strongly supported by the management of the organization. To further enhance compliance with the CoP this model will be reviewed after a benchmarking exercise at another statistical institute. This project will start in the last quarter of 2015 and be finished before July 2016.

Expected outcome:

Before July 2016, a revision of the process model will be ready in the form a report following a benchmarking visit to another statistical institute.

Recommendation 14

Statistics Iceland should discuss with the Government the scope for additional funding to meet the European requirements.

Action Plan:

As a consequence of budget cuts after the collapse of the Icelandic banking system, Statistics Iceland has not been able to meet demands of the European Statistical programme and had to reduce some services. The main problem has been the different treatment of EFTA relevant EU regulation on statistics in the Budget Process as compared with other similar regulations. The main goal is to make changes to the implementation of European regulations on statistics ensuring the same treatment and cost estimates in the Budget Process as applies to other EFTA relevant EU regulation. The new process will be in place before year end 2014.

Expected outcome:

New administrative regulation on the incorporation of European regulations on statistics into Icelandic law, ensuring the same administrative procedures as applies to other similar regulations as concerns cost estimates and Budgeting will be in place before the end of 2014.

Recommendation 15

Statistics Iceland should develop a strategic training plan that is aligned with its Business Plan.

Action Plan:

Statistics Iceland's main strength is its highly qualified staff, and continuous vocational training is an important part of the human resource policy. In January 2013 a new career development policy was implemented. This aimed to enhance the knowledge of employees by providing access to courses, both domestic and international, and by providing peer-tutoring. To bring long term vision to vocational training and better ensure the necessary skills and competencies are present within the organization a strategic training plan should exist. Such a plan should be made with the foresight to support the organization in adapting to new developments coming from ESS. Documented training plan has been introduced to all employees before end of 2015.

Expected outcome:

Documented strategic training plan which is aligned with Statistics Iceland's business plan has been introduced to all employees before the end of 2015.

Recommendation 16

Partnerships with the scientific community should be strengthened. For example involvement of users in methodological discussions should be formalised and the scientific community could be involved in professional training of Statistics Iceland staff.

Action Plan:

Statistics Iceland has a long tradition of user involvement through user groups in specific statistical domains. This has, however, not resulted in a great deal of cooperation between the Icelandic scientific community and Statistics Iceland, one reason being that there has not been a formal user group in this area of interest. Therefore a further partnership with academia is most welcome as it will result in a higher quality of published official statistics. In order to increase user involvement and strengthen collaboration with the scientific community there are two actions foreseen.

1) Establish a formal user group on the topic of scientific access to confidential data and service to the researcher community. The construction of this group will be done in cooperation with the major research entities in Iceland. This will allow for a more dynamic dialogue of the topical issues with the scientific community and allow Statistics Iceland to better serve this important group. This should be finished by end of 2015.

2) Existing user groups have not been granted a formal status with regard to how official statistics are made by Statistics Iceland, for example related to the methods being applied in the statistical production. This matter should be discussed with users of the statistics as they often have technical expertise and insights into the methods used for the production. Therefore a further partnership with academia is most welcome as it will result in a higher quality of published official statistics. Partnership with the scientific community will be strengthened in 2015 with the formation of a Methodological Advisory Committee (see recommendation 4). It is foreseen that the Methodological Advisory Committee will be able to identify possible gaps in the statistical

knowledge and expertise of staff. This can be used to better plan staff training and to find the appropriate lectures which often come from the academia. This will be finish by end of 2016.

Expected outcome:

- 1) User group, on scientific access to confidential data and service to the researcher community, will be formed. The first meeting will be held before end of 2015.
- 2) Methodological Advisory Committee will be established. This will increase the involvement of the scientific community in methodological discussions. Further, this will increase the utilization of external scientists, researchers, and academics in the methodological training of staff at Statistics Iceland. This will be finish by end of 2016.

Recommendation 17

Collaboration with other National Statistical Institutes on complex issues such as quality indicators should be strengthened.

Action Plan:

Collaboration with other statistical institutions has been very important to Statistics Iceland. Such collaboration continues to be an ongoing process. Statistics Iceland has had a formal cooperation with the statistical institutions in the Nordic countries for decades. This covers for example quality indicators, non-response, and other issues. Also, when new production is planned, Statistics Iceland contacts statistical institutions both Nordic and other institutions within the ESS. In 2014 such collaboration will take place between Statistics Iceland and Statistics Finland on methodological issues and internal auditing. Plans for the following years have not yet been laid out and there are no plans to centralize the implementation of this recommendation since present arrangement has been quite efficient.

Expected outcome:

In the course of 2014 a stronger professional relationship will be established between the above two statistical offices in the fields of quality and methodology.

Recommendation 18

Statistics Iceland should prioritise the development of a business register in order to comply with the Regulation on Business Registers and to meet national needs.

Action Plan:

In 2012 department on Business Statistics was established in Statistics Iceland. Preparations for building a Business Register and production of STS and SBS statistics started in the spring of 2012 and for 2013 and 2014 further funding and resources have been added to the project. In early 2014 a second version of the Business Register was released and further versions will be released in 2014 and 2015. Early 2015 the first of the SBS data will be produced and by end of 2017 it is planned to have all the variables available and a fully functional Business Register in place. This is in line with the action plan worked in cooperation with Eurostat in the accession process.

Expected outcome:

Business Register, which allows for a smooth production of STS and SBS variables, complies with the Regulation on Business Registers, and meets European and national needs by the end of 2017.

Recommendation 19

Statistics Iceland should continue to enhance its website, including graphical illustrations of statistics.

Action Plan:

Statistics Iceland uses the website as the main channel of dissemination. Therefore emphasis has to be on user friendliness and easy navigation. Also users have requested more visual presentations and easier exportation of graphs into other media. To meet these demands Statistics Iceland is currently building a new web. In addition Statistics Iceland has started a project to increase the selection of time series in web tables. In developing the web, users will be consulted by user surveys.

Expected outcome:

The new website of Statistics Iceland will open in 2014 with emphasis on visual presentations and easy access. Exportation of data and graphs will be easier and the web will be compatible for hand held tools such as tablets and smart phones.

Recommendation 20

The explanation of statistical messages, in bulletins and reports, should be improved.

Action Plan:

A strategy and additional resources are required to support initiatives to enhance statistical analysis in publications. By improving cooperation in dissemination work between organizational units at Statistics Iceland an important step is taken towards increased value and quality of statistical information for users. Better explanations and setting the new statistics in context with other information adds value for the user. Further training and an annual training course for expert staff on how to write messages and bulletins will be part of the training policy, see recommendation 15. This project will start in fourth quarter 2014 by evaluation of current condition, and is expected to be finished by fourth quarter 2016 with a new evaluation and a report on improvements.

Expected outcome:

The outcome of this project would be more and improved explanations and storytelling to set statistics in wider context in order to enhance their value for users. Annual training courses will be planned and the first course will be held in third quarter of 2015. Report on improvements with evaluations before and after, will be ready in fourth quarter 2016.

Recommendation 21

Statistics Iceland should review the Quality Management System from a user-perspective.

Action Plan:

Create a process for suggestions and complaints from users. Create a process where these suggestions and complaints, together with results from user surveys, user groups, and external and internal audits, will be an important part of the continuous improvement system. This work has already started and is expected to be finished by end of 2016.

Expected outcome:

The expected outcome, to be finished by the end of 2016, is an implemented and documented process for suggestions and complaints, and a document showing how suggestions, complaints, user surveys, discussions in user groups, and results from external and internal audits, are used as an integral part of the quality management system.

Recommendation 22

Statistics Iceland should prioritise the production of methodological documentation, and user-oriented metadata.

Action Plan:

As is stated in recommendation 11 methodological guidelines will be made in the coming months and years. The implementation of the project commenced in 2013 and is expected to be finished before end of 2017. Statistics Iceland has been working over the last year on how to implement the single integrated metadata system for all its products. The development of this metadata system (both user and producer oriented) is underway and is expected to be operational by the end of 2014, although at this time it is not clear when it will be put into use as the grant agreement which the current developmental work is based upon, was not expected to cover the implementation of the system. The funding of the implementation of the system is therefore at this moment not guaranteed. One of the main goals of this new system is to make it easier for users to gain access to relevant metadata.

Expected outcome:

Before the end of 2017, documented methodological guidelines that have been introduced and explained to employees working in the statistical process will be published. Documents containing user-oriented metadata will be available to users.

Recommendation 23

Statistics Iceland should work more pro-actively with the media, including holding press conference and seminars, both to raise awareness of its work and to strengthen its communication capacity.

Action Plan:

A project to raise awareness of Statistics Iceland and to strengthen Statistics Iceland communicational capacity with the press started in the spring of 2014. Some meetings with the media have taken place and further actions are planned. Although Statistics Iceland has had good relations with the media, this could be more strategic and proactive. Often published data does not get full coverage until users have published it in their own publications, one or two days after the original publication of the data. These users often have their own agenda and thus influence the interpretation of media of the results. Part of the action is to improve Statistics Iceland news releases, see also recommendation no. 20. This project is aimed at making stronger connections to the media and more open communication in order to inform the media on data and news releases.

Expected outcome:

There will be conferences on specific topics and press meetings explaining statistics and how to use the web to access information. Press meetings when publishing major results, such as the Census. First press conference will be held in 2014 and seminar for the media will take place in 2015. News agencies will be invited regularly to enhance better communication and to assign key contacts.

Recommendation 24

Statistics Iceland should publish and implement a revisions policy.

Action Plan:

Statistics Iceland has currently no published revision policy, although revisions are disseminated when new statistics are released and users informed in advance on the website. Therefore it is necessary to coordinate existing procedures and publish a revisions policy in line with the CoP. This action is planned to be finished by end of 2015.

Expected outcome:

Documented and published revisions policy finished by the end of 2015.