



INSTITUTO NACIONAL DE ESTATÍSTICA
STATISTICS PORTUGAL

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

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

Actors within the National Statistical System

Recommendation 1

The responsible Portuguese authorities should amend the statistical legislation creating a coordination body for the producers of national official statistics. (Coordination)

Current situation:

Statistics Portugal (SP) is in compliance with the coordination Principle and indicator 1.4. Accordingly with its legal statutes (Decree-Law n. 136 of 2 of July of 2012) SP has inter alia a coordinating responsibility of all official statistics under its sphere of competences. This coordination is materialized through several processes namely the AWP, its quarterly progress reporting, the regular monitoring of the Protocols of Delegation of Statistical Function with ONAs and regular meetings on developments of ESS, among other topics. However doubts may arise considering the content of the Law nº. 22 of 13 of May of 2008 of the Parliament on the (overall) National Statistical System, in particular considering its article 13th regarding the competences, i.e. functions of the Statistical Council. Although SP has no power to change laws it can suggest changes in order to turn clearer its coordination responsibility.

Improvement actions 1.1 and 1.2 - Formal creation of the Coordination Council for the production of official statistics

1.1. SP will formalize its coordination role with the Creation of a Coordination Council involving all other national authorities responsible for the development, production, and dissemination of official statistics, i.e. ONAs.

1.2. SP will initiate dialogue with the competent authorities aiming at clarifying and amending the National Statistical Law in order to reflect more precisely SP coordinating role.

Timeline:

1.1. End 1st semester 2016.

1.2. End 1st semester 2016.

Recommendation 2

The responsible Portuguese authorities should amend the powers of the Statistical Council, its Chairmanship and the composition of its members, especially in the context of the proposed new coordination body. (European statistics Code of Practice, indicator 1.4, coordination)

Current situation:

SP participates in the Ad hoc Committee of the Statistical Council (SC) in charge of drafting a proposal for a new National Statistical System law. Several amendments to the law have been discussed concerning the chairmanship of the Council, composition and its mandate. However they do not address the scope of changes resulting from the Reviewers recommendations and the amendments to the Regulation 223/2009.

Improvement actions 2.1 to 2.4 – Amendment to the Statistical Law: Statistical Council

- 2.1. SP will convey to the competent authorities all the relevant recommendations from the Peer Review (recommendations 1 to 8).
- 2.2. SP will promote discussions of the necessary changes within the Statistical Council.
- 2.3. SP will propose an amendment of the powers of the Statistical Council in view of the creation of the Coordination body referred in improvement action 1.1 and regarding the mandate, composition and chairmanship of the Statistical Council. The aim is to clarify the exclusive role of coordination exercised by SP and therefore removing the overlapping situations.
- 2.4. SP will make a proposal to the competent authorities to enhance the participation of and communication with the scientific community.

Timeline:

- 2.1. End 2015.

2.2. Throughout 2015.

2.3. No longer than the end of 2016, although the full timeline is not in the hands of SP.

2.4. No longer than the end of 2016, although the full timeline is not in the hands of SP.

Recommendation 3

The responsible Portuguese authorities should amend the Law on the National Statistical System to strengthen the right of Statistics Portugal to access administrative data and to make explicit the obligation of data owners to provide these data on demand for statistical purposes. (European statistics Code of Practice, indicator 2.2.)

Current situation:

The Statistical Law grants to SP the right to access administrative data for statistical purposes. However experience proves such a provision has not been sufficient and relations with data owners have been fragmented and inconsistent. Statistics Portugal (SP) will make use of this recommendation in order to strengthen language and provisions in the context of the revision of the national statistical law.

Improvement action 3 – Amendment to the Statistical Law: Access to administrative data

3. SP will make proposals to change the National Statistical Law in order to ensure timely and effective access to administrative data for statistical appropriation.

Timeline:

3. End 2016, although the full timeline is not in the hands of SP.

Recommendation 4

The responsible Portuguese authorities should amend the Law on the National Statistical System to make explicit the right of Statistics Portugal to be involved in the design and revision of any administrative data system in the public sector in order to make administrative data more suitable for statistical purposes and to monitor their quality. (European statistics Code of Practice, indicators 8.7, 8.8 and 8.9.)

Current situation:

This is a very important point for reducing the administrative burden on the society. The right for SP to participate in the design, revision and elimination of administrative data systems is not currently provided by the Statistical Law. Scarce participation has been granted for the creation, modification of any administrative data system despite several attempts to do so. However an example of a successful cooperation among several government entities led to the creation of the Simplified Business Statistics (IES) in 2007.

Improvement action 4 – Amendment to the Statistical Law: Design and revision of the administrative data system

4. SP will make proposals to change the statistical law in order to ensure SP right to be involved in the design and modification of any administrative data system in order to improve its suitability and quality for statistical purposes.

Timeline:

4. End 2016, although the full timeline is not in the hands of SP.

Resources and planning

Recommendation 5

The responsible Portuguese authorities should approve the annual work programme of official statistics before the beginning of the year, consistent with approved budget allocations. (European statistics Code of Practice, indicators 1.5, 3.1 and 11.2.)

Recommendation 6

The responsible Portuguese authorities should take measures to ensure that amendments to the law explicitly specify a default option if either the annual work programme or the budget is not approved by 1 January of the respective year. (European statistics Code of Practice, indicators 1.5, 3.1 and 11.2.)

Recommendation 7

The responsible Portuguese authorities should ensure that, without well-founded economic justifications, no further cuts beyond those already introduced as of 2014 are made. (European statistics Code of Practice, indicators 3.1 and 10.1.)

Current situation:

In SP's view, recommendations 5, 6 & 7 could be merged in a more comprehensive manner with a clearer message along the following lines: "The responsible Portuguese authorities should, before the beginning of each year, approve the Annual Working Programme, allocate and ensure the necessary resources for its implementation throughout the year". However, given the nature of SP within the public administration the ultimate aim of this recommendation is clearly limited by the current legal framework of budgetary procedures. In structural terms, this issue can be addressed only in the context of a change in the institutional status of SP.

Since the Annual Work Programme (AWP) is devoted almost entirely to fulfilling EU requirements leaving no room for elimination of any statistical operation it is difficult to conceive what type of default option could be devised. The general rule for using monthly 1/12 previous year budgetary funding is only applicable when the overall state budget has not been approved before the beginning of the year. 2014 experience has shown that despite the shortfall in the initial funding it did not imply any stopping of the AWP implementation since funds were made available later in the year. However the initial under-funding situation raises risks for the AWP implementation.

Improvement action 5/6/7– Ensuring timely approval of AWP and provision of necessary resources for its full, efficient and timely implementation

5/6/7. SP will maintain dialogue with the competent authorities in order to secure timely approval of AWP and ensure the full financing of its AWP in due time.

Timeline:

5/6/7. Yearly in the context of AWP, starting with the 2016 AWP

Recommendation 8

The responsible Portuguese authorities should allow open recruitment for special statistical competencies related to the annual work programme and the five-year strategy, in order to secure a better-balanced age structure of staff. (European statistics Code of Practice, indicators 3.1, 7.5 and 10.1.)

Current situation:

SP considers this a point of utmost importance. Although SP agrees with the recommendation its scope should be broadened to include a reference to the need of an appropriate pay scale addressing specificities and requirements of statistical functions to assure SP competitiveness in recruiting and retaining highly specialised staff. In pursuing this direction, SP has proposed to the government a more attractive wage scale and it is currently engaged in a process of recruiting 20 new staff members. These actions are yet insufficient to guarantee adequate and a better-balanced age structure of staff. SP will continue requesting for more flexibility in its staff management. In structural terms, this issue can be addressed only in the context of a change in the institutional status of SP.

SP pay scale does not recognise the specificities and requirements of statistical functions and therefore open recruitment will not ensure the necessary HR given that SP is not competitive to recruit and retain highly specialised staff.

Improvement action 8 – Adoption of measures to ensure recruitment of the necessary staff

8. SP will maintain dialogue with and request from competent authorities for adequate specialized staff with competitive pay scale.

Timeline:

8. Regularly and at least yearly in the context of AWP preparation, starting with the 2016 AWP

Recommendation 9

Statistics Portugal should approve an information technology development strategy consistent with the forthcoming five-year strategy. (European statistics Code of Practice, indicators 3.1 and 10.2.)

Current situation:

Statistics Portugal has been following an extremely consistent IT development strategy over the last decade, as verified by the Peer Review team, even though no formal strategic document has been developed aligned with the current five year strategy “General Guidelines of Official Statistical Activity 2013-2017”. Further development of an overall strategy will however require resources both financial and human and therefore the severe constraint resource environment is not conducive to deploy scarce resources around this objective immediately. Nevertheless the current IT infrastructure is adequate to the SP statistical production

Improvement actions 9.1 and 9.2 – Definition of an Information Technology development strategy document

- 9.1. SP will develop and approve an Information Technology development strategy, consistent with the current General Guidelines of Official Statistical Activity 2013-2017, focussing on promoting system and infrastructure integration; and fostering of development and innovation in information systems supporting the production and dissemination of official statistics.
- 9.2. SP will further elaborate an Information Technology strategy aligned with the deployment of the ESS Vision 2020 portfolio (its preparation is dependent on availability of resources).

Timeline:

- 9.1. End 2017.
- 9.2. Depending on availability of resources.

Quality documentation and audits

Recommendation 10

Statistics Portugal should enhance the content and frequency of updates of the Statistical Production Processes Handbook and other reference documentation while further aligning with the Generic Statistical Business Process Model. These documents should include detailed information on administrative data processing and quality checks, with requirements for monitoring internal coherence, as well as instructions on sampling and non-sampling errors. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principles 4, 8 and 14 and indicators 7.1, 7.2, 12.1 and 12.2.)

Current situation:

Statistics Portugal recognizes room for updating the Statistical Production Processes Handbook (SPPH) namely to translate into the written document the current practices followed which have not been formally adopted neither integrated in the available version of SPPH. In fact many improvements have taken place without a formal approval and several editions were produced. The last version adopted in 2010 still reflects the majority of functions, responsibilities and procedures in place at Statistics Portugal.

Improvement actions 10.1 and 10.2 – Update of the Statistical Production Processes Handbook

10.1. SP will update the Statistical Production Processes Handbook, along the last version of the GSBPM, as appropriate.

10.2. SP will further develop the Statistical Production Processes Handbook, and other reference documentation, including guidelines such as those proposed in recommendation above (e.g. Administrative data processing; quality checks; Instructions on sampling and non-sampling errors; quality reports).

Timeline:

10.1. End 1st semester 2016.

10.2. End 1st semester 2017.

Recommendation 11

Statistics Portugal should develop guidelines for testing and validating statistical questionnaires. (European statistics Code of Practice, indicators 4.2 and 8.2.)

Current situation:

According to the Statistical Production Processes Handbook the questionnaire validation and testing is a prerequisite for all surveys. SP always undertakes tests of new or relevant reformulations of questionnaires, but no documented guidelines exist for this testing and validation activities.

There is a practice at Statistics Portugal of systematic activity of testing and validating of questionnaires prior to the data collection but there is still room for improvement.

Improvement action 11 – Guidelines for testing and validating statistical questionnaires

11. SP will develop and adopt documented guidelines for testing and validating statistical questionnaires, also in line with improvement action 10.2, as they are reference documentation supporting the statistical process.

Timeline:

11. End 1st semester 2017.

Recommendation 12

Statistics Portugal should make available standard quality reports linked to data and metadata for statistical domains. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principle 4 and indicators 15.5, 15.6 and 15.7.)

Current situation:

Quality reporting is not systematically produced by Statistics Portugal, or available to the public, using a standard format as recommended by Eurostat. Nevertheless, Statistics Portugal produces all the Quality Reporting required by European Regulations and a culture of quality considerations and reporting exists at Statistics Portugal. There is however room for improvement as indicated already in the Annual Work Programme 2015.

Improvement actions 12.1 and 12.2 – Publishing of Standards Quality Reports

12.1. SP will adopt the ESS standard Quality Report, as appropriate.

12.2. Regular production and dissemination of Quality Reports within the Metadata System, for Statistics Portugal activities will be ensured.

Timeline:

12.1. End 2015.

12.2. From 2016 onwards on a gradual basis and tentatively for all activities by 2019

Recommendation 13

Statistics Portugal should re-establish annual internal quality auditing. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principle 4.)

Current situation:

Statistics Portugal views this activity as a priority and will carry it out as soon as additional human resources are available. At present Statistics Portugal is not implementing a programme of internal quality audits due exclusively to lack of internal resources. Procedures and the reference documentation have been adopted and a team of auditors exists.

Improvement actions 13.1 and 13.2 - Re-establishing the annual internal quality auditing programme

13.1. SP will define an annual internal quality auditing programme to be deployed from 2016 onwards.

13.2. Regular deployment on an annual basis of the Auditing Programme.

Timeline:

13.1. Definition of the 2016 Annual Auditing Programme until the end of 2015.

13.2. From 2016 onwards regular deployment of the Auditing Programme according to staff availability.

Dissemination and related topics

Recommendation 14

Statistics Portugal should further improve its website to achieve better user-friendliness, in particular with respect to navigation, data presentation and handling. (European statistics Code of Practice, indicators 15.1 and 15.2.)

Current situation:

Statistics Portugal recognizes the need for improvements in its website namely with respect to some functionalities like navigation, data presentation and handling as suggested, meeting expectations of both internal and external users. The results of the 2015 Customer Satisfaction Survey can guide further improvements. Some work has already started with respect to improve navigation and usability of the data base dissemination. Implementation of major improvements is however dependent on the necessary funding.

Improvement actions 14.1 and 14.2 – Further improvements to Statistics Portugal Website

14.1. SP will adopt an updated Website Improvement Action Plan.

14.2. Implementation of the action plan activities, such as, improving data access through a new organization and layout, increase the compatibility with mobile equipments, dissemination of data in other formats, enabling the re-use (e.g. open data, Public Use Files (PUFs), development of interactive contents, increase the number of web-services that can be used as an alternative way to explore data.

Timeline:

14.1. End 2015.

14.2. From 2016 onwards according to action plan and depending on funding availability.

Recommendation 15

Statistics Portugal should further improve the English version of its website to avoid a mix of languages, in particular in those parts of the website that are mostly accessed by foreign users. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principle 15.)

Current situation:

Statistics Portugal has only a partial English version of its website. It recognises the importance to offer a more comprehensive English version for foreigners.

Improvement actions 15.1 and 15.2 - Improving the English dissemination via Statistics Portugal website

15.1. SP will design a strategy to determine and rank what should be disseminated in its English website.

15.2. Implementation on a regular basis of the adopted strategy.

Timeline:

15.1. End 2015 for the adoption of the strategy.

15.2. From 2016 onwards the gradual implementation depending on staffing and funding availability.

Recommendation 16

Statistics Portugal should produce guidelines to promote statistical literacy in society as a way of better satisfying users' needs through more understandable statistical information. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principles 11 and 15.)

Current situation:

SP performs a large range of activities targeted to different users in what concerns statistical literacy. Some address users (students, teachers and researchers or any citizen) of Statistics Portugal's Information Network in Higher Education Libraries. Similar arrangements have been undertaken with the Library Schools Network aiming at training students and teachers of secondary schools on how to use and better understand the information available in SP Portal. Training to basic and secondary teachers provided by SP grants accreditation to teachers by the Ministry of Education. In addition the ALEA website (Local Action of Applied Statistics), provides both teachers and students with learning material for the study of Statistics of secondary education.

Improvement action 16 - Good practices for statistical literacy

16. SP will strengthen its statistical literacy approach by preparing illustrated guidelines, based on best national and international practices, to promote better use of statistics by improving their reading and understanding, like the use of graphs, info graphics, tables, colors, etc.

Timeline:

16. End 2016.

Recommendation 17

Statistics Portugal should promote the creation of a portal for the National Statistical System which should include at least basic institutional and statistical information and provide links to the websites of all national statistical authorities. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principle 15, coordination)

Current situation:

SP agrees with the need to introduce measures to facilitate the use of statistics produced by ONAs.

Improvement actions 17.1 and 17.2 - Creation of a portal for the National Statistical System

17.1. SP will start a dialogue with the ONA's, in order to analyse the feasibility of creating a National Statistical System portal.

17.2. Creation of the portal for the NSS based upon results of feasibility study or an alternative way to facilitate the access in SP website to each ONA website.

Timeline:

17.1. End 1st semester 2016.

17.2. End 2017.

Recommendation 18

All national statistical authorities should re-examine their policy for privileged access to press and data releases. They should ensure that individuals, not entities, are clearly identified; that strict safety conditions are in practice; that exceptions to the equal access are made public; and that there is regular, in-depth monitoring of the appropriate use of privileged access granted. (European statistics Code of Practice, indicator 6.7.)

Current situation:

Statistics Portugal fully complies with the CoP regarding pre-release access under embargo. SP stresses that its policy for privileged access to press releases under embargo (in general two hours before dissemination) only benefits few individuals (not entities), is implemented under strict safety conditions and exceptions to equal access are made public in the SP website. In addition there is a regular and in-depth monitoring of compliance with the specific pre-release conditions and appropriate measures to prevent breaches are in place and have been used when appropriate.

SP accepts, however, the recommendation in what concerns ONAs and it will develop a plan with them to put in place similar provisions and conditions when pre-release under embargo exists.

Improvement actions 18.1 and 18.2 - Enhancing the pre-release rule in the ONAs

18.1. In what concerns ONA's, SP will initiate the dialogue with the ONA's in order to ensure the adoption of a transparent and public policy for privileged access to pre-release data under embargo.

18.2. Initiating implementation and starting the monitoring of the new policy in ONAs.

Timeline:

18.1. End 2015.

18.2. From 2016 onwards.

Recommendation 19

Statistics Portugal should redesign major aspects related to the release calendars (press and data release) in order to increase user-friendliness. Release dates and the timing of the releases, in particular data releases, should be carefully reconsidered. (European statistics Code of Practice, indicators 6.5 and 13.2.)

Current situation:

Currently two pre-announced calendars are publicly available in Statistics Portugal Website (area calendars):

- An advanced release calendar for press releases (*Destaques*) throughout the year is made available on January for the entire year on a monthly basis; and on a daily basis for the first quarter. After that on the 1st day of every month, an updated daily release calendar is announced for the following 3 months. This calendar is very user friendly and accessible; search is possible by theme, word, date. Users are very familiar in using it.
- An advanced release calendar for statistics disseminated per activity/survey, for the next 3 months; the date in the calendar corresponds to the first date in which data is available; in some cases that date corresponds to the press release date.

Improvement action 19 – Redesign of release calendars in Statistics Portugal Website

19. SP will revisit and streamline its current approach to public release calendars in the website.

Timeline:

19. End 1st semester 2016.

Recommendation 20

Statistics Portugal should publish on its website a list of datasets and analyses produced as a result of customised requests. (European statistics Code of Practice, indicator 15.3.)

Current situation:

Statistics Portugal attaches great importance to the Principle of equal and impartial access granted to all users. SP has strong reservations about the feasibility of this recommendation and it will assess its implementation taking into account indicator 15.3, which recognises that this might not be feasible. It is worth noting that often customised requests address very specific needs of some users supported by protocols rarely applicable to others. On the other hand, SP turns customised products and analyses frequently requested (more than few times) by several users into regular products widely available on its website.

Improvement action 20

20. SP will assess implementation taking into account indicator 15.3, which recognises that this might not be feasible.

Timeline:

20. End 2017

Recommendation 21

Statistics Portugal should take the necessary actions with the Other National Authorities to ensure that all microdata can be accessed in Statistics Portugal. (European statistics Code of Practice, indicator 15.4, coordination)

Current situation:

Statistics Portugal will study the feasibility of such a recommendation namely in what concerns infrastructure capacity

Request by researchers to access to microdata can be made through SP in order to ensure researchers' certification. The microdata data sets could however remain with the ONA, who are statistical authorities and entrusted with such a function by the Protocol of Statistical Functions. When the access requires safe centre SP will facilitate such a feature in articulation with the relevant ONA. ONAs are expected to report annually on researcher activity and access to their microdata data sets is to be included in the joint annual report.

Improvement actions 21.1 and 21.2 - Accessing to microdata associated to ONAs' statistics in Statistics Portugal

21.1. SP will carry out a feasibility study together with the ONAs' in order to assess implementation of the recommendation, and to analyse implementation plan on a step wise approach.

21.2. Ensuring access if mechanism for implementation is viable.

Timeline:

21.1. End 1st semester 2016.

21.2. From 2017 onwards on a gradual basis according to ONAs' capacity and tentatively by end of 2019

Recommendation 22

Statistics Portugal should make the list of microdata that can be accessed by researchers more visible on its website. (European statistics Code of Practice, indicator 15.2.)

Current situation:

Work towards implementation of such a recommendation is already ongoing in SP. SP will start a dialogue with ONAs in order to increase the visibility of such data sets.

Improvement actions 22.1 and 22.2 – Increase visibility of Microdata available for researchers

22.1. Statistics Portugal will make available on its Website very detailed information about which databases are available, organised by theme, with respective methodological documents and description of available variables.

22.2. Adoption of similar approach by each ONA.

Timeline:

22.1. June 2015.

22.2. End 2016.

Recommendation 23

Statistics Portugal should enhance the procedures to control the appropriate use of microdata by researchers according to the declaration of confidentiality. (European statistics Code of Practice, indicator 5.6.)

Current situation:

Statistics Portugal agrees in general terms with the recommendation but, since there has never been a case of misuse, SP does not consider it a priority in the current situation for an intensive use of the scarce resources available

Improvement action 23

23. No action foreseen for the time being because of lack of resources.

Timeline:

23. N.A: (When resources become available).

Recommendation 24

Statistics Portugal should make a proposal to the responsible authorities in order to make the linking of different datasets possible (surveys and administrative registers) both at business and household level, thereby facilitating accessibility by researchers. (European statistics Code of Practice, indicator 9.6.)

Current situation:

This recommendation is not appropriate in the context of indicator 9.6. Principle 9 and indicator 9.6 refer to "Statistical Authorities promote measures that enable the linking of data sources in order to reduce reporting burden" and does not aim at facilitating accessibility by researchers. In addition the broad spirit of the recommendation poses difficulties in view of the Constitutional provision that prevents the attribution of an identification number to persons and households. The removal of such a barrier would contribute to increase efficiency of statistical production. Surrogated or dummy code has been used for few limited projects with the assistance of the National Data Protection Authority.

Improvement action

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

Timeline:

N. A.