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**Peer review on the implementation
of the
European Statistics Code of Practice**

Country visited: Norway

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Statistics Norway is an independent statistical office backed by a sound statistical law. The organisation has an excellent service culture which delivers high quality products to the satisfaction of users. Staff are proud of their work and proud to work for Statistics Norway. The office is technically advanced, with all products delivered through the Internet, the office being at the forefront of early Internet delivery. Data collection is strongly based on administrative registers.

Statistics Norway either largely or fully meets the principles of the Code of Practice. All indicators within the principles of Professional Independence, Mandate for Data Collection, and Statistical Confidentiality are fully met. This is partly a result of the Statistics Act, but also the culture of the office. There were impressive levels of documentation available to staff and a real willingness to learn across all staff. There is a strong level of international cooperation, especially across the Nordic group of countries, which enhances the quality of work.

There is a substantial level of research activity in Statistics Norway. Users commented at the need to carefully balance this work with the principles of impartiality and integrity of the office. The senior management were very conscious of this potential conflict.

The major area of improvement required is around the Quality Commitment, however there are strong indications that work is planned here and will be achieved in a short time period.

2. INTRODUCTION

With the adoption of the European Statistics Code of Practice, the Statistical Programme (SPC) committed itself to adhering to its principles. At its meeting on 25 May 2005, the SPC endorsed a stepwise monitoring procedure for the implementation of the Code over three years during which countries' self-assessments should be combined with elements of peer review, benchmarking and monitoring on the basis of the explanatory indicators added to each principle of the Code.

During December 2005 / January 2006 the National Statistical Institutes and Eurostat have completed their self-assessments, the results have been summarised by Eurostat in a report submitted to the Economic and Financial Committee in May 2006 which has been published on the Eurostat website.

As a next step towards implementation of the Code, the European Statistical System is organising peer reviews to complement the self-assessments starting with 2006. They are considered a vital element for the implementation of the Code of Practice given their capacity to encourage the sharing of best practice and to contribute to transparency in what is, essentially, a self-regulatory approach. This approach is designed to enhance accountability and to help building trust in the integrity of the European Statistical System, its processes and outputs.

The Code of Practice peer reviews follow a common methodology focusing on the institutional environment and dissemination part of the Code comprising the following principles: (1) Professional independence, (2) Mandate for data collection, (3) Adequacy of resources, (4) Quality commitment, (5) Statistical confidentiality, (6) Impartiality and Objectivity and (15) Accessibility and Clarity. In principle, the peer review is limited to the National Statistical Institute and its co-ordination role within a dispersed national statistical system. A short

document provided by the National Statistical Institute which summarises key aspects of the functioning of the national statistical system is published together with this report.

During a three days visit on-site and on the basis of information material provided by the National Statistical Institute and Eurostat prior to the review, peer reviews yield a report assessing compliance with the Code of Practice at indicator level and by principle following a four point assessment scale. The report includes a refined set of improvement actions covering all principles of the Code which are being used to feed the monitoring process of the implementation of the Code in the European Statistical System.

While the peer reviewers will undertake to base their assessment to the extent possible on factual information, it is worth noting some of the limitations of the peer review process. For example, peer reviewers are dependent upon the resources made available to them (though experienced reviewers can be expected to identify where appropriate information is not forthcoming). In addition these reviews are conducted on a strategic, organisation-wide and system wide basis. Accordingly it is not straightforward to ascertain that certain practices or behaviours or systems operate in all statistical domains.

3. FINDINGS PER PRINCIPLE

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.

Overall assessment: Statistics Norway has a long tradition of strong professional independence which is derived from a comprehensive legal act (*the Act of 16 June 1989 no. 54 concerning official statistics and Statistics Norway*) http://www.ssb.no/english/about_ssb/ and is continuously maintained and nourished through the provision of a high quality statistical service to the Norwegian society. A high degree of credibility and trust in Statistics Norway is regularly observed in public opinion surveys http://www.ssb.no/english/about_ssb/ and it was also confirmed as such by all users who were interviewed by the Peer Review team.

Indicator 1.1: The independence of the statistical authority from political and other external interference in producing and disseminating official statistics is specified in law.

Assessment: **Fully met**

Comments: It is clearly stated in section 3-1 of the Statistics Act that Statistics Norway is the central body for production and dissemination of official statistics and bears the main responsibility for ensuring that the object of the Statistics Act is fulfilled. Section 4-1 stipulates that "Statistics Norway is a professionally autonomous institution which shall be placed under such ministry as determined by the King", currently the Ministry of Finance. Note that by 'the King' in legal acts is meant the Government. The legal empowerment of Statistics Norway in this regard is well known to all stakeholders both internal and external.

Indicator 1.2: 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.

Assessment: Fully met

Comments: The post of the Director General of Statistics Norway corresponds to the highest non-political level in the public sector. The nomination is made by the government following a transparent selection procedure which involves an open competition among several highly qualified candidates. The duration of service is 6 years which can be extended to a maximum of 12 years. Regular meetings with the other DGs of the sub-ordinate bodies of the Ministry of Finance as well as top-managers' meetings of the whole public sector ensure senior level access to relevant policy authorities and administrative public bodies.

Indicator 1.3: 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.

Assessment: Fully met

Comments: Statistics Norway produces about 85% of all official statistics in Norway and has a strong co-ordination role of the overall statistical production in the country (Statistics Act section 3-3). The Director General has the main legal and operational responsibility for ensuring that official statistics in Norway are produced and disseminated in an independent manner. The Peer Review team gathered enough evidence that these responsibilities are exercised in a professional and impartial way, entirely independent of political authorities and other interest groups.

Indicator 1.4: 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.

Assessment: Fully met

Comments: The Statistics Act (section 3-1) provides strong and explicit responsibilities to Statistics Norway regarding the identification and prioritisation of needs for official statistics, and decisions with respect to the content, methods, analysis and timing of the statistical releases. The Peer Review team found no evidence where the integrity of methods, nor the independence and authority of Statistics Norway in these matters have been called into question. Statistics Norway provides methodological assistance and expert advice to other national producers of statistics as well.

Indicator 1.5: The statistical work programmes are published and periodic reports describe progress made.

Assessment: Fully met

Comments: Statistics Norway has a formal legal obligation to (discuss and) submit to its executive committee (section 4-2 of the Statistics Act) annual / multi-annual programmes and annual reports (on the execution of the programme). The annual work programme http://www.ssb.no/english/about_ssb/activityplan_200714.pdf, a strategy paper for the years ahead http://www.ssb.no/vis/english/about_ssb/strategy/strategy2007.pdf, a reflection on future

statistical challenges http://www.ssb.no/english/about_ssb/strategy/2007-01_web.pdf, as well as the annual reports devoted to the execution of the previous year's programme http://www.ssb.no/english/about_ssb/annual_report/2006/annual_report_2006.pdf, are all published on the web site of Statistics Norway. These documents are available in Norwegian and English languages. It should be noted that Statistics Norway has a 20 year long tradition in establishing formal work programmes and annual reports.

Indicator 1.6: Statistical releases are clearly distinguished and issued separately from political/policy statements.

Assessment: **Fully met**

Comments: Statistical releases are factual and do not contain any political or policy comments. Internal procedures and training of staff ensure that statistical releases remain quite neutral and descriptive. The Peer Review Team gathered enough evidence on this aspect both by examining a number of various subject-matter statistical releases <http://www.ssb.no/english/subjects/calendar/calendar4m.shtml> and by interviewing the major stakeholders.

Indicator 1.7: The statistical authority, when appropriate, comments publicly on statistical issues, including criticisms and misuses of official statistics.

Assessment: **Fully met**

Comments: It is only in the event of serious criticism and / or obvious misuse, where Statistics Norway intervenes publicly at the appropriate level and provides the necessary comments and explanations. The need to comment when statistics are misused is documented in the Dissemination Policy (chapter 12). The reported cases in this regard are infrequent. Statistics Norway has adopted a preventive and cautious approach; good documentation (metadata), objective and comprehensive analyses and a very good level of public confidence in Statistics Norway have kept the risk of misuses to minimum levels.

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.

Overall assessment: We consider that the Statistics Act of 16 June 1989, no 54 as well as the Regulations concerning the implementation and supplementation of the Statistics Act provide Statistics Norway with a solid, comprehensive and unambiguous mandate for data collection. The way in which this mandate is implemented by the statistical authorities is exemplary. There is a very good awareness among all stakeholders about the existence and importance of a dedicated legal basis for the collection and dissemination of official statistics.

Indicator 2.1: The mandate to collect information for the production and dissemination of official statistics is specified in law.

Assessment: **Fully met**

Comments: Section 3-1 of the Statistics Act clearly specifies that "Statistics Norway is the central body for production and dissemination of official statistics". Section 2-2 of the same Act underlines that the King (the Government) "may by regulation or resolution impose upon any person an obligation to provide the information which is necessary for the production of official statistics.....," and that "a deadline may be set for the provision of information and stipulations may be made regarding the form in which the information should be given". The authority given to the Government in section 2-2 of the Statistics Act is delegated to the Ministry of Finance and sub-delegated to Statistics Norway.

In our opinion the provisions of the Statistics Act in this regard provide Statistics Norway with a very powerful mandate for data collection. We found strong evidence that this mandate is exercised in a professional and sound manner; the guiding principle is to maintain an optimal balance between information requirements and the need to keep response burden to acceptable levels. The legal requirement is supported by a Strategy for Data Collection (Plans and Reports 2007/21) and a Dissemination Policy (Document 2007/10).

Indicator 2.2: The statistical authority is allowed by national legislation to use administrative records for statistical purposes.

Assessment: **Fully met**

Comments: The legal framework, i.e. the Statistics Act (sections 3-2 and 3-3) and its implementing regulations (chapter 1 and 2), which prescribes in great detail the rights of Statistics Norway in this regard, together with the way in which the actual use of administrative records for statistical purposes is performed, constitute a "best practice". One of the main success factors in this respect is the continuous collaboration and co-ordination of work between the 'owners' of administrative data and Statistics Norway. It is also important to highlight that the Regulations – laid down by the Ministry of Finance on 13 February 1990 - concerning the implementation and supplementation of the Statistics Act, create an excellent basis for co-ordination and collaboration. The contribution of the Statistics Council is also very important in ensuring a very good level of statistical co-ordination.

Indicator 2.3: On the basis of a legal act, the statistical authority may compel response to statistical surveys.

Assessment: **Fully met**

Comments: Section 2-2 of the Statistics Act specifies the rights of Statistics Norway to compel response to statistical surveys (see comments on indicator 2.1). The whole of chapter 3 of the implementing and supplementing Regulations is dealing with the rights of Statistics Norway to impose "compulsory fines" and stipulates the way in which such fines and their amounts are set. In particular, section 3-1 underlines that "Statistics Norway may impose compulsory fines for failure to respect the deadline for the provision of information laid down pursuant to § 2-2 of the Statistics Act". In practice, Statistics Norway exercises these powers in a moderate way. Compulsory responses are required in a limited number of household surveys and in most enterprise surveys.

Principle 3: Adequacy of Resources

The resources available to statistical authorities must be sufficient to meet European Statistics requirements.

Overall assessment: Statistics Norway has a responsive and well qualified staff and generally good computing resources. There is a good level of training for staff and a good Human Resource strategy. There were user concerns over the balance between commissioned work and basic funding and also over the retention rates for statistical staff.

Indicator 3.1: Staff, financial, and computing resources, adequate both in magnitude and in quality, are available to meet current European Statistics needs.

Largely met

Comments: By the end of 2006, Statistics Norway had a staff of 967. This has increased since 2000, and has increased in the last year as a result of a transfer of statistical functions (and associated staff) from the Norges Bank. 63% of the staff are graduates as reported in the 2006 Annual Report.

Users noted that there is a very strong service culture within Statistics Norway. Staff are easy to contact – names and telephone numbers are available in statistical releases. Staff are keen to respond to users' requests and have enthusiasm for their statistics. Staff noted that they could always use more resources. They believe that productivity is improving, with increased outputs for the same staff levels. Users continue to demand greater levels of information.

There is an ongoing process of investing in staff. Two areas have been highlighted as being at risk. There is a concern about maintaining the quality of economic staff in the National Accounts and Financial Statistics work areas and the perceived high turnover. Some users have seen this as being a potentially critical risk, especially given the use of these statistics in policy areas. It was noted that Statistics Norway may be seen as a training ground for economists for the Norges Bank and the Ministry of Finance, who can offer higher salaries.

IT resources are adequate in that Statistics Norway have continued to invest in IT systems, rather than have to depend on significant one-off projects and the associated risks.

Statistics Norway's budget is supplemented by user funding for commissioned work – currently contributing about 30% to the total expenditure budget. There is a need to review this process with what seems to be a significant level of variable funding. Some users have asked if some of this work should not be part of the core funding of the statistical office. A small amount of special funding has been provided to undertake the additional requirements for work for European statistics.

Indicator 3.2: The scope, detail and cost of European Statistics are commensurate with needs.

For European level reply

Indicator 3.3: Procedures exist to assess and justify demands for new European Statistics against their cost.

For European level reply

Indicator 3.4: Procedures exist to assess the continuing need for all European Statistics, to see if any can be discontinued or curtailed to free up resources.

For European level reply

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.

Overall assessment: The quality commitment of Statistics Norway is clear and strong. A proof of this is its inclusion in its strategic plan for 2007 (http://www.ssb.no/vis/english/about_ssb/strategy/strategy2007.pdf) where there is a section headed "Quality in every process" and which ends by noting that statistics shall meet the six dimensions of the ESS Quality system.

The systematic quality work in Statistics Norway is based on TQM principles and is characterised by: User orientation (user needs is the point of departure for defining quality in statistics); Process orientation (improvements require control of and changes in processes); Documentation and data (changes must be based on data about processes); Participation by all (project and teamwork is important); Management and continuity.

Two elements can be highlighted in relation to quality work in Statistics Norway: a) The availability of "quality pilots", who participate in projects as advisors and coaches in quality and process work, b) Research and analysis, which are a significant element in the Statistics Norway work, act as a quality check for the statistics as they help uncover potential weaknesses.

Quality is largely acknowledged by the users as being a strong point of Statistics Norway. Nevertheless, there is still room for improvements and for making the processes more systematic. This has prompted Statistics Norway to include in its strategy for 2007 a system for internal audits of the statistical production, which should allow the identification of common solutions to problems involving several departments.

Indicator 4.1 Product quality is regularly monitored according to the ESS quality components.

Assessment: **Largely met**

Comments: One of the strategies defined for 2007 is the implementation of systematic quality work, the main goal of which is to make sure that the production of statistics is as efficient and user-oriented as possible.

Regular monitoring of the statistical products is carried out, and the components used in such monitoring are those defined by the ESS. At present, the number of surveys monitored is close to 75%, with information about most ESS quality components available on their website

(section 'About the statistics', which is a systematic description of statistics including references to the main quality components of the statistical products, e.g. LFS: http://www.ssb.no/english/subjects/06/01/aku_en/).

Indicator 4.2 Processes are in place to monitor the quality of the collection, processing and dissemination of statistics.

Assessment: **Largely met**

Comments: Collection, processing and dissemination are well documented and regularly monitored.

Since 1995 Statistics Norway has a management document, which is annually revised, and it includes instructions, rules, guidelines and operative routines necessary to process the information.

On the other hand, Statistics Norway has trained quality pilots, who participate in projects as facilitators to ensure that quality principles are followed. For quality improvement projects, techniques for mapping the processes involved are important, and these quality pilots are trained in such techniques and in identifying and measuring critical process parameters.

It is also notable that the Department of IT and Data Collection has used Balance Scorecard (BSC) as a management tool, in order to assess the quality. In addition, and in relation to data collection, a proof of the quality assessment in this process is the commitment for reducing the response burden, as the document entitled *Coping with decreasing response rates in Statistics Norway. Recommended practice for reducing the effect of non-response* (http://www.ssb.no/emner/00/90/rapp_200629/rapp_200629.pdf) shows.

The project currently in place for developing a common system for data editing, which provides a standardised solution based on best practice, should be enhanced. The Activity Plan for 2007 (Plans and Reports 2007/14) includes a section (3.4) which highlights the work in 2007 for reviewing quality in every process, building upon the strategy document.

Indicator 4.3 Processes are in place to deal with quality considerations, including trade-offs within quality, and to guide planning for existing and emerging surveys.

Assessment: **Largely met**

Comments: The Department of Management Support, recently created, has the coordinating responsibility of the systematic quality work in Statistics Norway. This department has been established to put more pressure on quality work and facilitate a more systematic approach to measures for improvements in Statistics Norway. Facilitating the use of developed Current Best Methods is also the responsibility of the new department.

There is an advisory quality network headed by the director of this department. An open (but internal) forum for quality work is important for information and exchange of experiences.

During the different interviews with producers and users of the information, they were asked about different issues related to the quality components. None of the interviewed people (users/researchers, respondent organisation ...) were seriously critical about any of the quality principles. Moreover, they praised the documentation accompanying the statistics, especially the metadata system used.

In addition, Statistics Norway has a number of documents in Norwegian, only for internal use, explaining the rules to be applied in the different procedures, as well as the responsibilities of each unit and the recommendations to be followed in every different situation, for both existing and emerging surveys.

Indicator 4.4 Quality guidelines are documented and staff are well trained. These guidelines are spelled out in writing and made known to the public.

Assessment: **Fully met**

Comments: Internally, Statistics Norway has a specific site on the Intranet devoted to quality issues, which includes the most important handbooks, guidelines and recommendations on quality.

In the same way, it is notable that *Statistics Norway Strategy 2007* includes a specific section devoted to *Quality in every process*. This comprises the following issues: statistics based on best methods; systematic quality assurance of processes and products; the right expertise; prepared for change.

During the last few years most staff have attended courses on project and teamwork (150 staff) and 300 new employees through induction training. The Peer Review team gathered enough evidence that the quality principles are, in general terms, known by staff. Selected staff in Statistics Norway are trained as quality pilots (see the overall assessment on Principle 4). They support projects and processes as advisers. There are about 40 pilots. This work was started with assistance by the US company Westat.

On the website, a short summary of the ESS quality components, as well as a link to the European Statistics Code of Practice, is available (http://www.ssb.no/english/about_ssb/), although there is still very little documentation publicly available.

Indicator 4.5 There is a regular and thorough review of the key statistical outputs using external experts where appropriate.

Assessment: **Largely met**

Comments: Users noted that there was no pressing need to audit the statistical products of Statistics Norway. It was noted by Statistics Norway's staff that reviews were often in response to something not working. There were methodology reviews on an ad hoc basis covering about 60 – 70 products each year. In addition in 2002 some of Statistics Norway's statistical products were subject to a Data Review of Standards and Codes (ROSC) by the IMF, which resulted in a favourable report. There has also been an external evaluation of their research activities and inventories of their national accounts.

Also here the quality pilots play a significant role, as they act as internal (although they are not part of the project team itself) auditors.

Besides, Statistics Norway has a long tradition in research using their own data, and this has the value added of being a control on statistical quality.

A system for systematic internal audits of the statistics production will be established (2007). Teams with expertise in methods, IT and statistics will evaluate each set of statistics successively. Such audits and improvements have to be based on data, and several projects to provide more systematic and better data on products and processes have started.

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.

Overall assessment: In broad outline, confidentiality and security is guaranteed by Statistics Norway, as shown by the existence of clauses within the Statistics Act, the Security Committee and the Confidentiality Committee. Statistical confidentiality is guaranteed by law, and breaches of it are punishable. Staff of Statistics Norway have to sign confidentiality agreements. Further, data handling is in accordance with Act of 14. April 2000 no. 31 relating to the processing of personal data (Personal Data Act) and the Data Inspectorate's decision of 16 March 2006.

The availability of much documentation on data security must be highlighted (especially notable is the availability of an internal *Security Handbook*), without forgetting the physical security at the premises. Besides, the protocols for access to microdata are very comprehensive.

The confidentiality policy constitutes a best practice.

Indicator 5.1 Statistical confidentiality is guaranteed in law.

Assessment: **Fully met**

Comments: Section 2-4 of the Statistics Act, Obligation of secrecy, requires that "any person performing work or service for a body which prepares or produces official statistics has a duty to prevent unauthorised persons from gaining knowledge of whatever information (...) concerning personal matters, administrative or business matters, (...) collected for the purpose of producing official statistics". This obligation also applies after the person leaves the institution.

Indicator 5.2 Statistical authority staff sign legal confidentiality commitments on appointment.

Assessment: **Fully met**

Comments: When new employees join Statistics Norway, they sign a confidentiality agreement. This document includes the obligations they take, the legal basis for these obligations and the potential penalties in case of breach. Moreover, the signing of such document takes place in the presence of their supervisor, in order to ensure that all the terms in the commitment have been correctly understood.

Indicator 5.3 Substantial penalties are prescribed for any wilful breaches of statistical confidentiality.

Assessment: **Fully met**

Comments: Section 5-1 of the Statistics Act states that "breaches of the obligation of secrecy may be punishable pursuant to section 121 of the Penal Code".

The Penal Code states in its Article 121 that "any person who wilfully or through gross negligence violates a duty of secrecy that (...) is a consequence of his service or work for any state or municipal body shall be liable to fines or imprisonment for a term not exceeding six months.

If he commits such a breach of duty for the purpose of acquiring for himself or another person an unlawful gain or if for such a purpose he in any way uses information that is subject to a duty of secrecy, he shall be liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding three years.”

None of these penalties has been imposed to date.

Indicator 5.4 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.

Assessment: **Fully met**

Comments: Handbooks on confidentiality are available related to the production and the dissemination processes. However, these documents are only partly released to the public.

Nevertheless, it was checked during the interviews that junior staff, general users and researchers were aware of the rules and instructions for making data anonymous. Besides, the existence of two committees in Statistics Norway, the Security Committee and the Confidentiality Committee, must be highlighted.

Indicator 5.5 Physical and technological provisions are in place to protect the security and integrity of statistical databases

Assessment: **Fully met**

Comments: There are protocols assuring the information integrity, and there is a central IT unit in charge of this task. Statistics Norway has a security handbook for IT operations, which describes guidelines and procedures that apply to IT infrastructure and customer services. The handbook is only available for authorised personnel.

The security of the premises is controlled by using ID cards, with the premises being divided in different areas to which only authorised people can enter. Also visitors must observe strict protocols during their visit to the premises.

Indicator 5.6 Strict protocols apply to external users accessing statistical microdata for research purposes.

Assessment: **Fully met**

Comments: Permission to access statistical data from Statistics Norway is provided for in sections 3-1 and 2-5 of the Statistics Act, and in points 1 and 2 of the Data Inspectorate's decision of 16 March 2006.

Statistics Norway can make non-anonymous data (microdata and detailed statistics) available for statistical purposes within research and public planning. The data are only available for a limited period and are linked to a specific project. The specific research work shall be documented in the project documentation.

Data from voluntary surveys can only be accessed where the respondent has given explicit consent. Where the data have been made anonymous, the requirement for consent does not apply.

Before data can be made available to a researcher, he/she shall sign a confidentiality agreement, besides a written agreement between Statistics Norway and the research institution.

Researchers showed their interest in accessing microdata by the Internet, applying the necessary security measures (currently they only have access to microdata in CD-ROM).

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.

Overall assessment: There is a very strong level of impartiality and objectivity within the work of Statistics Norway. This is emphasised in the Policy on Ethics and Standards and was well supported by users. A strong point of the organisation was the depth of documentation provided in the Dissemination Policy, which supports the release practices of Statistics Norway. The Policy was comprehensive in covering the indicators of this principle.

Indicator 6.1: Statistics are compiled on an objective basis determined by statistical considerations.

Fully met

Comments: Users commented that there was strong objectivity with the work of Statistics Norway. The approval process for release of statistics is at the Director level and these procedures are documented in the [Dissemination Policy \[2007/10\]](#). There are good training programmes within the office to ensure that staff know the requirement to produce impartial statistics.

Indicator 6.2: Choices of sources and statistical techniques are informed by statistical considerations.

Fully met

Comments: The choice of sources and methods is founded in the Statistics Act. The Ethics and Statistics Report [2007/19] notes "Statistics Norway employees shall be objective and independent and use the best methods available" Further the Act requires Statistics Norway to be the central body for the production of official statistics and that it will "develop statistical methods and apply statistics to analysis and research". Producers or users confirmed that sources and methods chosen were based on statistical considerations.

Indicator 6.3: Errors discovered in published statistics are corrected at the earliest possible date and publicised.

Fully met

Comments: An error in the Labour Force survey results in 2006 was corrected quickly and notification was made to key users. However because of the critical nature of the statistics, more could have been done to inform of the error.

This mistake has proven a good basis for learning and for improving documentation. The Statistics Norway Dissemination policy [Document 2007/10] now contains a section [7] on Guidelines for correcting errors. The Dissemination branch of Statistics Norway was very mindful of the need to have this policy and to keep it up-to-date.

Indicator 6.4: Information on the methods and procedures used by the statistical authority are publicly available.

Fully met

Comments: The About Statistics web pages contain information on the methods and procedures of Statistics Norway. All data has this documentation, with the exception of historic data which is no longer produced. While this documentation is comprehensive, there is further work which could be undertaken to standardise the quality of the documentation.

Indicator 6.5: Statistical release dates and times are pre -announced.

Fully met

Comments: Statistical Release calendar is updated every four months, with pre-announced times. All statistical releases are made through the Internet and all released at 10:00 am. The Dissemination Policy [Document 2007/10] contains a section on procedures for the Advance release calendar [section 2.3]. This additionally lists procedures for managing releases when products do not meet the original timetable. Punctuality is monitored and reported through the Annual Report.

Indicator 6.6: 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.

Largely met

Comments: There has been a strong tradition of providing equal access to all users. This is one of the ten key quality principles for the dissemination of statistics [[section 1 Dissemination Policy Document 2007/10](#)]. This is further expanded in section 2.1 of the Dissemination Policy. The following exceptions are noted in the Dissemination Policy Document:

"The Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development are sent figures being prepared for public finances in connection with their work on the national budget, revised national budget and municipal reports";

- In cases where statistics are based on administrative data, "data owners may, in principle, have current knowledge of figures before the release";
- "Where user-financed statistics are not subject to the information obligation, as is the case for a number of interview surveys, customers can have access to the results before they are released."

These exceptions need to be better noted on the Internet.

Users were aware of the equal access policy and were not able to get early access to data. There had been no recent instances of leaks occurring.

Indicator 6.7: Statistical releases and statements made in Press Conferences are objective and non-partisan.

Fully met

Comments: Objectivity is a key value of Statistics Norway. Their Policy on Ethics and Statistics [Report 2007/19] leads with the statement: "Statistics Norway employees shall be objective and independent, and use the best methods available such that society has confidence in Statistics Norway's statistics and analysis". This document also uses as a starting point for the need for Statistics Norway to adhere to international standards, including the European Statistics Code of Practice and the UN Fundamental Principles.

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.

Overall assessment:

Statistics Norway provides very good access to its data. This is well documented in *Statistics Norway's Dissemination Policy April 2007 – Document 2007/10* which provides very good information for both internal and external use. The levels of accessibility were supported by interviews with users and more broadly by the results of the user satisfaction survey. Key areas where users saw the need for improvement were to further improve web accessibility and metadata.

Indicator 15.1: Statistics are presented in a form that facilitates proper interpretation and meaningful comparisons.

Fully met

Comments: All statistics and most analyses are published in both Norwegian and English. At least a quarter of the material is published in New Norwegian (nynorsk), one of Norway's two official languages. A strength of the outputs from Statistics Norway is the high degree of use of standard concepts and classifications. This was specifically noted by users, and is a result of Statistics Norway producing 85% of Norway's official statistics as well as the role of Statistics Norway in coordinating official statistics.

The Dissemination policy has sections on Common Technical rules, Notes, Sources, Information and References, Orthography, Wording and Style, and Presentation of Figures. This is very good example of documenting standard rules for publication.

Indicator 15.2: Dissemination services use modern information and communication technology and, if appropriate, traditional hard copy.

Fully met

Comments: Statistics Norway was a leader with Internet, first having a web site in 1995. All statistical outputs are released free of charge through the web site. Detailed data is available through the *Statistical Bank*. Paper publications are also available for selected outputs [see Dissemination Policy section 3.2]. Internet publications are stored electronically by the National Library of Norway.

The user survey indicated that improvements could be made to the web site to improve accessibility. The main requirements are improved navigation and search facilities. Statistics Norway has started improving these aspects as part of continuing to improve web services.

Indicator 15.3: Custom-designed analyses are provided when feasible and are made public.

Fully met

Comments: Tailor-made analyses are available and are appreciated by users. The pricing policy [section 2] notes that no customer may have exclusive rights to the results of the work. All tailor-made analyses are made public following release. Users noted that tailor-made jobs are generally completed promptly with very good service from staff.

Indicator 15.4: Access to microdata can be allowed for research purposes. This access is subject to strict protocols.

Fully met

Comments:

See indicator 5.6.

Indicator 15.5: Metadata are documented according to standardised metadata systems.

Largely met

Comments: Statistics Norway provides metadata through its About Statistics section on the website. Work has been focused on coverage of metadata. There needs to be now a focus on the quality of the metadata. Training is provided for users as to how to access Statistics Norway's data. In addition to courses for journalist and librarian students, courses are also provided for politicians and diplomats – all free of charge.

Indicator 15.6: Users are kept informed on the methodology of statistical processes and the quality of statistical outputs with respect to the ESS quality criteria.

Largely met

Comments: Statistics Norway's users made good use of the About Statistics page to access information about methodology and quality. For intensive users, such as researchers, there is still not the depth of metadata available for their needs.

4. CO-ORDINATION ROLE OF THE NATIONAL STATISTICAL INSTITUTE

The Norwegian statistical system is highly centralised with Statistics Norway producing about 85% of all official statistics. The co-ordination role of Statistics Norway is very strong and it is clearly specified in section 3-3 of the Statistics Act as well as in chapter 2 of the Regulations concerning the implementation and supplementation of the Statistics Act. Among the other governmental agencies which produce statistics, the main ones are: National Insurance Administration, Norwegian Institute of Public Health, Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, The Norwegian Labour and Welfare Organisation, Norwegian Pollution Control Authority. The website of Statistics Norway provides links to other producers of statistics and relevant administrative registers in a very systematic and clear way.

Statistics Norway is exercising its co-ordination mandate in an effective and exemplary way which is based on a comprehensive co-operation and collaboration approach with the other producers of statistics and owners of administrative registers. A significant step in this context was the creation of the Statistics Council in 2004. It is an advisory body, headed by the Director General of Statistics Norway and consists of 18 producers of statistics or central register owners. Its main role is to strengthen the co-ordination of official statistics in Norway. The detailed mandate, composition, as well as the minutes of meetings and the annual reports of the Statistics Council are published on the website of Statistics Norway in the following address: <http://www.ssb.no/omssb/sf/>.

The effectiveness of statistical co-ordination in Norway is recognised by all other producers of official statistics and it has been underlined by the Board in several annual reports.

5. GOOD PRACTICES TO BE HIGHLIGHTED

1. Statistics Norway enjoys a high level of credibility and trust in the Norwegian society. Professional independence, a service culture and professionalism are the key drivers. Moreover, there is a very good awareness among all stakeholders about the existence and importance of a solid and comprehensive legal act relating to official statistics and Statistics Norway.

2. A formal approach to human resource development through continuous training in quality, communication, methodology, etc. Especially the training in project and teamwork and development of Quality Pilots, who participate in improvement projects as facilitators to ensure that quality principles are followed.

3. Statistics Norway is leading in the development of statistics with the use of registers. This is based on a legal act that allows the extensive use of the public registers, security systems assuring the right use of the information, and the continuous collaboration and co-ordination of work between the 'owners' of administrative data and Statistics Norway. This wide use of administrative data allows reductions in response burden, which is one of the strategic objectives set out by Statistics Norway.

4. A very efficient approach is ensuring confidentiality while allowing access to microdata for research purposes. A Security Committee, which is part of the organisation and management of Statistics Norway, is responsible for the security of both the premises and the documentation used in the different stages of the statistical production process. Besides, there is a privacy ombudsman, who has adviser and controller functions. Regarding confidentiality issues, a Confidentiality Committee has been set and is in charge of solving all doubts that could arise on the delivery of microdata for a particular project. On the other hand, all these security measures are reflected in clear rules and written agreements to be signed by researchers and public planners accessing microdata.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE PEER REVIEW TEAM

The peer review team recommends that the improvement actions presented in connection to each principle should be implemented. This should take place in accordance to the proposed timetables or earlier.

7. LIST OF IMPROVEMENT ACTIONS BY PRINCIPLE OF THE CODE

Principle 1: Professional Independence

Improvement actions

★ No improvement actions proposed

Timetable

Principle 2: Mandate for Data Collection

Improvement actions

★ No improvement actions proposed

Timetable

Principle 3: Adequacy of Resources

Improvement actions

★ Continuing to improve staff competencies through active training, development and recruitment of staff. This can be implemented through using the recently developed Human Resource Strategy [Plans and Reports 2007/17].

★ Statistics Norway should review the balance of work between that provided from its basic funding and that provided by Commissioned work. The outcome of the review should provide a view as to the core work of the office that should be baseline funded, and options for setting priorities for resource allocation.

Timetable

Implementation is already underway.

Ongoing, first report in 2008.

Principle 4: Quality commitment

Improvement actions

★ For all statistical outputs of Statistics Norway quality should be monitored and made publicly available according to the European Statistical System (ESS) components of quality. This should provide more comprehensive and systematic quality measures than are now produced.

★ Statistics Norway develops a programme of systematically reviewing statistical outputs and processes using external experts where appropriate.

★ Develop a guide to planning new surveys

Timetable

This should be fulfilled no later than the end of 2009.

To have the programme in place by the end of 2007.

To have the guide completed in 2008.

Principle 5: Statistical Confidentiality

Improvement actions

★ No improvement actions proposed

Timetable

Principle 6: Impartiality and objectivity

Improvement actions

★ The few exceptions to providing pre-release access need to be better documented on the web site.

Timetable

Immediately.

Principle 7: Sound Methodology

Improvement actions

★ No improvement actions proposed

Timetable

Principle 8: Appropriate Statistical Procedures

Improvement actions

Statistics Norway will continue to standardise methods and processes.

Timetable

Ongoing

Principle 9: Non-Excessive burden on respondents

Improvement actions

Statistics Norway will implement actions outlined in their Strategy for data collection [Plans and Reports 2007/21]. In particular methods of improving electronic data collection need to be applied.

Timetable
Ongoing.

Principle 10: Cost Effectiveness

Improvement actions

★ No improvement actions proposed

Timetable

Principle 11: Relevance

Improvement actions

★ No improvement actions proposed

Timetable

Principle 12: Accuracy and Reliability

Improvement actions

★ Statistics Norway will implement best practices for reducing survey non response.

★ Development of improved and more automatic routines for avoiding errors in publishing, in accordance with the dissemination policy (Documents 2007/10).

Timetable
To be completed in 2007.
To be completed in 2007.

Principle 13: Timeliness and Punctuality

Improvement actions

★ No improvement actions proposed

Timetable

Principle 14: Coherence and Comparability

Improvement actions

★ Statistics Norway will implement the new standard industrial classification (NACE revision 2).

Timetable
To be completed in 2010.

Principle 15: Accessibility and clarity

Improvement actions

★ The Statistics Norway web site will be further improved. It needs to improve user accessibility with better search functions and navigation.

★ Statistics Norway should continue the work of developing their metadata. There needs to be an evaluation of the quality of information in the About Statistics web pages. Additionally, more detailed metadata needs to be made available to satisfy the requirements of researchers.

Timetable
To be completed in 2008.
To be completed in 2009.

Principle 15: Accessibility and clarity

Improvement actions

Statistics Norway works on improving the infrastructure for providing researchers access to microdata.

Statistics Norway aims at improving the Statistics Bank with better functionality, guidelines and more content in English.

Timetable

To be completed in 2008.

To be completed in 2008

Statistics Norway is encouraged to publish scientific articles in Norwegian newspapers explaining and illustrating the impact of alternative definitions on statistics regarding some phenomena of major public concern (unemployment, poverty, cost of living, etc.).

At least two articles per year should be published, highlighting in a clear and comprehensive way the quantitative impact of alternative methods and definitions. Start date: 2008

Annex A: Programme of the visit

PEER REVIEW STATISTICS NORWAY 4 – 6 JUNE 2007

1 st day Discussion with internal stakeholders (all internal staff)			
4 June	09.00 - 09.30	Welcome and introduction of programme, organisational matters	Mr. Ø. Olsen Mr. H-V. Sæbø Mr. J. Byfuglien Ms. I. Horverak
	09.30 – 11.00	Meeting with management and senior staff, Principles 1, 2, 3	Mr. Ø. Olsen Mr. H-V. Sæbø Mr. T. Valen Ms. C. Wilberg
	11.00 – 11.30	Meeting with management and senior staff, Principle 5	Mr. Ø. Olsen Mr. H-V. Sæbø Mr. P-I. Severeide Mr. J-K.Tønder Mr. T. Valen
	11.30 – 12.30	Meeting with management and senior staff, Principles 6, 15 (incl. User survey)	Mr. Ø. Olsen Mr. H-V. Sæbø Ms. A. Skranefjell
	12.30 – 13.30	Lunch break	
	13.30 – 14.15	Interview with DG and Quality manager, Principle 4	Mr. H-V. Sæbø Mr. J. Bjørnstad Ms. G. Olsen
	14.15 – 15.45	Meeting with junior staff, principles 1-6, 15	Ms. H.K. Nylænder Ms. L. D. MacMahon Mr. O. Stensrud Ms. N. Brøyn Mr. J. O. Folsland Mr. R. Bjørnstad Mr. G. Claus
	15.45 - 16.15	Meeting with representatives from some production units	Mr. B. Bleskestad Ms. E. Vassenden Mr. H. Næsheim Mr. O. Moss

2 day Discussion with external stakeholders			
5 June	09.00 – 10.00	Meeting other national data producers: Statistical Council	NIFU-STEP, Studies in Innovation, Research and Education (Ms. W. Maus, Ms. S Sundnes) The Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (Mr. E. Hoffmann) Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training (Mr. K. Bråtane) The Norwegian Institute of Public Health (Ms. H. Lyshol) The Norwegian Labour and Welfare Organisation (Mr. S. Langeland)
	10.00 – 11.00	Meeting with main users: Ministry of Finance as administrative body and as user	Ministry of Finance (Ms. S. Russwurm, Mr. S. Odnæs, Mr. M. P. Johansen, Ms. T. Francke)
	11.00 – 12.30	Meeting with main users	The National Bank of Norway (Mr. V. Hvidsten) The Ministry of Trade and Industry (Mr. C. Gjersem) The Ministry of Agriculture and Food (Mr. H. Grotli) The Norwegian Agricultural Economics Research Institute (Mr. L. J. Rustad) The Ministry of the Environment (Mr. Ø. Lone)
	12.30 – 13.30	Lunch	The National Bank of Norway (Mr. V. Hvidsten, Mr. J. Qvigstad, Mr. J. Byfuglien)
	14.00 – 15.00	Meeting with representatives from researchers	The research Council of Norway (Ms. I. Stangeby) Frisch Centre (Mr. E. Hernæs)
	15.00 – 16.00	Meeting with representative(s) from media	Aftenposten (Mr. S. Bjørnstad) NRK (The Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation) (Ms. K. Moksness)
	16:00 – 17:00	Meeting with representatives of respondents/respondents' organisations	The Federation of Norwegian Commercial and Service Enterprises (Mr. L. E. Haartveit)

3 day Conclusions			
6 June	10.00 – 11.30	Meeting with management to sum-up and detailed review of list of improvement actions for all principles	Mr. Ø. Olsen Mr. H-V. Sæbø Mr. Å. Cappelen Ms. C. Wilberg Mr. O. Ljones Ms. A. Skranefjell Mr. J. Byfuglien Ms. I. Horverak
	11.30 – 13.00	Meeting with top management: conclusions, recommendations and follow-up (improvement actions)	Mr. Ø. Olsen Mr. H-V. Sæbø Mr. J. Byfuglien Ms. I. Horverak

8. LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Internal Staff

Øystein	OLSEN	Director General	
Hans Viggo	SÆBØ	Deputy Director General	Head of Department of Management Support
Cecilie	WILBERG	Deputy Director General	Head of Department of Administrative Affairs
Johan Kristian	TØNDER	Deputy Director General	Head of Department of Social Statistics
Anne	SKRANEFJELL	Deputy Director General	Head of Department of Communication
Ådne	CAPPELEN	Deputy Director General	Head of Department of Research
Olav	LJONES	Deputy Director General	Head of Department of Economic Statistics
Paul Inge	SEVEREIDE	Head of Division	Division for Population Statistics
Jan	BJØRNSTAD	Head of Division	Division for Statistical Methods and Standards
Bjørn	BLESKESTAD	Head of Division	Division for Energy and Industrial Production Statistics
Elisabetta	VASSENDEN	Head of Division	Division for Health Statistics
Helge	NÆSHEIM	Head of Division	Division for Labour Market Statistics
Ole	MOSS	Head of Division	Division for Primary Industry Statistics
Jan	BYFUGLIEN	Senior Adviser	International Secretariat
Heidi	NYLÆNDER	Senior Adviser	Department of Management Support
Lise Dalen	MC MAHON	Senior Adviser	Division for Credit Market Statistics
Olav	STENSRUD	Senior Adviser	Division for Financial Markets
Nina	BRØYN	Senior Adviser	Division for Health Statistics
Thorleiv	VALEN	Senior Legal Adviser	Department of Management Support
Roger	BJØRNSTAD	Researcher	Unit for Macroeconomics
Jon Olav	FOLSLAND	Journalist	Department of Communication
Gunnar	CLAUS	Adviser	Head of Department of Management Support
Grete	OLSEN	Adviser	Department of Management Support
Ingrid	HORVERAK	Adviser	International Secretariat

Other participants

Kirsten Wille	MAUS	NIFU-STEP, Studies in Innovation, Research and Education	
Susanne	SUNDNES	NIFU-STEP, Studies in Innovation, Research and Education	
Eivind	HOFFMANN	The Norwegian Directorate of Immigration	
Knut	BRÅTANE	Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training	
Heidi	LYSHOL	The Norwegian Institute of Public Health	
Stein	LANGELAND	The Norwegian Labour and Welfare Organisation (NAV)	
Sigrid	RUSSWURM	The Ministry of Finance	
Sigurd	ODNÆS	The Ministry of Finance	
Morten Petter	JOHANSEN	The Ministry of Finance	
Tove	FRANCKE	The Ministry of Finance	
Jan	QVIGSTAD	The National Bank of Norway	
Vetle	HVIDSTEN	The National Bank of Norway	
Carl	GJERSEM	The Ministry of Trade and Industry	
Håkon	GROTLI	The Ministry of Agriculture and Food	
Øyvind	LONE	The Ministry of the Environment	
Ingunn	STANGEBY	The research Council of Norway	
Erik	HERNÆS	Frisch Centre	
Sigurd	BJØRNESTAD	Aftenposten	
Kristin	MOKSNES	NRK (The Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation)	
Lars E.	HAARTVEIT	The Federation of Norwegian Commercial and Service Enterprises	