

PEER REVIEW REPORT

**ON COMPLIANCE WITH THE CODE OF PRACTICE AND
THE COORDINATION ROLE OF THE NATIONAL STATISTICAL INSTITUTE**

REPUBLIC OF ALBANIA

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CAPI	Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing
CATI	Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing
CoP	European statistics Code of Practice
ESS	European Statistical System
GSBPM	Generic Statistical Business Process Model
INSTAT	Institute for Statistics
IPA	Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NSI	National Statistical Institute
NSS	National Statistical System
ONA	Other National Authority
QM	Quality Management

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The National Statistical System (NSS) of the Republic of Albania consists of the Institute of Statistics (INSTAT), the Bank of Albania and the Ministry of Finance and Economy.

The NSS operates on the basis of the Law on Official Statistics, according to which INSTAT is the main producer and disseminator of official statistics, as well as being the coordinator of the NSS. The Law also establishes the Statistical Council as an integral part of the system of official statistics.

It was clear to the Peer Review team that INSTAT enjoys a high level of trust and respect, and that its independence is widely accepted. The staff met by the Peer Review team showed high involvement and dedication. Junior staff showed motivation and enthusiasm, and praised the open, supportive environment within INSTAT. The Peer Reviewers formed the impression that INSTAT has a high reputation among all stakeholders.

The Law on Official Statistics gives INSTAT a strong coordinating role within the NSS. INSTAT also plays a significant role in the EU accession process as the main provider of statistical information on the economic and social system in Albania. INSTAT has established a strong network, signing many memorandums of understanding with ministries, data providers, universities, and other agencies.

Statistical production in INSTAT is based to a large extent on surveys. In both business and household surveys, the response rates are quite high. The Law on Official Statistics provides INSTAT with good access to administrative data, and INSTAT is making increasing use of such sources in statistical production.

The Peer Review team identified three broad areas in which compliance with the European statistics Code of Practice (CoP) could be enhanced. These issues are related to strengthening the institutional environment, developing quality management further and improving cost-effectiveness, and improving the communication with users and other stakeholders.

The amended Law on Official Statistics came into force in May 2018. It changed the legal status of INSTAT to that of an independent institution reporting directly to Parliament, strengthened the functioning of the NSS, improved coordination, changed the role and composition of the Statistical Council, etc. At this stage it is too early to assess precisely how the NSS and its compliance with the CoP will be affected by the changes of the Law. At any rate, there are a number of points that should be taken into account in the implementation process of the new Law. One is that the scope of official statistics should be redefined and indeed expanded, at the very least to include all European statistics. Other issues include the need to improve access to this expanded range of official statistics, reporting annually on progress in the NSS, responding to misinterpretation and misuse, and the need to reinforce the protection of statistical confidentiality.

Given the limitations of resources and, in the EU accession process, the increasing obligations to comply with the statistical acquis, INSTAT should further develop its quality management framework by working more systematically on the improvement of process and product quality and by enhancing cost-effectiveness. To that purpose, INSTAT should improve the framework and the role of quality management, modernise methods of data collection, improve statistical production processes, set targets for timeliness, and measure the response burden. More efficiency could also be gained by developing a comprehensive system of cost accounting.

Communication with users and other stakeholders is an area that INSTAT should develop further, and the following improvements are proposed: increase the transparency of the Statistical Council; establish permanent user groups for key statistical areas; work more proactively with the media; improve statistical releases; and strengthen cooperation with academia.

Generally, the Peer Review team considers that the NSS of Albania is largely compliant with the CoP. The recommendations in this report are intended to further enhance compliance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Strengthen the institutional environment

1. INSTAT should assess the statistics produced by ministries and other agencies and, having taken account of the opinion of the Statistical Council, establish a broader list of official statistics. This list should include all European statistics. The five-year programme should be adapted accordingly. (European statistics Code of Practice, Coordination.)
2. INSTAT should establish a committee of the producers of official statistics. The committee should be chaired by the Director General of INSTAT, and membership should consist of the most senior statistical representatives from the other producers. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principle 11)
3. INSTAT should establish and maintain a common dissemination portal for all official statistics. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principle 15 and Coordination.)
4. INSTAT should publish a common release calendar covering all official statistics, showing the date and time of publication for each release, and it should monitor and assess the compliance of producers with this calendar. (European statistics Code of Practice, Indicator 6.5 and Coordination.)
5. INSTAT should coordinate and publish a detailed annual report describing progress in implementing the five-year programme of official statistics. (European statistics Code of Practice, Indicator 1.5 and Coordination)
6. INSTAT should exercise its right to react publicly to the misuse or misinterpretation of official statistics, for example by issuing a statement on its website in a small number of well selected cases. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principle 1.)
7. INSTAT should: establish an internal Confidentiality Committee; provide practical guidelines for staff on how best to protect confidentiality in the processing and dissemination of statistics; and publish a Confidentiality Policy on its website explaining, in simple terms, to stakeholders (respondents, providers of administrative data, researchers accessing microdata) how they ensure that confidentiality is properly protected. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principle 5.)
8. INSTAT should undertake an assessment of any threats that may be posed to statistical legislation by other legislative acts, including the Law on Archives and the Law on the Right to Information. If statistical confidentiality is shown to be compromised, INSTAT should propose legislative changes to the Government of Albania to ensure that statistical confidentiality is properly protected. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principle 5)
9. INSTAT should further develop its quality management framework by establishing a quality steering committee. Quality management should focus on projects that are needed to support activities in all statistical areas, such as the development of detailed quality guidelines and the publication of a quality statement. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principle 4)

Develop quality management further and improve cost-effectiveness

10. INSTAT should increase the use of electronic techniques of data collection and reduce the resources devoted to interviewing in household and business surveys. (European statistics Code of Practice, Indicator 10.2)
11. To increase cost-efficiency, INSTAT should aim to use the postal service as far as possible to deliver questionnaires and reminders in business surveys where paper questionnaires continue to be used. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principle 10)
12. INSTAT should propose to the relevant organisations that software for maintaining company records takes the needs of official statistics into account. (European statistics Code of Practice, Indicator 10.2)
13. The Methodological Unit of INSTAT should provide methodological guidelines that are appropriate for all statistical products, should ensure that these guidelines are followed and should update the guidelines periodically. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principle 7)
14. To reduce costs, including training and support costs, INSTAT should rationalise the range of IT tools that are used in statistical processing. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principles 7 and 10)
15. INSTAT should plan the implementation steps for harmonising their statistical processes towards the Generic Statistical Business Process Model, in cooperation with other NSIs where possible. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principle 7)
16. INSTAT should develop guidelines for methodological reviews, including self-assessment and statistical auditing. A plan should be devised to apply reviews to the INSTAT portfolio over the coming years. (European statistics Code of Practice, Indicator 4.4)
17. INSTAT should set a timeliness target for each statistical product, and it should monitor and report on progress. (European statistics Code of Practice, indicator 13.1)
18. INSTAT, and other national authorities producing European statistics, should measure the response burden systematically for all their surveys. Senior management should monitor the burden and set targets for its reduction over time. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principle 9.)
19. INSTAT should establish a comprehensive system that enables the estimation of the costs of statistical processes and products, and should use the resulting information for management purposes including the benchmarking of efficiency and cost-effectiveness. (European statistics Code of Practice, Indicator 10.1)

Improve communication with users and other stakeholders

20. The Statistical Council should get more public visibility. The agenda, the minutes, and where relevant, other documentation of the meetings of the Statistical Council should be published on a dedicated page on the INSTAT website. (European statistics Code of Practice, Indicator 11.1.)
21. INSTAT should establish a system of permanent user groups for key statistical areas. (European statistics Code of Practice, Indicator 11.1)
22. In order to raise awareness of official statistics, INSTAT should work more proactively with journalists and news media by providing further seminars, workshops or informal events. A dedicated page of the INSTAT website should provide the media with

information tailored for their purposes. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principle 15)

23. INSTAT should provide a headline and improved commentary in its statistical releases. (European statistics Code of Practice, Indicator 15.1.)
24. INSTAT should continue to strengthen cooperation with the academic world by developing methodologies, collaborating in the production of official statistics, training, and using microdata for deeper analysis. It should assign the coordination of the cooperation activities with the academia to a special unit. The five-year programme and annual plans should provide greater detail on planned cooperation activities, and the annual reports should provide details about the outcomes. A dedicated page of the INSTAT website should facilitate communication with the academic world and researchers. (European statistics Code of Practice, Indicator 7.7)

2. INTRODUCTION

This peer review of the Institute of Statistics (INSTAT) of the Republic of Albania was undertaken in the framework of the Eurostat-funded project “IPA 2015 Multi-beneficiary Statistical Cooperation Programme”. The company GOPA, under contract with Eurostat, was responsible for organising all activities and tasks relating to the peer review.

The peer review report is part of a series of assessments, the objective of which is to evaluate the extent to which National Statistical Institutes (NSIs) and the European Statistical System (ESS)¹ comply with the European statistics Code of Practice (CoP). This series of assessments is based on a similar round of peer reviews carried out in EU Member States, and follows, as much as possible, the same methodology, slightly adapted to the context of the enlargement countries.

The CoP, which sets out a common quality framework for the ESS, was first adopted in 2005 by the Statistical Programme Committee and updated in 2011 by its successor, the European Statistical System Committee. The CoP — 15 principles and related indicators of good practice — covers the institutional environment, the statistical production process and the output of European statistics. The ESS is committed to fully complying with the CoP and is working towards its full implementation. Periodic assessments review progress towards reaching this goal.

The first global assessment, a round of peer reviews in 2006–2008, was followed by a round of ‘light’ peer reviews and adapted global assessments in the enlargement countries in 2010–2012. The light peer reviews explored how the NSIs and Eurostat were progressing in implementing the parts of the CoP relating to the institutional environment and dissemination of statistics (principles 1–6 and 15). This resulted in reports for each NSI and Eurostat, available on the Eurostat website². These reports also include a set of improvement actions covering all the principles of the CoP; these formed the basis of the annual monitoring of the implementation of the CoP in the enlargement countries in the period 2011–2015.

In line with the second round of reviews carried out in EU Member States in 2014–2015, the scope of this round of peer reviews in the enlargement countries is broader: the assessment of CoP compliance covers all principles; the CoP compliance of selected other national producers of official statistics (as well as the NSI) in each country is assessed; and the way in which statistical authorities coordinate the production and dissemination of official statistics within their statistical systems is explored.

It should be underlined that there is a fundamental difference between the reports in the previous round of peer reviews conducted in 2006–2008 and the reports from this round. In the 2006–2008 round, compliance with principles 1 to 6 and 15 of the CoP was assessed by means of a four-level scale (fully met; largely met; partly met; and not met) and improvement actions were agreed on all 15 principles. After five years of continuous development most of the improvement actions have been implemented and significant progress towards full compliance with the CoP has been made. Therefore, rather than stating the state of play for all principles of the CoP, the reports from this second round focus mainly on issues where full compliance

¹ The ESS is the partnership between the Union statistical authority, which is the Commission (Eurostat), the national statistical institutes (NSIs) and other national authorities responsible in each Member State for the development, production and dissemination of European statistics. This Partnership also includes the EFTA /EEA countries.

² <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/quality/first-round-of-peer-reviews>

with the CoP has not been found or where further improvements are recommended by the Peer Review team.

In order to gain an independent view, the peer review exercise has been externalised and an audit-like approach, where all the answers to the self-assessment questionnaires have to be supported by evidence, has been applied. Each peer review in the enlargement countries is conducted by three reviewers and has four phases: completion of self-assessment questionnaires by a country; their assessment by peer reviewers; a peer review visit; and the preparation of reports on the outcomes.

The peer review of Albania was conducted by Mr Peter Hackl (lead expert), Mr Torbioern Carlquist and Mr Adrian Redmond, who conducted a peer review visit to Tirana on 4 to 8 June 2018. The programme of the visit is in Annex A and the list of participants in Annex B.

This report focuses on compliance with the CoP and the coordination of European statistics within the Albanian statistical system. The report highlights some of the current strengths of the statistical system and contains recommendations for improvement. Improvement actions developed by INSTAT on the basis of this report will be published within the four-week period starting when the final report is sent to the NSI.

3. BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE NATIONAL STATISTICAL SYSTEM

Legislation

The current Law on Official Statistics (No 17/2018), which came into force in May 2018, sets out the principles of official statistics (which are guided by the principles of the European statistics Code of Practice) and defines the role of INSTAT and the National Statistical System (NSS). The NSS consists of INSTAT, the Bank of Albania, and “Other public authorities determined under the official statistics production program”. (In the current programme, the only authority in this category is the Ministry of Finance and Economy.) The Law provides the mandate for data collection and for access to administrative data. It stipulates that the Director General of INSTAT is appointed by Parliament, “following a transparent and public selection procedure”, for a five-year term, renewable once, and it covers the role and membership of the Statistical Council. The law also describes in some detail the coordination role of INSTAT. Other pieces of legislation which are relevant for the NSS include the Law on Civil Servants, the Law on Management of Budgetary System, the Law on Protection of Personal Data and the Law on Census of Population and Dwellings.

Mission

In its long-term development strategy for the period 2017-2030, INSTAT states that its mission is “to produce neutral, transparent and up to date statistics that help users in the process of development and transformation in the economic and social spheres within the country”. As its vision, INSTAT “aims to provide reliable and comparable data, adapting methodologies and adding a list of statistical indicators”. INSTAT has four strategic objectives for 2030, focusing on quality, administrative data sources, professional capacity, and IT systems.

Structure of INSTAT and the National Statistical System

INSTAT consists of nine Directorates. Five of these are statistical directorates, and the remaining four are horizontal directorates: the IT Directorate, the Finance and Supporting Services Directorate, the European Integration and Project Coordination Directorate, and the Regional Statistics Directorate. The nine directorates are further subdivided into 36 Units. One of the units within the Regional Statistics Directorate coordinates the work of the 12 regional statistical offices. The following units report directly to the Director General: the Internal Audit Unit, the Publication and Dissemination Unit, the Coordinator for the National Statistical System and the Coordinator for Quality Statistics.

About 190 permanent staff members work in the INSTAT head office and regional offices. In addition, there are 310 permanent interviewers and 1,600 temporary (mainly part-time) interviewers.

The Statistical Council contains 11 members. In accordance with the Law on Official Statistics, these members represent local government, the Bank of Albania, the Ministry of Finance and Economy, main users (two members), academia (two members), civil society, Chambers of Commerce, and the media; the Director General of INSTAT is an ex officio member.

INSTAT is the coordinator of the NSS and is responsible for the majority of official statistical products. The two other national authorities (ONAs) producing official statistics are responsible for products that are closely connected to their main activities. The Bank of Albania is responsible for Balance of payments, International investment position, Financial accounts, Sectoral balance sheets, Foreign affiliates trade statistics, etc. The Ministry of Finance and Economy is responsible for Government finance statistics and Public debt statistics. Other

statistics are produced and disseminated by various Ministries and agencies, but these statistics are not official statistics because they are not included in the five-year programme. For example, statistics are produced by the Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Tourism and Environment, and the General Directorate of State Police.

Widespread use is made of memorandums of understanding (MoUs). There are many bilateral MoUs between INSTAT and other agencies, and there is a trilateral MoU between INSTAT, the Bank of Albania and the Ministry of Finance and Economy. The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development conducts surveys on behalf of INSTAT in the field of agriculture statistics, and this activity is regulated by an MoU. There are also various working groups established between INSTAT and the ONAs or data providers.

Statistical Programme

INSTAT drafts the multiannual statistical programme in cooperation with other producers, and then submits the draft to Government, which proposes it to Parliament for approval. The current five-year programme covers 2017-2021. Annual operational plans for the implementation of the programme are also prepared by INSTAT, sent to Government and approved by Parliament. Under the Law on Official Statistics, INSTAT is to report on the implementation of the five-year programme annually (to Parliament) and every four months (to the Statistical Council).

Statistical products

The statistical products of INSTAT cover a wide range of topics. The INSTAT website, the main dissemination channel, provides statistics and other information in Albanian and English. Statistics are disseminated in press releases, publications and the online database. The database allows users to generate tables interactively and to download the results in Excel or other formats. INSTAT also prepares multi-domain publications such as Albania in Figures, Women and Men in Albania, and the Statistical Yearbook.

An annual release calendar on the INSTAT website shows the planned dates for the release of NSS statistics. Any modification in the release calendar is publicised and explained. All users have equal access to statistical data at the release time and there is no privileged access beforehand. The Bank of Albania and the Ministry of Finance and Economy also disseminate statistics on their own websites, and they publish their own annual calendars.

INSTAT makes widespread use of Facebook for keeping in contact with users.

INSTAT conducted its first user satisfaction survey in 2017 and the results have been published on its website. This survey is planned to be repeated annually.

4. COMPLIANCE WITH THE CODE OF PRACTICE AND THE COORDINATION ROLE WITHIN THE NATIONAL STATISTICAL SYSTEM

4.1 STRENGTHS OF THE NATIONAL STATISTICAL INSTITUTE IN RELATION TO ITS COMPLIANCE WITH THE CODE OF PRACTICE AND TO ITS COORDINATION ROLE

The new Law on Official Statistics, which came into force in May 2018, is a significant improvement on the previous version and provides a strong and comprehensive legal basis for INSTAT and the NSS. The law makes the independence of INSTAT very clear. The supervising authority for INSTAT is no longer the Government but the Albanian Parliament. The Parliament also appoints the Director General, who now has the same status as the highest public servants. The Statistical Council is more representative of users than the previous Council. The Law gives INSTAT and other statistical authorities a very strong legal mandate to collect data from any available source, including registers and files of administrative data. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principles 1, 2 and 11).

The Law also provides INSTAT with a very strong coordinating role within the NSS. As part of its coordination function, INSTAT places strong reliance on signing MoUs with statistical authorities, holders of administrative data and other agencies: 29 MoUs have already been signed and others are under negotiation. The MoUs state the mutual obligations regarding the exchange of data and the implementation of the activities in the statistical programme, and also aim at compliance with internationally agreed standards, classifications and methodologies. (European statistics Code of Practice, Coordination and Principle 7).

The Peer Review team was informed that the expectation of the accession process to the EU has raised the awareness of the relevance of reliable and high-quality statistical data within Albania. Public authorities are showing willingness to cooperate with INSTAT and the NSS, and in some cases holders of administrative registers have modified systems to accommodate statistical needs. (European statistics Code of Practice, Coordination and Principle 8)

Discussions with ministries, data providers, researchers, the media, and international organisations showed that INSTAT enjoys a high level of trust. Generally, its independence and impartiality are not questioned. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principles 1 and 6).

INSTAT also has good relationships with respondents, and manages to achieve quite high response rates in both business and household surveys. For example, the response rate is 85-90% in the Short-term Business Statistics survey, about 80% in Structural Business Statistics, 85-90% in the Labour Force Survey, and 84% in the Survey of Income and Living Conditions. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principles 4, 8 and 12).

The staff met by the Peer Review team showed high involvement and dedication. Junior staff are well educated, showed motivation and enthusiasm, and praised the open, supportive environment within INSTAT.

4.2 ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This section presents the issues where the Peer Reviewers consider that the overall level of compliance with the CoP throughout the NSS could be enhanced:

- Strengthen the institutional environment;
- Develop quality management further and improve cost-effectiveness;

- Improve communication with users and other stakeholders.

These issues are discussed with specific recommendations in the following sections of the report.

4.2.1 STRENGTHEN THE INSTITUTIONAL ENVIRONMENT

The Peer Review team identified five areas where INSTAT could further improve the institutional environment for official statistics:

- Expand the range of official statistics;
- Facilitate access to official statistics;
- Improve reporting on progress;
- Respond to misinterpretation and misuse;
- Reinforce the protection of statistical confidentiality.

4.2.1.1 EXPAND THE RANGE OF OFFICIAL STATISTICS

In Albania, while the terms “National Statistical System” and “official statistics” are precisely defined, these definitions are very narrow. The NSS is defined in the context of the five-year Official Statistics Programme. Article 11.1 of the Law on Official Statistics states that:

“The National Statistical System shall consist of the following official statistics producers:

- a) Institute of Statistics and its subordinate regional statistical offices;
- b) Bank of Albania;
- c) Other public authorities determined under the official statistics production program.”

In the current five-year programme, for 2017-2021, the only producer in category (c) is the Ministry of Finance and Economy. Accordingly, the NSS in Albania currently consists of just three organisations: INSTAT, the Bank of Albania and the Ministry of Finance and Economy. Official Statistics are defined to be the statistics produced by these organisations that are listed in the Programme.

Some organisations that produce European statistics are not included in the Programme. These organisations are therefore not part of the NSS and the statistics they produce are not official. The Peer Reviewers believe that there are also other ministries and agencies producing statistics that are of sufficient quality and relevance to be included in the scope of official statistics. The scope of both the NSS and of official statistics should therefore be expanded. INSTAT should assess the quality of the statistics produced by ministries and other public agencies, and create a new, expanded list of official statistics. This list should include, at the very least, all European statistics. INSTAT should seek the views of the Statistical Council, who can speak on behalf of the user, on the relevance of these statistics before the list of official statistics is finalised. The five-year programme should then be adapted to cover this broader list of official statistics. The NSS, which is defined to include all official statistics producers, would then automatically expand. It should be mentioned that, Ideally, all members of the NSS should comply with the CoP when producing official statistics.

To achieve better coordination of European and other official statistics, the Peer Review team recommends that:

1. INSTAT should assess the statistics produced by ministries and other agencies and, having taken account of the opinion of the Statistical Council, establish a broader list of official statistics. This list should include all European statistics. The five-year programme should be adapted accordingly. (European statistics Code of Practice, Coordination)

Coordination is very strong in the new version of the Law on Official Statistics. According to Article 12, “the National Statistical System shall be coordinated by INSTAT to ensure that all official statistics producers observe the standards, concepts, definitions, classifications and statistical methodologies adopted by the United Nations and Eurostat, wherever possible”. This coordination includes “all activities for the development, production and dissemination of official statistics”, as well as “statistical programming and reporting, monitoring quality, methodologies, data transmission and communication on the activities of the National Statistical System”. A key component of this coordination is the five-year programme, which sets the strategy for the development of official statistics and the NSS. The programme is prepared by INSTAT in cooperation with the other statistical authorities and takes into account the opinion of the Statistics Council. INSTAT has taken practical steps to implement its coordination role. It has established a post, “Coordinator for National Statistical System”, reporting to the Director General. The three current members of the NSS (INSTAT, the Ministry of Finance and Economy, the Bank of Albania) have signed a memorandum of understanding, they share a common release calendar (published by INSTAT), and they have set up working groups for particular statistics.

With the expansion of the NSS to encompass all producers of official statistics (see Recommendation 1 above), the Peer Reviewers consider that the opportunity should be taken to strengthen coordination and communication by setting up a committee of producers of official statistics, called perhaps the Coordination Committee for Official Statistics. The committee should be chaired by the Director General of INSTAT, and membership should consist of the most senior statistical representatives from the other producers. It should meet at least annually. This platform should deal with quality issues, compliance with the CoP, programming and planning, methodological support, standards and classifications, technical assistance, uniform dissemination policies, training opportunities, and the exchange of information about current issues. The committee would ensure the implementation of guidelines and standards for the development, production and dissemination of statistics throughout the NSS. Apart from strengthening coordination and communication, the forum would provide the expanded NSS with a stronger identity. The committee could set up subcommittees or working groups to discuss topics of interest in greater detail.

To improve coordination and enhance compliance with the CoP, the Peer Review team recommends that:

2. INSTAT should establish a committee of producers of official statistics. The committee should be chaired by the Director General of INSTAT, and membership should consist of the most senior statistical representatives from the other producers. (European statistics Code of Practice, Coordination)

4.2.1.2 FACILITATE ACCESS TO OFFICIAL STATISTICS

To facilitate the accessibility of all official statistics produced by the Albanian NSS, users should easily find the required statistics without needing to know which national authority produced them. The INSTAT website does not provide links to the official statistics produced by other authorities. The Peer Review team considers that INSTAT should enhance the branding

and accessibility of official statistics by maintaining a portal with direct links to all the official statistics produced by members of the NSS.

INSTAT publishes the common release calendar on the home page of its website. Journalists interviewed by the Peer Reviewers confirmed that they rely on it a lot. The calendar for the current year is published in December of the previous year. It can be filtered by date, by theme and by producer (INSTAT, Bank of Albania, Ministry of Finance and Economy). The calendar shows the date of release, but not the time of day. INSTAT publishes at 11am, the Bank of Albania at 10am, and the Ministry of Finance and Economy publishes any time during the working day of the day in question. The Peer Review team considers that each producer should publish at a predefined time, and that the common calendar should show the time of release as well as the date. The calendar should also be expanded to cover all producers of official statistics (see Recommendation 1), and INSTAT should routinely check the compliance of producers with the release calendar.

To enhance compliance with the CoP, the Peer Review team recommends that:

3. INSTAT should establish and maintain a common dissemination portal for all official statistics. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principle 15 and Coordination)
4. INSTAT should publish a common release calendar covering all official statistics, showing the date and time of publication for each release, and it should monitor and assess the compliance of producers with this calendar. (European statistics Code of Practice, Indicator 6.5 and Coordination)

4.2.1.3 IMPROVE REPORTING ON PROGRESS

Indicator 1.5 of the CoP states that “The statistical work programmes are published and periodic reports describe progress made”. As regards programming and planning, INSTAT coordinates, with the other producers in the NSS, the five-year programme for official statistics. The current programme, covering the period 2017-2021, is a detailed document providing information on the main objectives of national statistics, a SWOT analysis of the NSS, planned improvements in the legal framework, and the detailed objectives and innovations for each statistical area. There are also annual plans, though these relate to the work of INSTAT rather than the NSS as a whole.

The programmes and plans provide useful and relevant information for users and other stakeholders, but progress reports are also important.

A final report on the programme is not published separately but is included as part of the next programme: Section 1 of the current programme for 2017-2021 is “The Progress of the Program of Official Statistics for 2012-2016” and is essentially a summary report on the previous five-year programme. The Peer Reviewers consider that monitoring and reporting are important elements of programming, and that progress reports on the programme should be published at least annually. This would also be in line with Article 13.2(d) of the new Law on Official Statistics, which states that INSTAT should “submit to the Albanian Parliament within April of the following year, the annual report on its activity, which should include the functioning of the National Statistical System, the implementation of the Official Statistics Program and the Annual Plan implementation”. Four-monthly progress reports on the programme are prepared for the Statistical Council, but these reports are not published.

Annual reports are already produced, but these relate solely to the activities and performance of INSTAT. The most recent annual report, for 2017, provides information on progress and

general developments during the year, gives details on planned activities that were not carried out, provides measures of the respondent burden and other performance indicators, and summarises the results of the user satisfaction survey. The report also describes progress towards European integration in the field of statistics and provides details of the associated support received from the EU and other members states. However, the report provides limited information on progress in specific statistical areas. To intensify relations with users and to provide greater visibility to official statistics, the Peer Review team believes that the annual report should, as mentioned above, cover the NSS as a whole, and that it should provide greater detail on statistical production.

To further enhance compliance with the CoP, the Peer Reviewers recommend that:

5. INSTAT should coordinate and publish a detailed annual report describing progress in implementing the five-year programme of official statistics. (European statistics Code of Practice, Indicator 1.5 and Coordination)

4.2.1.4 RESPOND TO MISINTERPRETATION AND MISUSE

Indicator 1.7 of the CoP states that the National Statistical Institute should “comment publicly on statistical issues, including criticisms and misuses of statistics as far as considered suitable”. National legislation does not explicitly provide for this, though it is implied in Article 14.2(d) of the Law on Official Statistics, which states that INSTAT shall be responsible for “providing professional assistance for the correct interpretation of official statistics”. INSTAT does not yet have a formal policy in this area, and to date they have been rather reluctant to appear in the media in the context of political debates involving statistics. INSTAT could not provide the Peer Reviewers with recent examples of intervention. The unpublished draft of INSTAT’s Dissemination Policy document states “In case of misinterpretation or misuse in the media, the PDIU [the Publication & Dissemination of Information Unit within INSTAT] will coordinate with the editor whether a notification of the error, an explanatory article written by INSTAT or an interview with a representative of INSTAT will be published by the media channel to explain the misinterpretation or misuse. If necessary, INSTAT may publish the explanation in the form of a press release.” The Peer Reviewers support the approach proposed by INSTAT.

To further enhance compliance with the CoP, the Peer Review team recommends that:

6. INSTAT should exercise its right to react publicly to the misuse or misinterpretation of official statistics, for example by issuing a statement on its website in a small number of well selected cases. (European statistics Code of Practice, Indicator 1.7)

4.2.1.5 REINFORCE THE PROTECTION OF STATISTICAL CONFIDENTIALITY

The legal provisions for protecting statistical confidentiality are set out in the Law on Official Statistics, and of course there are internal rules and procedures on statistical confidentiality, information security and the protection of personal data. There is also an internal regulation containing ethical rules for processing personal data, signed between INSTAT and Data Protection Commissioner. All INSTAT staff sign a confidentiality statement on appointment. There is no central organisational structure within INSTAT for dealing with statistical confidentiality, and each statistical production unit is responsible for ensuring the confidentiality of its own data. The Peer Reviewers consider that INSTAT would be in a stronger position in this area if it set up an internal Confidentiality Committee. This committee could deal with internal procedural rules on technological, organisational and security measures, and

it could discuss the anonymisation of microdata files and the protection of confidentiality in statistical tables. It could also react to emerging developments and threats.

The Peer Reviewers also consider that INSTAT should provide its staff with detailed guidance on the practical aspects of the principles of statistical confidentiality. It should develop detailed internal rules for data protection and for ensuring confidentiality in the production and dissemination process. The proposed Confidentiality Committee could play a useful role in this area.

Indicator 5.4 of the CoP calls for the publication of a confidentiality policy. Aspects of such a policy can be deduced from legal and other documentation on the INSTAT website, but there is no single policy document on statistical confidentiality. The Peer Reviewers consider that INSTAT should produce and publish a consolidated policy document to explain to its stakeholders how they protect confidentiality.

To further enhance compliance with the CoP, the Peer Review team recommends that:

7. INSTAT should: establish an internal Confidentiality Committee; provide practical guidelines for staff on how best to protect confidentiality in the processing and dissemination of statistics; and publish a Confidentiality Policy on its website explaining, in simple terms, to stakeholders (respondents, providers of administrative data, researchers accessing microdata) how they ensure that confidentiality is properly protected. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principle 5)

The Peer Reviewers became aware, during their visit to INSTAT, of two areas of possible threat to statistical confidentiality from national legislation.

The first concerns the deposition of records with the Central State Archive of the Republic of Albania. Article 32 of the Statistics Law states:

“Storage of collected data

1. The official statistics producers shall be obligated to store the data collected electronically or through scanned questionnaires, at least 10 years from the date of their collection.
2. Upon the expiration of the deadline provided for in Paragraph 1 of this Article, the data shall be sent to the Central State Archive, in accordance with the Law No. 9154, date 06.04.2003, On Archives.”

Therefore, the electronic or scanned returns (not the paper returns, which are destroyed) are sent to the national archive after 10 years. After a certain time has passed, these become public records. For most records, this is 25 years after the date of creation. For records containing personal data, it is 50 years or longer after the date of creation. Article 65 of the Law on Archives (No 9154 of 6.11.2003) permits limiting access in certain cases, but it is not clear whether any of the cases listed would cover records collected under a promise of statistical confidentiality. The Peer Review team considers that the deposition of statistical returns with the national archives, for them to become public records in due course, to be unusual, and it considers the time intervals before release to be rather short. The team suggests that legal advice should be sought on the meaning and interpretation of the Law on Archives in this context and that, if necessary, legislative changes should be sought to ensure that statistical confidentiality is adequately protected.

The second area of possible threat to statistical confidentiality relates to the Law on the Right to Information (No 119/2014). As explained by INSTAT to the Peer Review team, the facts can

be summarised as follows. A particular organisation had requested that the Bank of Albania provide it with a copy of the list of companies and their investments as used in preparing the Bank's report on Foreign Direct Investments. The Bank had obtained this information from INSTAT. The data is publicly available in the National Registration Center, but INSTAT had done some modifications in its version for statistical purposes. The Bank of Albania refused the request, citing the confidentiality provisions of the Law on Official Statistics. The requester appealed this to the Commissioner for Personal Data Protection and the Right of Information, who decided in February 2018 that the information should be released. The Bank took the issue to court and in May 2018 the Administrative Court of First Instance in Tirana agreed with the Commissioner and decided that the information should be released. One of the reasons cited by the judge was that the information sought was not confidential and was publicly available on the National Registration Centre's website.

This is a recent issue, and the Peer Review team have neither the resources nor the legal expertise to examine it more deeply. As with the Archives issue, the Peer Reviewers believe that legal advice should be sought on the implications of this decision and, if necessary, legislative clarification or amendments should be made.

To ensure the protection of statistical confidentiality, the Peer Reviewers recommend that:

8. INSTAT should undertake an assessment of any threats that may be posed to statistical legislation by other legislative acts, including the Law on Archives and the Law on the Right to Information. If statistical confidentiality is shown to be compromised, INSTAT should propose legislative changes to the Government of Albania to ensure that statistical confidentiality is properly protected. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principle 5)

4.2.2 DEVELOP QUALITY MANAGEMENT FURTHER AND IMPROVE COST-EFFECTIVENESS

The Peer Reviewers identified six areas of improvement of the quality management and cost-effectiveness of INSTAT:

- Improve the framework and the role of quality management;
- Modernise the methods of data collection;
- Improve the statistical production processes;
- Set targets for timeliness and measure the response burden;
- Develop a system of cost accounting.

4.2.2.1 IMPROVE THE FRAMEWORK AND THE ROLE OF QUALITY MANAGEMENT

The quality infrastructure of INSTAT consists of the Coordinator for Quality Statistics, who reports to the Director General, and the Quality Unit, which is based in the IT directorate and is responsible for the implementation of quality management (QM). A recent development in INSTAT related to QM is the publication of quality reports which are now available for 14 statistical products.

A crucial feature of quality management is its ability to identify potentials for improvement. For that purpose, many NSIs have a QM steering committee which convenes regularly to discuss relevant quality issues. Installing a QM steering committee would professionalise the QM framework and help drive quality improvement. The Peer Reviewers recommend that INSTAT

should establish such a committee. It should be chaired by the Coordinator for Quality Statistics, it should include three or four senior staff members as well as some junior experts, and it should report to the Director General. The central principle of QM, and the focus of the QM steering committee, should be continuous improvement. In its work, it should strive to ensure that the user perspective is covered.

Projects that should be prioritised by the steering committee include: the development of detailed quality guidelines to be followed by the line departments, setting standards for quality reports and ensuring that these standards are being followed, and the production of user-oriented quality reports for all statistical products. Indicator 4.1 of the CoP states, in part, “Quality policy is defined and made available to the public.” As INSTAT has not published such a policy (it has published a brief Commitment to Quality, which is not quite the same thing), the QM steering committee should also prioritise the production and publication of a quality policy document.

The visibility of QM activities both within INSTAT and externally provides an important determinant of the reputation of INSTAT. Quality projects should be well planned, publicised in programmes and plans, and progress and results should be provided in the annual reports.

To further enhance the compliance with the CoP, the Peer Review team recommends that:

9. INSTAT should further develop its quality management framework by establishing a quality steering committee. Quality management should focus on projects that are needed to support activities in all statistical areas, such as the development of detailed quality guidelines and the publication of a quality statement. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principle 4)

4.2.2.2 MODERNISE THE METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION

About 190 permanent staff members work in the INSTAT head office and regional offices. In addition, there are 310 permanent interviewers and 1,600 temporary (mainly part-time) interviewers. Having such a large proportion of staff devoted to data collection is disproportionate.

By and large, INSTAT uses paper questionnaires for household and business surveys. The substitution of paper questionnaires by electronic techniques of data collection should be actively pursued. Some use is made of CAPI (Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing) for household surveys, though it should be used more extensively. INSTAT will implement software for CATI (Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing) for household surveys shortly, though it will be some time before it is operational. For business surveys, INSTAT has trialled web-based questionnaires for the larger enterprises, but the take-up rate was disappointing. The reasons for this should be analysed and ways found to improve the acceptability of the process.

Using electronic methods to capture data provides many advantages. It is cost-efficient. It can help to reduce the form-filling burden, increase the efficiency of statistical processes, improve data quality, and protect statistical confidentiality. For INSTAT, it would go some way towards correcting the imbalance between office staff and interviewers in the field. The Peer Reviewers therefore consider that INSTAT should increase the use of electronic techniques of data collection in both household and business surveys.

The Peer Reviewers were informed about the low quality of postal addresses in Albania. For many business addresses, the details are not precise enough to ensure correct delivery. For this reason, INSTAT routinely uses their interviewers to deliver questionnaires to businesses. Indeed,

this is all the more reason for INSTAT to strive towards the use of web-based questionnaires and, where appropriate, CATI. At any rate, with the gradual improvement in the quality of addresses and, hopefully, the more widespread use of postcodes in Albania there should be an increasing proportion of questionnaires that can be delivered correctly. To the extent that paper questionnaires continue to be used, the Peer Reviewers consider that INSTAT should use the postal system to a greater extent for questionnaire delivery, and reserve the use of interviewers for those cases where the postal address is likely to be too poor to ensure reliable delivery. It is true that INSTAT manages to achieve high response rates, and that their heavy use of interviewers for the delivery and collection of questionnaires contributes to this. The approach being recommended by the Peer Reviewers could, therefore, result in a deterioration of the response rate. However, a reasonable balance needs to be struck between response rate and resources, and, currently, the human resources devoted to data collection are excessive. The interviewers could continue to be used as required for the larger firms, where response is more important, and they could continue to be used to call on nonresponding businesses.

Data-collection from enterprises could be facilitated to some extent if the software used by companies to maintain their records, such as accounting and payroll systems, were to include modules to extract the data needed for statistical purposes. This would also assist in reducing the respondent burden on businesses. The Peer Reviewers consider that INSTAT should propose to the relevant companies, and in the relevant bodies of the business community, that such modules be provided to take needs of official statistics into account.

To further enhance the compliance with the CoP, the Peer Review team recommends that:

10. INSTAT should increase the use of electronic techniques of data collection and reduce the resources devoted to interviewing in household and business surveys. (European statistics Code of Practice, Indicator 10.2)
11. To increase cost-efficiency, INSTAT should aim to use the postal service as far as possible to deliver questionnaires and reminders in business surveys where paper questionnaires continue to be used. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principle 10)
12. INSTAT should propose to the relevant organisations that software for maintaining company records takes the needs of official statistics into account. (European statistics Code of Practice, Indicator 10.2)

4.2.2.3 IMPROVE THE STATISTICAL PRODUCTION PROCESSES

The methodological infrastructure of INSTAT consists of various units. The IT Directorate includes the Methodology Unit, which has the core competence for methodology. In practice, when methodological issues are to be dealt with, further units might be involved such as the Quality Unit and the Data Basis and Metadata Management Unit, both of which are also in the IT Directorate. For every statistical activity a working group is formed, with representatives from the subject matter area, and the above mentioned and possibly other units, to advise and support the relevant statistical department. Nonetheless, while making use of such support, each statistical department tends to rely on its own guidelines and methodology and to implement its own methods for data validation, editing, imputation, documentation, etc. Therefore, within INSTAT, the harmonisation of the statistical processes corresponding to the various statistical areas is not very advanced.

To provide high quality statistics based on sound methodology, the Peer Reviewers consider that INSTAT should provide methodological guidelines that are appropriate for and cover the

needs of all statistical areas. These guidelines should include standard methodological solutions designed to increase quality, efficiency and cost-effectiveness. The Methodology Unit should develop such guidelines with support from the Quality Unit and other areas. The availability of standard methodological guidelines should reduce the need for methodological consultations and increase the efficiency of the statistical processes and the quality of the statistical products. The Methodology Unit should assess the guidelines periodically and update them to take account of developments in legislation, classifications, statistical methodology, information and communication technologies, etc.

To further enhance the compliance with the CoP, the Peer Review team recommends that:

13. The Methodological Unit of INSTAT should provide methodological guidelines that are appropriate for all statistical products, should ensure that these guidelines are followed and should update the guidelines periodically. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principle 7)

The statistical processes in INSTAT make use of a wide variety of IT tools such as SPSS, SAS, Stata, MS Access, R, and others. Across line departments, the software used differs widely. This increases complexity and reduces efficiency. It also results in greater costs for licences, system maintenance, support and training. The Peer Reviewers consider that INSTAT should simplify its software portfolio.

To further enhance the compliance with the CoP, the Peer Review team recommends that:

14. To reduce costs, including training and support costs, INSTAT should rationalise the range of IT tools that are used in statistical processing. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principles 7 and 10)

Like many other NSIs, INSTAT is aware that harmonisation of statistical production along the lines of the Generic Statistical Business Process Model (GSBPM) helps to improve the cost-effectiveness of the processes and the quality of the statistical products. INSTAT has started to document the statistical processes of each statistical department along the lines of GSBPM. Based on the documentation of the statistical processes resulting from this systematic screening, steps will be planned to harmonise the processes within INSTAT towards GSBPM. Having in mind its limited resources, INSTAT should plan the implementation of GSBPM modules carefully and strive for partnership and cooperation with other NSIs or institutions that are in a similar situation.

To assess the quality of statistical processes and products, Indicator 4.4 of the CoP requires that statistical authorities should regularly review their key statistical outputs. Some external reviews have been conducted, such as the Sector Review of business statistics in 2015 and the Sector Review of the Labour Force Survey in 2016. (The corresponding reports are published on the Eurostat website.) So far, INSTAT has no experience in internal statistical reviews, though they are taking steps in this direction. The reviewing role has recently been assigned to the Coordinator for Quality Statistics. The priority now is the develop guidelines for methodological reviews, including self-assessment and statistical audits.

The Peer Review team considers that methodological reviews provide valuable information and help to improve quality and cost-efficiency, and that INSTAT should introduce a plan for periodic self-assessments and auditing. All key statistical products should be assessed systematically, every five years say, by a small team with the participation of those involved in the statistical process and experts from other areas. Ideally, when high profile statistical

products are being audited, external experts should be invited to participate. The audit reports should be published, at least in summary form.

To further enhance the compliance with the CoP, the Peer Review team recommends that:

15. INSTAT should plan the implementation steps for harmonising their statistical processes towards the Generic Statistical Business Process Model, in cooperation with other NSIs where possible. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principle 7)
16. INSTAT should develop guidelines for methodological reviews, including self-assessment and statistical auditing. A plan should be devised to apply reviews to the INSTAT portfolio over the coming years. (European statistics Code of Practice, Indicator 4.4)

4.2.2.4 SET TARGETS FOR TIMELINESS AND MEASURE THE RESPONSE BURDEN

Timeliness is a useful indicator of performance and progress. INSTAT publishes, in its annual report, Performance Assessment Indicators. One of them is the number of publications released on time, where they provide the overall percentage for the latest year and the target for the next year. But this indicator relates to punctuality, not timeliness (the gap between reference period and publication), and it is provided only at the overall level. The Peer Reviewers consider that there should be a timeliness target for each individual statistical product, that senior management should regularly assess progress towards meeting the targets, and that progress should be reported on in the annual report or elsewhere on the website.

To further enhance compliance with the CoP, the Peer Reviewers recommend that:

17. INSTAT should set a timeliness target for each statistical product, and it should monitor and report on progress. (European statistics Code of Practice, indicator 13.1)

Principle 9 of the CoP states that “The reporting burden is proportionate to the needs of the users and is not excessive for respondents. The statistical authorities monitor the response burden and set targets for its reduction over time”. In each household survey, INSTAT has a question on the time taken to complete the survey. Therefore, it can measure the burden on households, and in fact it publishes this information in its annual report. This question is not yet, however, included in all business surveys, and therefore the burden cannot be measured. The Peer Reviewers consider that INSTAT should address this issue so that the burden can be measured and monitored systematically, and that INSTAT should set targets for its reduction. This also applies to ONAs, and, ideally, to all producers of official statistics in the NSS.

To further enhance compliance with the CoP, the Peer Reviewers recommend that:

18. INSTAT and other national authorities producing European statistics should measure the response burden systematically for all their surveys. Senior management should monitor the burden and set targets for its reduction over time. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principle 9)

4.2.2.5 DEVELOP A SYSTEM OF COST ACCOUNTING

INSTAT has introduced an accounting system that registers the working time of each staff member, classified to particular statistical activities. The system was piloted in 2017 and is now operational in the Office. The Peer Reviewers welcome this development and recommend that the system should be good enough to enable robust calculation of the costs of both products (such as surveys) and processes, based on well-established classification and coding systems. INSTAT plans to combine the time-recording information with financial data, and to

classify the results according to the GSBPM. Preliminary results, to be regarded as baseline indicators, should be available later in 2018. The system should be comprehensive enough to record the working time of the staff in the regional offices. And, given the considerable resources that INSTAT has around the country devoted to interviewing and to visiting respondents, it is important that the system should also record and classify the work of the full-time and part-time interviewers. This cost-accounting system should enable INSTAT to cope more effectively with restrictions on financial and human resources, and to use cost-based planning to make the best use of resources. It is accepted that the costs of other NSS authorities and of institutes outside the NSS that carry out statistical surveys on behalf of INSTAT will not be covered by this system.

To further enhance the compliance with the CoP, the Peer Review team recommends that:

19. INSTAT should establish a comprehensive system that enables the estimation of the costs of statistical processes and products, and should use the resulting information for management purposes including the benchmarking of efficiency and cost-effectiveness. (European statistics Code of Practice, Indicator 10.1)

4.2.3 IMPROVE COMMUNICATION WITH USERS AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS

Official statistics must meet users' needs. For that purpose, communication between NSIs and users from government, public administration, business, the media, the academic world, researchers and the public in general is an important means to get feedback and to get information on ways to improve the quality, relevance and accessibility of statistical products. The Peer Review team identified five areas where INSTAT could further improve communication and consultation with stakeholders:

- Increase the transparency of the Statistical Council;
- Establish permanent user groups for key statistical areas;
- Work more proactively with the media;
- Improve statistical releases;
- Strengthen the cooperation with academia.

4.2.3.1 INCREASE THE TRANSPARENCY OF THE STATISTICAL COUNCIL

The role and composition of the Statistical Council is set out in the Law on Official Statistics. The role of the Council is, essentially, purely advisory. It gives its opinion on the five-year programme and the annual plan, and it reviews and evaluates the annual report and the four-monthly progress reports on the implementation of the programme. Article 22.1 of the Law states that "The Statistical Council shall be composed of eleven members, who shall be appointed by the Albanian Parliament, based on professional interests on official statistics as users of statistics, as well as on their knowledge of statistical methods, processes of producing data or due to other implications in statistical production". The members represent local government, the Bank of Albania, the Ministry of Finance and Economy, main users (two members), academia (two members), civil society, Chambers of Commerce and the media. The Director General of INSTAT is an ex officio member. At the time of writing, the new Council has yet to be appointed, and its rules of procedure have yet to be decided. (The previous Council, consisting of seven members, had a supervisory and decision-making role and was less oriented towards users.)

The Peer Reviewers note that there was no transparency concerning the operations of the previous Statistical Council. The Council had no website and the INSTAT website provided no information on the activities of the Council. There is no access to agendas, minutes or opinions passed. The Peer Reviewers propose that the opportunity to address this lack of transparency should be taken as the new Council is established.

To further enhance the compliance with the CoP, the Peer Review team recommends that:

20. The Statistical Council should get more public visibility. The agenda, the minutes, and where relevant, other documentation of the meetings of the Statistical Council should be published on a dedicated page on the INSTAT website. (European statistics Code of Practice, Indicator 11.1)

4.2.3.2 ESTABLISH PERMANENT USER GROUPS FOR KEY STATISTICAL AREAS

The relevance of the statistical products, that is, statistical products that meet the needs of users, is the requirement of Principle 11 of the CoP. To comply with this requirement the statistical authority needs to communicate effectively and to establish strong relations with users.

INSTAT consults its users in various ways. The Statistical Council, which is representative of users, gives its opinions on draft programmes and plans. The first user satisfaction survey was conducted in 2017, the results of which are available on the INSTAT website, and this survey will be repeated annually. Regular analysis of user requests provides useful insight into the relevance of the various statistical products. Service level agreements and memorandums of understanding have been established with some key users. Occasional seminars, workshops and roundtables are set up for particular topics. There are various ad hoc working groups, and many bilateral contacts and meetings with the main users. User groups are set up occasionally on a temporary basis. INSTAT also make excellent use of Facebook as a channel for communicating with users.

However, the Peer Reviewers believe that more intensive communication and consultation with users is required. INSTAT should establish a system of permanent user groups. Standing user groups, which might meet a couple of times a year, should be established for key statistical areas such as macroeconomic, business, agricultural or social statistics. The groups should include major stakeholders, which, depending on the area, could include ministries, other producers, the media, representative organisations or the research community.

Such groups would provide an effective means of strengthening relations with users, getting feedback on products and services, informing users about developments and plans, providing information on unmet user needs, and offering a user perspective on quality.

To further enhance the compliance with the CoP, the Peer Review team recommends that:

21. INSTAT should establish a system of permanent user groups for key statistical areas. (European statistics Code of Practice, Indicator 11.1)

4.2.3.3 WORK MORE PROACTIVELY WITH THE MEDIA

Journalists and the news media are key users because they provide a channel to other users and they help to ensure that statistics are more widely used and properly interpreted. INSTAT has a good relationship with the media. They hold a few press conferences a year and they work hard to get the media involved. One of the positions on the Statistical Council is reserved

for a media representative. During the meeting with media representatives, the Peer Reviewers were informed by those present that they were happy with the website, the statistical releases, and the speedy response they got to their queries. They indicated that they would appreciate further opportunities to learn about statistics via seminars or workshops. The Peer Reviewers agree that such opportunities should be provided. Indeed, INSTAT has occasionally conducted such sessions in the past. The Peer Reviewers also recommend that INSTAT, like many NSIs, provides the media with information tailored for their purposes on a special page of its website.

To further enhance compliance with the CoP, the Peer Reviewers recommend that:

22. In order to raise awareness of official statistics, INSTAT should work more proactively with journalists and news media by providing further seminars, workshops or informal events. A dedicated page of the INSTAT website should provide the media with information tailored for their purposes. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principle 15)

4.2.3.4 IMPROVE STATISTICAL RELEASES

INSTAT'S releases form an important component of dissemination, providing the latest information to the media and other users. The releases are factual and objective, they have a consistent look and feel, and they have a reasonable balance between text, tables and graphics. Nonetheless, the Peer Reviewers formed the opinion that the textual commentary could be improved. For any particular release, this commentary tends to be rather repetitive from one period to the next. The commentary could provide a somewhat deeper analysis and do more to provide the information behind the figures. For instance, the text could provide reasons for trends and patterns in the published statistics. This would increase the usefulness of the product and reduce the risk of misinterpretation. The Peer Reviewers also consider that the releases would be improved by providing each with a well-chosen headline. These changes would make releases more readable and more likely to get media attention.

INSTAT should also take the opportunity to address some relatively minor issues. The name of the product should be standardised: sometimes they are called "releases", sometimes "press releases", occasionally "news releases". The term "statistical releases" has not yet been used. The accessibility, usability (and reusability) of releases would be improved by moving from pdf to text/html format. The information provided on revisions could be more precise. On the webpage for any particular release, there are three links: Open this pdf; Download this pdf; and Tables. The implication is that there is some correspondence between the tables linked to and the contents of the release. But there is not: the tables in the release are different from the tables in the link; moreover, the tables in the release are frozen in time while the tables in the link are drawn dynamically from the database and can therefore contain revisions and newer data.

To further enhance compliance with the CoP and to ensure that its statistics are more widely used and reliably interpreted, the Peer Review team recommends that:

23. INSTAT should provide a headline and improved commentary in its statistical releases. (European statistics Code of Practice, Indicator 15.1)

4.2.3.5 STRENGTHEN THE COOPERATION WITH ACADEMIA

It is the opinion of the Peer Review team that there is great potential in developing cooperation with academia in fields such as training, development of methodologies, and collaboration in the production of official statistics and in using microdata for deeper analysis. A systematic

approach to the development of methodologies in collaboration with the academic community would have a beneficial impact on data quality. The broader use of microdata for research purposes would increase the value of statistical information.

The Law on Official Statistics explains the role of the academic world in the NSS of Albania:

- Article 6 specifies that official statistics shall provide quantitative, representative and reliable data to, inter alia, research and academic institutions;
- Article 22 stipulates that the academic world is to be represented in the Statistical Council by two members;
- Article 28 requires INSTAT's Statistical Training Center to provide in-depth training and knowledge in the field of statistical production in order to facilitate the conditions and stimulate research activity by the academic and scientific world.

The Official Statistics Programme 2017-2021 states that one of the main objectives of national statistics is to strengthen relations and cooperation with research and scientific organisations and universities, and INSTAT's annual plan for 2018 mentions, as part of the coordinating role of INSTAT, "increasing the corporation with the academics and the universities to increase the professional capacities of the statisticians". It is clear that INSTAT attaches great importance to cooperation with the academic and scientific world. The ties seem to be well developed. The Statistical Council is traditionally chaired by a member representing the academic world. The Peer Review team was informed by representatives of the academic community that they were keen to cooperate with INSTAT. During the last two years, memorandums of understanding have been agreed with five universities. In the MoU with the University of Tirana, INSTAT confirms support for the plan of the university's Faculty of Economics to participate in the European Master in Official Statistics programme initiated by Eurostat and the ESS. In 2017, seven staff members of INSTAT had teaching appointments at universities. Other staff members provide talks and lectures in universities.

INSTAT makes widespread use of paid internships for students. This provides an efficient means to familiarise students with official statistics, to create a pool of potential future staff members, to increase the awareness of the relevance of official statistics, and to improve the reputation of INSTAT within academia. During 2017, 43 students were provided with short internships of up to two months, and a further seven students who had completed their bachelor education were given contracts of up to one year.

INSTAT provides access to anonymised microdata for research purposes. This includes the Labour Force Survey (2017-2013), Time Use Survey, Living Standard Measurement Survey (2002, 2005, 2008, 2012), a dataset on Return Migration and Re-Integration Survey, and a sample from the Census of Housing and Population 2011. Unfortunately, no documentation is available on the number of projects that have taken place or the results of these projects.

In 2017, a joint research project of INSTAT staff members with academic researchers resulted in the paper "Dissemination of demographic and socio-economic developments in Tirana with special attention to youth education", published in 2018 in the Journal of Educational and Social Research. And in June 2018 INSTAT published the first issue of its scientific journal "Research, Journal of Statistics and socio-economic analysis".

The Peer Review team welcomes these activities, but it recommends that the coordination of the cooperation activities with the academic and scientific world should be assigned to a special unit. While the five-year programme and the annual plans refer to this cooperation, they should be more specific and should list concrete projects and activities. And the annual reports should

provide information on the results of these activities. On the INSTAT website, a special page should facilitate communication with the academic world and researchers. This should include information on accessing microdata, training activities open to researchers and internship opportunities. It should also give links to reports of research projects that made use of official statistics and provide other information of interest to the academic world.

To further enhance the compliance with the CoP, the Peer Review team recommends that:

24. INSTAT should continue to strengthen cooperation with the academic world by developing methodologies, collaborating in the production of official statistics, training, and using microdata for deeper analysis. It should assign the coordination of the cooperation activities with the academia to a special unit. The five-year programme and annual plans should provide greater detail on planned cooperation activities, and the annual reports should provide details about the outcomes. A dedicated page of the INSTAT website should facilitate communication with the academic world and researchers. (European statistics Code of Practice, Indicator 7.7)

4.3 NATIONAL STATISTICAL INSTITUTE VIEWS WHERE THEY DIVERGE FROM PEER REVIEWERS' ASSESSMENT

INSTAT welcomes the Peer Review team report and agrees with the findings and suggestions.

ANNEX A: PROGRAMME OF THE VISIT

PEER REVIEW VISIT TO ALBANIA

4 – 8 June 2018

AGENDA

Time	Programme	Participants
Day 1 – Monday, 4 June 2018		
09:00–10:30	Peer Review Team preparatory meeting	Peer Review Team: Peter Hackl (lead expert); Adrian Redmond; Torbioern Carlquist Observers: Vuk Cadjenovic, Irena Varagic
10:30–11:00	Preparatory meeting with the INSTAT Coordination Team (other ONA representatives)	Peer Review Team, Observers INSTAT Coordination Team: Maldie Dema, Elsa Dhuli, Helda Mitre, Klajd Shuka, Vjollca Simoni, Altin Xhikneli Bank of Albania: Argita Frashëri Ministry of Finances and Economy: Eva Doda
11:00–11:30	Welcome and introduction, adopting the agenda, organisational matters	Peer Review Team, Observers INSTAT: Delina Ibrahimaj; Maldie Dema; Elsa Dhuli; Helda Mitre; Elona Sevrani; Etugert Llazi; Elirjeta Pepaj; Ervin Shameti; Ledia Thomo; Klajd Shuka; Altin Xhikneli; Vjollca Simoni
11:30–11:45	Coffee break	
11:45–13:00	Presentation of the National Statistical System (General information session with description on how NSS is organised)	Peer Review Team, Observers INSTAT: Delina Ibrahimaj; Maldie Dema; Elsa Dhuli; Helda Mitre; Elona Sevrani; Etugert Llazi; Elirjeta Pepaj; Ervin Shameti; Ledia Thomo; Klajd Shuka; Altin Xhikneli; Vjollca Simoni
13:00–14:00	Lunch break	
14:00–15:00	Coordination role of INSTAT	Peer Review Team, Observers INSTAT: Delina Ibrahimaj; Maldie Dema; Elsa Dhuli; Helda Mitre; Elona Sevrani; Ledia Thomo
15:00–15:30	Coffee break	
15:30–17:15	The Law on Official Statistics and related legislation (CoP principles 1, 2, 5 and 6)	Peer Review Team, Observers INSTAT: Delina Ibrahimaj; Maldie Dema; Elsa Dhuli; Helda Mitre; Altin Xhikneli; Vjollca Simoni
Day 2 – Tuesday, 5 June 2018		
9:00 – 10:45	Programming (statistical work programmes), planning and resources (CoP principles 1, 3, 9 and 10)	Peer Review Team, Observers INSTAT: Delina Ibrahimaj; Maldie Dema; Elsa Dhuli; Helda Mitre; Etugert Llazi; Ervin Shameti; Ledia Thomo; Klajd Shuka
10:45–11:15	Coffee break	
11:15–13:00	Quality (organisational structure, tools, monitoring,) (CoP principles 4 and 11 to 14)	Peer Review Team, Observers INSTAT: Delina Ibrahimaj; Maldie Dema; Elsa Dhuli; Helda Mitre; Ledia Thomo; Elirjeta Pepaj; Klajd Shuka; Altin Xhikneli; Alma Kondi
13:00–	Lunch break	

14:00		
14:00–15:45	Dissemination and confidentiality (CoP principles 5, 6 and 15)	Peer Review Team, Observers INSTAT: Maldi Dema; Elsa Dhuli; Helda Mitre; Ledia Thomo; Klajd Shuka; Altin Xhikneli; Olta Kodra
15:45–16:15	Coffee break	
16:15–17:15	Methodology, data collection, data processing and administrative data (CoP principles 2, 7 and 8)	Peer Review Team, Observers INSTAT: Maldi Dema; Elsa Dhuli; Helda Mitre; Ervin Shamenti; Liliana Boci; Alma Kondi; Flutura Rama
Day 3 – Wednesday, 6 June 2018		
09:00–10:00	Methodology, data collection, data processing and administrative data (CoP principles 2, 7 and 8) (<i>Continuing</i>)	Peer Review Team, Observers INSTAT: Maldi Dema; Elsa Dhuli; Helda Mitre Erkand Muraku; Liliana Boci; Alma Kondi; Flutura Rama
10:00–10:30	Coffee break	
10:30–11:15	Meeting with Other National Authorities (ONAs) <u>Bank of Albania</u>	Peer Review Team, Observers Bank of Albania: Argita Frashëri; Rudina Lilaj; Ilda Drini; Iris Mele; Majela Smakaj (Collaku); Refika Allkurti (Fejzo)
11:15–12:00	Meeting with Other National Authorities (ONAs) <u>Ministry of Finances and Economy</u>	Peer Review Team, Observers Ministry of Finances and Economy: Mimoza Peco; Irena Gjika
12:00–12:45	Meeting with EU Delegation	Peer Review Team, EU Delegation: Stephen Stork
12:45–13:30	Lunch break	
13:30–15:00	Meeting with Statistical Council	Peer Review Team, Observers Statistical Council: Kozeta Sevrani; Rudina Lulaj; Nikolla Lera
15:00–15:30	Coffee break	
15:30–17:15	Meeting with junior staff	Peer Review Team, Observers INSTAT (Junior staff): Orald Hoxha; Erald Cela; Ani Begolli; Kozeta Haxhillari; Marinela Lamce; Jesmina Mustafaj; Elma Cali; Klodiana Ducka; Blerina Paja; Edison Tunaj
Day 4 – Thursday, 7 June 2018		
09:00–10:15	Meeting with main users – Ministries and other public/private institutions (including bank of Albania as a user)	Peer Review Team, Observers Main Users: Enian Cela; Eva Doda; Majlinda Manushi; Uarda Llazi; Elvis Koçi; Aida Hasmetaj; Migena Mezini; Ledian Bardhi
10:15–10:45	Coffee break	
10:45–12:30	Meeting with main data providers/respondents	Peer Review Team, Observers Main data providers/respondents: Edlira Dersha; Anila Kika; Aferdita Kote; Dritan Avdyli; Genti Ahmataj; Nexhmije Çeka; Drilona Baruti; Teuta Panariti; Qanie Fetahu; Redona Eltari; Daver Berberi; Ermir Nika; Shpëtim Çokaj; Enkeleda Peshkatari; Jona Ravanolli; Mukades Hashorva; Arta Tani; Bajram Dedja
12:30–13:30	Lunch break	
13:30–14:3	Meeting with main users – Media	Peer Review Team, Observers Media: Mirilda Tili; Besar Likmeta; Nertila Maho
14:30–14:45	Coffee break	

14:45– 15:4	Meeting with main users - Scientific community	Peer Review Team, Observers Scientific Community: Ledjon Shahini; Evelina Çeliku; Edvin Zhllima; Ahmet Maçellari; Klodian Rama
15:45– 16:45	Meeting with the international organisations	Peer Review Team, Observers International Organisations: Altin Kurdari; Hilda Shijaku; Elda Hallkaj; Eno Ngjela; Manuela Bello; Ermelinda Xhaja; Birgitta Mannfelt; Estela Bulku; Azeta Çollaku; Elsona Agolli; Gazmend Bejtja
Day 5 – Friday, 8 June 2018		
09:00– 10:30	PR team discussion	Peer Review Team, Observers
10:30– 10:45	Coffee break	
10:45– 12:45	Clarifications, remaining or additional issues and focus areas	Peer Review Team, Observers INSTAT: Maldi Dema
12:45– 13:30	Lunch break	
13:30– 15:30	Meeting with senior management: conclusions and recommendations	Peer Review Team, Observers INSTAT: Delina Ibrahimaj; Maldi Dema; Elsa Dhuli; Helda Mitre; Elona Sevrani; Etugert Llazi; Elirjeta Pepaj; Ervin Shameti; Ledia Thomo; Klajd Shuka; Altin Xhikneli; Vjollca Simoni

ANNEX B: LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Institution	Representatives	Working position
Peer Review Team		
	Peter Hackl	Lead expert
	Adrian Redmond	Expert
	Torbjoern Carlquist	Eurostat
Observers (MONSTAT)		
	Vuk Cadjenovic	Assistant Director
	Irena Varagic	Adviser in the Department for Demography, Education, Culture and Justice
INSTAT		
	Delina Ibrahimaj	General Director
	Maldi Dema	Coordinator for NSS
	Elsa Dhuli	Coordinator for Quality Statistics
	Elona Sevrani	Director of National Account Directory
	Etugert Llazi	Director of Economic Statistics Directory
	Elirjeta Pepaj	Director of Real Sector Statistics Directory
	Ledia Thomo	Director of Social Statistics Directory
	Helda Mitre	Director of Information Technology Directory
	Klajd Shuka	Director of Finance and Supporting Services Directory
	Ervin Shameti	Director of Regional Statistics Directory
	Vjollca Simoni	Head of European Integration and International Relations Unit
	Altin Xhikneli	Head of Publication and Dissemination Unit
	Alma Kondi	Head of Quality Statistics Unit
	Erkand Muraku	Head of Economic Account in Agriculture and Environment Unit
	Olta Kodra	Head of Data Bases and Metadata Management Unit
	Flutura Rama	Head of BS Register Unit
	Liliana Boçi	Head of Methodology Unit
Other National Producers		
Bank of Albania		
	Argita Frashëri	Director of Financial Statistics Department
	Rudina Lilaj	Head of External Sector Statistics
	Ilda Drini	Head of Foreign Investments and Surveys Office
	Iris Mele	Head of Balance of Payments Office
	Majela Smakaj (Çollaku)	Head of Monetary Statistics Office
	Refika Allkurti (Fejzo)	Head of Financial Accounts Office
Ministry of Finances and Economy		
	Mimoza Peco	Director of Treasury Operations Department - General Directorate of Treasury
	Irena Gjika	Head of Debt Strategy and Monitoring Unit - Public Debt Directorate
EU Delegation		
	Stephen Stork	Head of Operations section 1
Statistical Council		
	Kozeta Sevrani	Chairperson
	Rudina Lilaj	Member
	Nikolla Lera	Member
Junior Staff (of INSTAT)		
	Orald Hoxha	Specialist
	Erald Cela	Specialist
	Ani Begolli	Specialist
	Kozeta Haxhillari	Specialist

	Marinela Lamce Jesmina Mustafaj Elma Cali Klodiana Ducka Blerina Paja Edison Tunaj	Specialist Specialist Specialist Specialist Specialist Specialist
Main Users		
Bank of Albania	Enian Cela	Head of Economic Analysis Office
Ministry of Finances and Economy	Eva Doda	Specialist in the Macroeconomic Modelling Sector, Directory of Macroeconomic politics and Fiscal issues
Prime Minister's Office	Elvis Koçi Aida Hasmetaj	Operational Situation Room Operational Situation Room
General Directorate of Prisons	Migena Mezini	Statistician
Ministry of Culture	Lediana Bardhi	Adviser at Minister's Cabinet
Union of Chambers of Commerce & Industry	Majlinda Manushi Uarda Llazi	General Secretary Assistant
Main Data providers / Respondents		
Ministry of Tourism and Environment	Edlira Dersha	Specialist in the Information and Statistics Elaboration Sector
Institute of Social Insurances	Anila Kika	Specialist in the Department of Statistics
General Directory of Taxation	Aferdita Kote	Specialist
General Directory of State Police	Dritan Avdyli	Directorate for Data Processing, Chief State Police
Ministry of Infrastructure and Energy	Genti Ahmataj Nexhmije Çeka	Head of Sector Specialist
Central Inspectorate	Drilona Baruti	Expert in the Directory of Inspections Supervision, Methodological Guidance and Coordination
Ministry of Health and Social Protection	Teuta Panariti	Statistics specialist near Finance and Statistics Directory at the State Social Service
Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development	Qanie Fetahu	Specialist in the Sector of Monitoring, Priorities and Statistics
Financial Supervisory Authority	Redona Eltari Daver Berberi	Specialist statistician Specialist
Ministry of Culture	Ermir Nika	Specialist
General Directorate of Civil Status	Shpëtim Çokaj	Specialist at Sector of the Administration of National Registry of Addresses
National Registering Centre	Enkeleda Peshkatari	Director of Innovation and Registers Directory
National Agency of Information Society (AKSHI)	Jona Ravanolli	Specialist
Compulsory Health Insurance Fund	Mukades Hashorva	Head of Sector of Statistics
Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth	Arta Tani	Specialist in the Sector of Monitoring and Statistics
Institute of Public Health	Bajram Dedja	Doctor/epidemiologist. Epidemiological Observatory Office
Media		
Fax News	Mirilda Tili	Journalist
Labirn	Besar Likmeta	Journalist
Monitor	Nertila Maho	Journalist
Scientific Community		
University of Tirana (Faculty of Economy)	Ledion Shahini Ahmet Maçellari	Professor/researcher Professor/researcher

Bank of Albania	Evelina Çeliku	Researcher
University of Agriculture, Tirana	Edvin Zhllima Klodian Rama	Professor/researcher Professor
International Organisations		
IOM	Altin Kurdari	IPA Coordinator
World Bank	Hilda Shijaku	Economist
UNICEF	Elda Hallkaj	Monitoring & Evaluation
UNDP	Eno Ngjela	National Programme Officer
UNFPA	Manuela Bello	Assistant Representative
Embassy of Sweden	Ermelinda Xhaja	Programme officer
Statistics Sweden	Birgitta Mannfelt	Senior Advisor
UN Women	Estela Bulku	National Programme Officer
UN RC Office	Azeta Çollaku	RBM Analyst
UNFPA	Elsona Agolli	Programme Analyst-Youth & Gender
World Health Organisation	Gazmend Bejtja	National Programme Officer