



**Governing
by the numbers:
The statistical
governance in Albania**

POLICY PAPER



Kingdom of the Netherlands

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Author

Ilvana Dedja LLM

Internal Review

Arjan Dyrmishi

External Review

Marina Poppa M.Sc.

CSDG
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ABBREVIATIONS

CoP	European statistics Code of Practice
ES Code of Practice	European Statistics Code of Practice
ESA	European System of Accounts
ESGAB	European Statistical Governance Advisory Board
ESS	European Statistical System
EU	European Union
EUROSTAT	Statistical Office of the European Union
INSTAT	Institute of Statistics
IoT	Internet of Things
MDAs	Ministries Departments and Agencies
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NSI	National Statistical Institute
NSO	National statistical office
NSS	National Statistical System
NUTS	Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics
ONA	Other National Authority
PSZ	Program of Official Statistics
QAF	Quality Assurance Framework
QM	Quality Management
QTS	Statistical Training Center
SDG	UN Sustainable Development Goals
UNECE	United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

DEFINITIONS

An other producer of Official Statistics (OPOS) is an organisational entity within a government ministry, department or agency, other than the national statistical office, that are authorised under the official statistics program to develop, produce and disseminate official statistics (in Albania, it can also be referred to as 'statistical agency').

Data means the the quantities, characters, or symbols on which operations are performed by a computer, which may be stored and transmitted in the form of electrical signals and recorded on magnetic, optical, or mechanical recording media.

Dissemination means making available official statistics to users, regardless of the form and means, by ensuring the protection of confidential data.

National Statistical System is the sum of the official statistics producers, operating within the Republic of Albania.

Official statistics are defined as statistics produced according to the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics and other international standards by a national statistical office or by another producer of official statistics mandated by the national government or certified by the national statistical office to compile statistics of its specific domain.

Production of statistics shall mean the necessary activities for the preparation, collection, storage, compilation, analysis, interpretation, and dissemination of the statistical data.

Program of official statics shall mean the program of official statics, approved by the Parliament.

The national statistical office (NSO) is defined as the main producer of official statistics in a country and or the organisation responsible for coordinating all activities related to the development, production, and dissemination of official statistics in the national statistical system.

Users of official statistics produced by countries' national statistical systems (NSS) are people with an interest in the data being published.

Data users refer to users who have a general understanding of statistical methodology and have an analytical purpose in using official statistics. These users often include government actors, research institutions, professional statisticians, civil society organizations, and educational institutions.

Data governance entails defining, implementing, and monitoring strategies, policies and shared decision-making over the management and use of data assets.

“Reliable statistics are a cornerstone of democracy. They are landmarks in a complex world and provide objective information to guide policies”.

- Georges-Simon Ulrich, General Director of Swiss Federal Statistics Office¹

¹ INSTAT, Media Release, [New project between INSTAT and Swiss Federal Statistics Office to establish local registers](#) (2018).

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

We encounter numbers in the media, in political discussion, and decisions. How many people live in a country, how much is produced, what is the criminality rate, education, health? In the context of living in a democratic society, statistics serve as more than just a collection of numbers and figures; they are essential to informed decision-making, transparency, and accountability.

Politics based on evidence is established to be an element that guides modern and good governance. Meaning, in a society that expects results from the government's services, the latter must constantly evaluate what it does in order to produce relevant politics that address causes rather than relying on assumptions or hunches. More recently, in the evolution of information technology, e-governance, and the abundance of data, the concept 'Data for Policy' (D4P)² has emerged. Experts note that by combining algorithms, machine learning and the Internet of Things, governments and societies could potentially leverage data for better policies.

This discourse makes a detour on the concept of official statistics. In a time where the process of gathering, disseminating, and analysing data is time-effective and cost-effective to the taxpayer money, the importance and utility of official statistics is being called into question.

Under the auspices of this debate, the aim of this policy paper is to (1) ignite a debate on the importance of official statistics for the functioning of (a democratic) society; (2) analyse the quality of official statistics, and (3) reflect on the future of official statistics, contextualising these elements to Albania.

The discussion will be two-fold:

- Due to a lack of statistical literacy and missing information about the quality of statistics in Albania, most of the analysis will be centred in providing a general understanding on (i) the statistical governance model in Albania, (ii) the actors and their interactions, (iii) the level of independence and the quality of official statistics.
- After this conceptual understanding is established, the policy paper aims to work upon on the importance to “open, smart, trusted statistics relevant for the society” to provide necessary adaption of statistical governance in Albania, as recommendations to the relevant authorities.

² According to OECD, national, regional and local governments need precise and timely data to implement better policies for wellbeing and sustainable development. Data and indicators are key for strategic planning and decision making and are tools for promoting informed dialogues across levels of government and sectors of society, integrating both a national and an international perspective.

Although it is widely assumed that statistics is a technical field, this is not always the case. For citizens to make informed decisions in a variety of areas of their lives, statistics are essential. The potential influence of statistics on public policies and individual citizen decisions stems from the high degree of trust and respect that exists for data providers. As a result, this policy paper seeks to reframe statistics governance as an essential component of citizen empowerment and well-informed decision-making in Albania, rather than just as a technical field. In that endeavour, making a distinction between three notions used mistakenly interchangeably, data, statistics, and official statistics, takes priority.

- Data: Individual facts, raw information.
- Statistics: The organisation and interpretation of the facts. It is a process, the product, the statistical information.
- Official statistics: Official statistics are statistical outputs produced by a national statistical office (NSO) or by other designated governmental bodies. The term “official statistics” serves as a quality label, indicating that official statistics are developed, produced, and disseminated in accordance with internationally agreed statistical standards and recommendations, the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics, and the European Statistics Code of Practice.

The element that distinguishes data and statistics is the process of production. Statistics, being a product, goes through a thorough process chain from production to delivery and utilisation of the final outputs. It involves expertise, well-thought methodologies, and very specific purpose. It is important to make a difference, given the myriad of information –often, of dubious nature, that exists. National Statistical Offices need to be recognised as authoritative and of the highest quality, as for citizens and public entities to rely on their data. Their mission should not only be to produce and disseminate reliable statistics, but also to convey trust that they produce a reliable output—and to address user needs.

Using baseline studies and handbooks on data for policy, statistical governance, and policy for data, which serve as a compass to guide the analysis of the Statistical Governance in Albania, the analysis in this policy paper provides the foundation for engaging these standards in evidence-driven policy in Albania. Through an in-depth examination of standards and benchmarks that define the quality of official statistics, we provide evidence on the importance to use official statistics rather than simple data on decision-making processes. However, this is recommended when the official statistics are independent, impartial, relevant, accessible, and trustworthy. This policy paper reflects on Albania's statistical governance model and recent developments in the field of official statistics. It offers policymakers information on what to base their policies on, gives stakeholders in the official statistics field the evidence they need to drive positive change in users' trust and use of statistics, and explains to the citizens how official statistics are produced and why it is important to use and refer to them.

Analysing "who", "what" and "why" in statistical governance, we find that the system is designed in accordance with the guidelines set forth in international standards.

Potential avenues for political influence exist, but they are intertwined with the culture of individual and institutional independence. Addressing this challenge is not easily achievable through normative or legal provisions. However, the findings that there are some concerns relating to the quality in statistics, statistical auditing and a not-user oriented/friendly approach, suggests there are

The topic is very timely, and independence, high quality statistics, quality management, and evidence-based decision making are keywords that are not well-researched or debated in the context of Albania.

A detailed overview of findings and recommendations follows.

Statistical Governance in Albania

In Albania, the legal framework that governs the collection, processing, development, and distribution of official statistics is the Law no. 17/2018 "On Official Statistics". In addition to the law, the Official Statistics Program, which is prepared by INSTAT in cooperation with statistical agencies, taking into consideration the opinion of the Statistics Council, and which is sent to the Council of Ministers to propose to the Assembly - after the completion of this process, is the basic document that defines the strategy for the development of official statistics and the National Statistical System for a period of five years, aiming to fulfil the demands of users for quality statistics. Referring to the law, producers of official statistics are: INSTAT, Bank of Albania; and Statistical Agencies. All three elements contribute to what is known as the "National Statistical System" (NSS). In line with the purpose and functionality of this policy document, the mode of operation, interaction, and integrity of the SKS statistics producers will unfold the governance of statistics in Albania.

In this governance framework, INSTAT is the statistical authority that ensures that the processes of production of official statistics are conducted in accordance with the EU and international principles and standards. However, if the design of the system is already regulated by the law, in a model 'transposed' from Regulation (EC) No 223/2009, then the challenge is to produce statistics exactly to that standard.

The study's findings about the governance of statistics include the following concerns: (1) decentralisation of data production, which could result in inconsistent and inefficient data production; (2) relying solely on administrative data for some statistical fields, which could not accurately reflect reality and compromise the accuracy of the statistics; (3) a potential lack of comprehension of statistical data's existence and how it is used by the citizens; and (4) despite the fact that INSTAT's independence has been reinforced through reforms, worries about the possibility of political influence or pressure on data collection, analysis, and distribution still exist. Both public trust and the validity of official statistics may be impacted by this.

The assumptions are based on established findings on similar practices to those employed by the national statistical office. They are not based on an empirical analysis on scrutinising the processes ('how') and the output ('why'), but rather focus

on the principle of achieving the goal to "have trust in statistical governance" and the sub-goals, to (i) strengthening the independence and innovativeness of producing official statistics, (ii) consider the interest of citizens in designing statistical activities (given that the production of official statistics is funded by taxpayers' money) and guarantee oversight/control of the execution by an apolitical entity, and (iii) harmonize official statistics with both international and EU standards, with the aim of achieving comparability.

In order to emphasise the critical role that statistics play in making well-informed decisions, the government should actively encourage the incorporation of statistical data into policymaking. Increasing the visibility of statistics guarantees that knowledge derived from data will play a crucial role in the creation of policies. Good governance requires accountability, openness, and evidence-based decision-making, all of which are fostered by this integration.

Quality in statistics

The quality of a country's governance means the level to which its institutions (such as INSTAT) and processes (such as the collection of official statistics) are transparent, giving citizens the opportunity to participate in decisions that affect their lives. The study further discloses how INSTAT's interaction with statistical agencies is regulated, the principles on which the operationalization of its mission is based, as well as the audit process of the statistical service in the country. An examination of the quality of the process of producing official statistics results that the statistical offices are more concerned with the accuracy of the statistics, rather than the quality. Quality includes accuracy as an element, in addition to relevance, consistency, continuity, timeliness, accessibility to the statistics it produces. In focusing more on the production, and less in the relevance to the data, their transparency and independence, there is a risk that the statistical system in Albania may fail to be recognised as an authoritative and relevant body for the user. This could impact on the long-term the democratic element of the society. If the distinction between data, statistics and official statistics blur, the consequence is that users may opt to utilize any type of data for their decision-making processes. This lack of differentiation could lead to decisions being based on potentially unreliable or unverified information, potentially undermining the accuracy and effectiveness of decision-making processes.

There is also found a lack of the civil society's focus on the matter of statistics. Civil society plays a crucial role in the quality system of statistics. For this reason, it is recommended that civil society be more involved in advocating for transparency, more friendly platforms, as well as open data initiatives, in order to increase citizens' access to government data. Also, it is recommended to increase cooperation between INSTAT, civil society, and educational institutions, to increase awareness on statistics, 'data literacy' and 'statistical literacy' (the ability to read, process and analyse data and statistics), and the critical role of accessible data in good governance. Finally, civil society is recommended to monitor and report on issues

related to the integrity of statistical data, possible misuse of statistics and violations of data privacy regulations, demanding responsibility to the relevant authorities.

Furthermore, it is recommended that the statistical office undertake strategies for the recognition and promotion of the brand and its platform. Statistics are not considered useful if they are not used, either by policy makers or citizens. For this reason, the statistical office needs to explore ways to increase the visibility of the statistics in the country. In this regard, INSTAT is recommended to create or improve partnerships with NGOs, media bodies and educational institutions to raise awareness of the importance of statistics and to promote knowledge of data.

Alignment with the EU and international standards

The governance of statistics in Albania is mostly in accordance with the norms and standards offered as a model by the European Union. Elements that are absent but that the pertinent Albanian institutions might find interesting to consider are the inclusion of a (i) neutral officer according to the Dutch model, which is designed to answer questions about the focus of the work, partnerships or activity of the statistical agency (in addition, an administrative appeal may be filed against the acts of the statistical agency); (ii) the committee on ethics, which is put to work when statistical agencies consider a request for research (by analogy, the implementation of article 35 on statistical services in law no. 17/2018 "On official statistics"), and (iii) the concept of total quality management.

The alignment of Albania's statistical system with EU standards and best practices is essential for its aspirations for EU integration. However, challenges remain in applying these standards consistently and effectively across all statistical actors and data areas.

Through an in-depth audit of the governance of statistics in Albania, the systems and procedures that control the production, dissemination, and utilization of statistical data, this study aims to highlight and inform on the integral role played by reliable and unbiased statistics in upholding the foundations of a democratic society.

1. INTRODUCTION

Among the many difficulties and issues facing Albania's relatively new democracy, the topic of how the official statistics are governed³ seems to not have caught the interest of researchers, civil society or the public. One might conclude that other issues, such as economic development and political stability, may have taken priority over statistical governance. An additional possibility is that there may be a lack of understanding regarding the significance of statistics for good decision-making and, moreover, the significance of a good statistical governance.

The premise is that good governance⁴ is one in which political decision-making is based on evidence.⁵ It is evidenced that for that for governance to be considered effective and accountable, decisions made by political authorities should be well-informed, supported by credible evidence, and grounded in robust data. In practical terms, this means relying on thorough research, statistical analyses, and relevant information when formulating policies and making decisions that impact society. If decision-making fails to be supported by evidence, then the risk exists of "a lack of transparency, subjectivity or even erroneous policies".⁶

Deconstructing the concept of "decision-making based on evidence" is necessary in this situation. Firstly, if one views governance as the exercise of political, administrative, and economic power to oversee a nation's affairs at all levels⁷, then good governance demands that the work be grounded in statistical data.⁸ Analysing the notion of "decision-making based on evidence" requires acknowledging the importance of statistical data in administrative, political, and economic decision-making processes. It suggests that to inform, direct, and justify policy decisions, good governance practices integrate quantitative and qualitative data from statistical analyses.

³ R.A.W. Rhodes, 'Understanding Governance 20 Years On' [2017] Understanding Governance 1 <<http://www.raw-rhodes.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/National-Governance-Review.pdf>>, p 11.

Governance refers to self-organising, inter-organisational networks characterised by interdependence, resource exchange, rules of the game and significant autonomy from the state

⁴ There is a plethora of definitions on good governance. The one best suited for the objective and scope of this paper is the one employed by the Council of Europe in noting that good governance is "the responsible conduct of public affairs and management of public resources" as encapsulated in the Council of Europe 12 Principles of Good Governance.

⁵ Walter J Radermacher, 'Governing-by-the-Numbers/Statistical Governance: Reflections on the Future of Official Statistics in a Digital and Globalised Society' (2019) 35 Statistical Journal of the IAOS 519, p 520.

⁶ *ibid*, p 520.

⁷ UNDP, 'Governance for Sustainable Human Development', New York: UNDP, 1997, pp 2–3.

⁸ UNECE, 'Recommendations for Promoting, Measuring and Communicating the Value of Official Statistics' (2018) p. 62.

A dilemma is risen whether the statistical governance model in Albania provide the necessary oversight, efficiency, or transparency in the production of official statistics. This scenario prompts critical considerations about the reliability and quality of the statistical information produced, as well as its impact on informed decision-making and public trust.

On this context, this policy paper aims to ignite a discussion on a little informed area, where, as noted by the author Radermacher, "there is a misconception or misleading concept that addressing questions which deal with information quality, interaction with users and statistical governance are reserved only to statisticians".⁹ As a result, in taking the green light of navigating the complex world of statistics, this study aims to be a baseline study on the governance model used in the field of statistics in Albania, extending the focus to its compliance with the EU *acquis*, and in the end, the process of modernising the statistical governance. The following questions will have to be addressed in the paper:

- What is the current state of statistics governance in Albania?
- Who are the main actors that are part of this system, and how do they interact with each other?
- How independent are statistical processes from political and other interests in Albania?
- How compliant is this system (including laws, methodology, processes) with EU statistical governance?

This policy paper does not delve into an examination of whether policymaking in Albania is grounded in evidence. As such, the first underlying premise is that this is true. Moreover, the study does not aim to mark the statistical governance as independent or not. That would necessitate separate research due to the complexity of noting if the (in)dependence affects the quality of the statistics or not.

This study aims to be an introduction to the concept of official statistics, statistical governance, and the link between big data and official statistics.¹⁰

⁹ Walter J Radermacher, 'Governing-by-the-Numbers/Statistical Governance: Reflections on the Future of Official Statistics in a Digital and Globalised Society' (2019) 35 Statistical Journal of the IAOS 519, p 520.

¹⁰ Another concept that would be interesting to explore in the Albanian context is the new concept of governance statistics. In simple terms, it is established by sound authorities in the field of governance and statistics that there is a lack of principles or framework that lay the foundation for the official statistics systems to measure the performance of the (good) governance of the government in its statistical activities. United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, 'In-Depth Review of Governance Statistics in the Unece / OECD Region' 11, p 5. See further Praia City Group, Handbook on Governance Statistics: 'Governance statistics are fundamental to ensuring that the relationship between the State and its citizenry is transparent and accountable. They assist in monitoring the performance of government and in better understanding the contribution of governance in its various dimensions to development. Governance statistics contribute to the measurement and realization of human rights. They can help to identify groups or sub-groups in the population that are most affected by the dysfunctions of governance systems, with a view to putting in place appropriately targeted

Methodology

The methodology employed in this study relies on conducting a comprehensive analysis through desk research, with a specific focus on the European Union *acquis*, Albanian legislation, and various documents/policies produced by authorities within the National Statistical System. Synthesizing a variety of sources, including academic works and documented practical experiences from local and international authorities, the policy document aims to draw valuable insights and highlight challenges in the context of statistical governance in Albania.

In the many ways that governance is defined and conceptualised, this study employs to use the 'governance' in its strictest sense, calculating the sum of "the institutions, processes and conventions in a society which determine how power is exercised, how important decisions affecting society are made and how various interests are accorded a place in such decisions".¹¹ To put it simply, it's "the process of decision-making and the process by which decision are implemented (or not implemented)."¹² In an attempt to operationalise the complex concept of governance, we employ the methodology used by Radermacher in its book 'Official Statistics 4.0'¹³ on the main aspects of relevance to the governance of official statistics. Radermacher introduces the five pillars of statistical governance:

- Who: Actors and Roles (Pillar One)
- What: Statistical Programme and Products, Services (Pillar Two)
- How: Quality Assurance (Pillar Three)
- Confidentiality, Data Ownership, Access to Data (Pillar Four)
- International Cooperation and Relations, Standards, Governance (Pillar Five)¹⁴

This comes in line with Foucault's elucidation that in order to understand the science behind the government, it was useful to ask certain questions like, "Who governs what? According to what logics? With what techniques? Towards what ends?"¹⁵.

policies, as pledged in the 2030 Agenda "Leaving no one behind". Governance statistics can also contribute to preventing and managing conflict, when used as early warning systems, and can help foster peace, by periodically informing on State-society relations, which lie at the centre of sustainable peace.'

¹¹ Thomas G Weiss, 'Governance, Good Governance, and Global Governance: Conceptual and Actual Challenges' (2012) 21 *Thinking about Global Governance: Why People and Ideas Matter* 168, p 797, citing the definition on governance used by Institute of Governance, Ottawa.

¹² Yap Kioe Sheng, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, 'What is Good Governance?'

¹³ Walter J. Radermacher, 'Official Statistics 4.0 - Verified Facts for People in the 21st Century', Springer (2020).

¹⁴ *ibid*, pp 143-148.

¹⁵ Cited in Fleur Johns, 'Governance by Data' (2021) 17 *Annual Review of Law and Social Science* 53, p. 64.

This study is structured as follows: First, we set the scene by defining Official Statistics, and its elements. This is a crucial step as statistics is a concept deemed technical and the public lacks a thorough understanding of its use and importance in policymaking and decision-making. Furthermore, in a world where data is abundant, it is becoming harder to distinguish between official statistics, data, and statistics, which makes it easier for people to rely on inaccurate or unreliable information. This study aims to contribute to clearing this distinction. Second, the multi-faceted statistical governance in Albania is analysed to distinct and discuss who are the institutions that make the statistics governance, how are their processes and what do they produce/provide to the citizens. Third, the system is scrutinized against other models employed by EU member states and the EU requirements to join the European Union. Finally, the pieces of the puzzle are pulled together and ideas for further discussion and research are offered.

This paper does not pretend to answer all the dilemmas connected to the statistical governance in Albania, but only to serve as a basis for discussion.

2. OFFICIAL STATISTICS - AN OVERVIEW

“People are becoming more demanding, whether as consumers of goods and services in the marketplace, as citizens or as businesses affected by the policies and services which government provides. To meet these demands, government must be willing constantly to re- evaluate what it is doing so as to produce policies that really deal with problems; that are forward-looking and shaped by the evidence rather than a response to short-term pressures; that tackle causes not symptoms; that are measured by results rather than activity; that are flexible and innovative rather than closed and bureaucratic; and that promote compliance rather than avoidance or fraud. To meet people’s rising expectations, policy making must also be a process of continuous learning and improvement.”¹⁶

Citizens, and governments need evidence and accurate information to support their decision-making processes.¹⁷ The provision of high-quality data and information has been guaranteed or expected by the national statistical offices (NSOs) and other producers of official statistics over the last few decades.¹⁸ However, with the proliferation of big data¹⁹ and the growing complexity and individualisation of the world which requires more detailed information²⁰, the world has is shifting from evidence-based to data-driven decision-making ('data-for-policy (D4P)').²¹ To summarise, the takeaway is that data is taking the place of evidence, and decisions are driven/oriented from the data produced by algorithms, machine learning, and the Internet of Things.²² In this situation, official statistics are expected to catch up

¹⁶ White Paper “Modernising Government”. 1. The Prime Minister and the Minister for the Cabinet Office. White Paper: Modernising Government. White Paper presented to the Parliament. London: The Prime Minister and the Minister for the Cabinet Office, United Kingdom; 1999 30 March 1999, cited in Walter J. Radermacher, Governing-by-the-numbers/Statistical governance: Reflections on the future of official statistics in a digital and globalised society, *Statistical Journal of the IAOS* 35 (2019) 519–537 519 DOI 10.3233/SJI-190562 IOS Press, p 520.

¹⁷ UNECE, *Recommendations for Promoting, Measuring and Communicating the Official Statistics* (2018), p. 11.

¹⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁹ Every day, 2.5 quintillion bytes of data are created – so much that 90 per cent of the data in the world today have been created in the last two years. UNECE, citing “Apply new analytics tools to reveal new opportunities”, IBM Smarter Planet website, Business Analytics page

www.ibm.com/smarterplanet/us/en/business_analytics/article/it_business_intelligence.html.

²⁰ UNECE (2018), p. 1.

²¹ Radermacher, *Governing-by-the-numbers/Statistical governance* (2019), p. 520.

²² *ibid.*

to the challenge posed by big data and modernise its statistical work, and its legal and institutional framework.²³

In this context, the Albanian statistical system is fraught with two challenges: (1) the first challenge is the alignment of the statistical processes with the EU standards and *acquis*, as part of the integration process; and (2) the second, the modernisation of its statistical operations to become relevant and necessary for the users. Chapter 18 which focuses on statistics is part of Cluster 1, under the new enlargement methodology. Besides this, it is also crosscutting among the other chapters of Cluster 1. This highlights the importance of progress and adhering to the EU requirements to approximate statistics to the EU standards. However, "official statistical products are of no use unless they meet someone's needs".²⁴ In this reformation of the statistical systems in EU and international level, Albania should look both to the EU benchmarks, and innovate to remain relevant to its users.

Given the lack of research on statistics (policy-oriented) in the Albanian discourse, the following section focuses on key definitions, contextualising elements, and understanding statistical governance.

2.1 The basics of official statistics

Official statistics are statistical outputs produced by a national statistical office (NSO) or by other designated governmental bodies. Usually, official statistics describe the economy, demography, environment, social and cultural situations in a particular country, and are produced within the scope of the statistical programme which guides the work of the national statistical system. The term "official statistics" serves as a quality label, indicating that official statistics are developed, produced and disseminated in accordance with internationally agreed statistical standards and recommendations, the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics and the European Statistics Code of Practice. (UNECE)

²³ *ibid.* This is also analysed by Radermacher, who raises the question that what is the necessity for elaborate official statistics in the future, where there are modern and innovative possibilities to acquire evidence/data. Questions he raises are: Why should a politician wait for official statistics when there was real-time data for the most difficult decisions? Why afford a statistical service to the cost of taxpayers when it seems so easy to analyse the data that all the machines mutually connected within the Internet of Things are generating all the time? He raises the questions to breakdown that despite the innovation of big data, the quality in the official statistics cannot be superseded.

²⁴ UNECE (2018), p. 3.

Official statistics are produced, developed, and distributed in accordance with internationally accepted standards and recommendations, such as the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics²⁵ and European Statistics Code of Practice²⁶.

Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics	European Statistics Code of Practice
Principle 1: Relevance, Impartiality, and Equal Access (<i>the test of practical utility</i>)	Principle 1: Professional independence (Professional independence of statistical authorities from other policy, regulatory or administrative departments and bodies, as well as from private sector operators)
Principle 2: Professional Standards, Scientific Principles, and Professional Ethics	Principle 2: A clear legal mandate to collect and access information from multiple data sources
Principle 3: Accountability and Transparency	Principle 3: Adequacy of Resources (Human, financial and technical resources, adequate both in magnitude and in quality)
Principle 4: Prevention of Misuse	Principle 4: Commitment to Quality
Principle 5: Sources of Official Statistics (all types of sources (...) quality, timeliness, costs, and the burden).	Principle 5: Statistical Confidentiality and Data Protection
Principle 6: Confidentiality (strictly confidential and used exclusively for statistical purposes)	Principle 6: Impartiality and Objectivity (scientific independence, users treated equitably)
Principle 7: Legislation	Principle 7: Sound methodology
Principle 8: National Coordination (consistency and efficiency in the statistical system)	Principle 8: Appropriate Statistics Procedures
Principle 9: Use of International Standards	Principle 9: Non-excessive burden on respondents
Principle 10: International Cooperation (Bilateral and multilateral cooperation in statistics)	Principle 10: Cost effectiveness (<i>resources used effectively</i>)
	Principle 11: Relevance (meet the needs of users)
	Principle 12: Accuracy and reliability (<i>portray reality</i>)
	Principle 13: Timeliness and punctuality

²⁵ Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics, <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/dnss/hb/E-fundamental%20principles_A4-WEB.pdf>.

²⁶ European Statistics Code of Practice, <<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/4031688/8971242/KS-02-18-142-EN-N.pdf/e7f85f07-91db-4312-8118-f729c75878c7?t=1528447068000>>.

	<p>Principle 14: Coherence and comparability (consistent internally, over time and comparable)</p> <p>Principle 15: Accessibility and clarity (presented in a clear and understandable form, released in a suitable and convenient manner, available and accessible on an impartial basis with supporting metadata and guidance)</p>
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Table 1: A glimpse on the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics and the European Code of Practice.

They refer to “data collected, compiled and analysed by statistical agencies, or other authorised authorities to provide accurate and reliable information regarding the population, the economy, social indicators, and the formulation of policies”.²⁷

According to Radermacher, official statistics can be defined by using three questions:

- Who? Official statistics are typically created and made available by statistical offices, or public administrations.
- What? Statistical work programmes and priorities are prepared according to public sector standards (i.e. participation of civil society) with the final decisions partly taken in legislative procedures.
- How? Statistical methodologies are nowadays subject of international cooperation and manifested in statistical standards; high-level quality is assured through management systems and ethical codes.²⁸

In modern statistical systems, official statistics are defined as "statistics developed, produced and disseminated by the national statistical systems of countries, in conformity with the United Nations Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics, internationally agreed statistical standards, codes and recommendations as well as applicable national legislation and programmes."²⁹ The key element is the quality stamp. By entrusting the development, production and dissemination of statistics to a governmental office, who must work in conformity to well-established standards, the process itself is well-designed to produce quality statistics.³⁰

²⁷ Hossein Hassani and Steve MacFeely, ‘Driving Excellence in Official Statistics: Unleashing the Potential of Comprehensive Digital Data Governance’ (2023) 7 Big Data and Cognitive Computing.

²⁸ Radermacher, 'Official Statistics 4.0' (2020), p. 5.

²⁹ UN, ‘The Handbook on Management and Organization of national Statistical Systems’, 4th Edition of the Handbook of Statistical organization (2022a), p. 31.

³⁰ John Pullinger, Trust in official statistics and why it matters, Statistical Journal of the IAOS 36 (2020) 343–346 343 DOI 10.3233/SJI-200632 IOS Press, p. 345.

2.2 National statistical office and national statistical system

The national statistical office (NSO) is the entrusted government agency to conduct, lead, and coordinate, statistical activities that concern the nation in its entirety.³¹ In some countries, in addition to their primary responsibilities of formulating policy and carrying out administrative tasks, specialised departments and ministries may produce official statistics on their subject alongside the NSO.³² For example, the ministry of education, health, labour, and finance, may be responsible for developing statistics relating to their subject.³³ In other countries, the NSO is the specialised statistical organisation which is entrusted with the bulk of official statistics. In these instances, the ministries, departments, and agencies (MDAs) are often essential data sources for the official statistics compiled by the NSO.³⁴

Different countries may have different governance models for the national statistical office. However, UN has recommended that, the two main issues that must be observed in all cases are:

- that the statistical activities to be carried out under very specialised and specific skills and expertise (no matter where they are carried out, meaning, *even if ministries and departments provide the statistics, they shall fall under the same quality stamp*); and
- irrespective of the division of responsibilities, there is a need for close cooperation between the NSO and other producers of official statistics in the MDAs (Ministries Departments and Agencies).³⁵

According to UN, the reasons that necessitate a strong cooperation between the NSO and the MDAs are:

- to ensure that the coverage of the official statistic is adequate (*both in subject matters and geographic coverage*);
- to avoid duplication of collection of data and other statistical activities (streamline the process, reduce costs, and minimize the burden on respondents who may be asked to provide information by multiple agencies);

³¹ UN, 'The Handbook on Management and Organization of national Statistical Systems', 4th Edition of the Handbook of Statistical organization (2022a), p. 31.

³² *ibid*, p 31.

³³ *ibid*.

³⁴ *ibid*.

³⁵ *ibid*, p 32.

- to regulate that all official statistics are based on scientific methods and standards and that they have a common base of agreed and established concepts, classifications, and procedures.

The National Statistical System (NSS) is "an organised approach to the provision of high-quality data and statistics, which provides the basis for reliable and comparable information".³⁶ In this system, the various roles and responsibilities are assigned in a clear and transparent manner (*either through a statistical law or a statistical programmes*), and the NSS members are continuously involved in the coordination process to ensure the high quality of the official statistics.

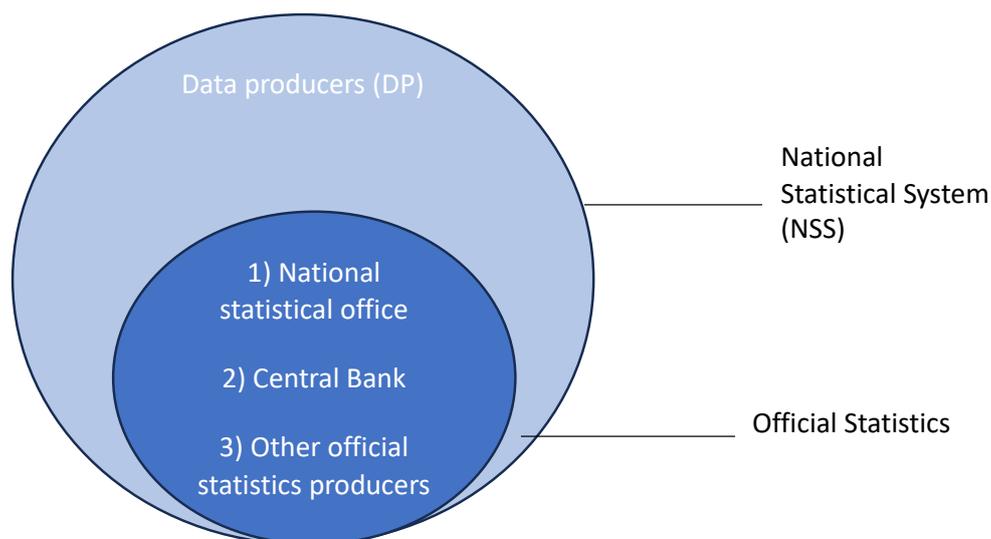


Figure 1: Boundaries of the National Statistical System (NSS) and Official Statistics. Source: Volker Täube, *Boundaries and coordination of the National Statistical System (NSS)*, *Statistical Journal of the IAOS*, vol. 36, no. 2, pp. 401-406, 2020, DOI: 10.3233/SJI-200637 <<https://content.iospress.com/articles/statistical-journal-of-the-iaos/sji200637>>.

The manner that the National Statistical System is governed varies from country to country. It can either (1) be regulated in law (*by a statistical law*), or (2) be "somewhat informal and pragmatic".³⁷ Cooperation within the NSS can revolve around statistical programs that cover the entire system. In many countries, this cooperation is supported by formal agreements, like memoranda of understanding (MoUs), which outline each organization's roles and responsibilities.³⁸

³⁶ Volker Täube, '[Boundaries and coordination of the National Statistical System \(NSS\)](#)', *Statistical Journal of the IAOS*, vol. 36, no. 2, pp. 401-406, 2020, DOI: 10.3233/SJI-200637.

³⁷ *ibid.*

³⁸ *ibid.*

In *Figure 2*, it is illustrated that the National Statistical System consists of two main components: producers of Official Statistics and data producers. The distinction between these two lies in their roles and functions within the statistical system.

Producers of Official Statistics are entities responsible for generating, compiling, analysing, and disseminating official statistical information.³⁹ These entities archetypally include the NSO, government ministries, departments, and specialized agencies. They have the authority and mandate to collect, process, and publish statistical data on various aspects of society and the economy, such as population demographics, economic indicators, social welfare, education, health, and more.⁴⁰

On the other hand, data producers are entities that primarily generate and provide raw data, which is then further processed and analysed by producers of Official Statistics to produce official statistical outputs.⁴¹ Essentially, data producers "deliver data which will be further processed by producers of official statistics."⁴²

Recognising the difference between data producers and producers of official statistics is critical because it clarifies that not all data is subjected to the same rigorous quality checks as official statistics.

Producers of official statistics produce statistics using:

- (i) non-traditional data sources:
 - a. big data (mobile phone data, social media, etc.),
 - b. citizen generated data (CGD)
 - c. data from credit card providers,
 - d. data from electronic payments switch companies,
 - e. scanner data for consumer electronics,
- (ii) traditional sources:
 - a. paper questionnaires,
 - b. face-to-face and telephone interviews,
 - c. statistical surveys,
 - d. administrative registers.⁴³

³⁹ Radermacher, *Official Statistics 4.0*, p. 2.

⁴⁰ Volker Täube, '[Boundaries and coordination of the National Statistical System \(NSS\)](#)', *Statistical Journal of the IAOS*, vol. 36, no. 2, pp. 401-406, 2020, DOI: 10.3233/SJI-200637.

⁴¹ *ibid.*

⁴² *ibid.*

⁴³ Statistical Commission, [Supplementing the United Nations Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics: Mapping and Guidance for the United Nations Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics against non-conventional and nontraditional data sources](#) (2020).

All producers of official statistics must comply to the ethical and professional standards laid out in the EU code of Practice and the UN Fundamental principles.⁴⁴ According to 10 UN Fundamental Principles, producers of official statistics must have the following elements⁴⁵:

- Production of official statistics in a given area is legitimate if justified by needs of the users;
- Be free of conflicts of interest;
- Be perceived by all users as acting impartially, so that all users can have trust in the results as unbiased representation⁴⁶;
- Statistics are presented in a way that facilitates proper interpretation and meaningful comparisons;
- Results of official statistics have to be consistent or reconcilable over a reasonable period of time;
- Professional Independence;
- Statistical producers have to be transparent;
- Use three type of sources:
 - Statistical surveys: data collection from individuals, households, corporate and unincorporated businesses, and public entities outside the own government structure, for the exclusive purpose of statistics (most of which official statistics);
 - Administrative records: secondary use of data collected primarily for administrative purposes about individuals or private businesses by other parts of the same government structure;
 - Environment and territorial observation and monitoring data collected by specialised government agencies with technical devices (e.g. remote sensing with satellites)⁴⁷; etc.

2.3 The role of the chief statistician⁴⁸

⁴⁴ UNECE, ['How Should a Modern National System of Official Statistics Look?'](#) (2008), p 1.

⁴⁵ *ibid*, pp 7-

⁴⁶ According to UNECE, activities that could create conflicts of interests are: Administrative decisions on individual units (businesses, individuals) such as permits, taxes etc. Decisions to include a unit in an administrative register that may be used for such purposes is equivalent; Advocating specific policy measures; Public relations for the government/country; Involvement in political decisions (preparation of decisions without advocacy is o.k.); Data collection for administrative use by another government unit; Data collection for non-official statistics if one or more of the Principles is not respected.

⁴⁷ The Statistical Law applies to all phases of statistical activity for statistical surveys; for the other two sources, primary data collection must be based on other laws, and the statistical legislation becomes applicable only after the data are handed over to an official statistician (NSO or statistical department of a ministry/Central Bank). [UNECE](#), p 16.

⁴⁸ A common international term for the head of the NSO in a country is chief statistician.

The head of the NSO (*the chief statistician*) is "the main caretaker of [the government's] official statistics and representing the country in international statistical fora."⁴⁹

According to UN, the chief statistician: (i) ensures that official statistics are carried out on an **impartial** basis (*in accordance to the law and international principles*), free from political and other unprofessional infringement; (ii) leads and develops the official statistics; (iii) harmonises official statistics internally and externally; and (iv) coordinates the national statistical system.⁵⁰

The chief statistician has duties that extend beyond those of serving the government or the political forces of the time; he has the duty to the users of statistics, in general, to see to it that the statistics are compiled, processed and released consistently, with full transparency and integrity, comparable over time and between countries, following established international and internal practices. That is the only national interest in this respect.⁵¹

2.4 The users

Who are the users of official statistics?

According to UN, "anybody who accesses and/or reprocesses any data or statistics disseminated by the NSS, independently of the nature of use, is considered a user."⁵²

Governments

This includes the policy and lawmakers in the national government and in the legislative assembly, civil servants in MDAs as well as in regional and local government. These are the largest users of the official statistics. Their main uses are for gaining knowledge of developments in the various fields of society, supporting the formulation and implementation of policies and measures as well as monitoring the actions taken to assess if and to what extent they are producing the planned results. This applies to all kinds of political planning and implementation; annual and medium-term economic planning, such as for preparing the government

⁴⁹ UN, 'The Handbook on Management and Organization of national Statistical Systems', 4th Edition of the Handbook of Statistical organization (2022a), p. 34.

⁵⁰ *ibid.*

⁵¹ *ibid.*, p 36.

⁵² UN Handbook, p. 113.

	agenda, the central government budget; policies and planning in the social sector, for health services, education and labour market measures; and in the environment sector to lay short and medium-term plans and decide on measures and actions.
International and regional organizations	Closely related to government uses of statistics are those of international and regional organizations. Those uses are dictated by the mandates of the various organizations and the participation of the countries in international cooperation and programmes.
Businesses	Businesses are intensive users of official statistics. Their interest is planning and running their business activities in light of the observed and expected economic developments. They use official statistics to assess the economic situation and for deciding on their business plans – for “evidence-based decision making”. Similarly, trade unions and labour market organizations use official statistics for assessment purposes and planning their labour market policies.
Media	Media are important users of official statistics and one of the main channels for communicating statistical information to the various actors in society and the public at large. It is their role to report on main developments in society, assess the economic, social, and environmental situation and generally act to hold government and public and private sector players accountable for their actions.
The academic, research and education community	The academic, research and education community uses official statistics in various ways. Universities and higher-level schools use official statistics in their teaching activities. Universities and research institutions use various types of official statistics in their research. While government, businesses and media are mainly users of aggregate data and statistical indicators, more detailed information is often needed in academic and applied research, even at the most detailed level of microdata.
Non-government organizations (NGOs)	Non-government organizations (NGOs) and civil society need official statistics to gauge the need for their activities and determine where to focus their attention and services.
The public at large	The public at large has a right to be served with official statistics to be able to assess situations and developments for themselves. Of course, this group of users is the largest, the most diffused and dispersed and probably the least focused. Particularly for those reasons, it is the duty of

the NSOs and other producers of official statistics to see that the needs of the public for official statistics are taken care of.

Figure 2: The users of official statistics. Source: UN, 'The Handbook on Management and Organization of national Statistical Systems', 4th Edition of the Handbook of Statistical organization (2022a), p. 40.

2.5 The statistical production

The process of producing official statistics can, in simple terms, be described as involving four logical steps - identifying user needs, collecting data, processing and analysis of the statistics, and reporting and disseminating the findings.⁵³

Traditionally, these processes have been carried out within different divisions or units of NSOs. For example, the agricultural division would handle all aspects of producing agricultural statistics, from designing surveys to reporting findings.⁵⁴ This approach is known as a *stovepipe* or *silo* system.

The term "stovepipe" or "silo system" refers to an organizational structure where different departments or units within an organization operate independently and in isolation from one another. Each department functions as its own "silo," focusing solely on its specific tasks and objectives without much interaction or collaboration with other departments. In the context of producing official statistics, the stovepipe or silo system means that each division or unit within the National Statistical Office operates autonomously, handling all aspects of statistical production within its own domain. While this setup ensures specialized knowledge and expertise within each department, it may lead to inefficiencies and missed opportunities for collaboration and sharing of resources and information across different subject areas.⁵⁵ To address these limitations, many National Statistical Offices have taken steps to provide centralized support for different subject matter departments. This centralized support includes assistance in various areas such as questionnaire design, methodology, data collection, IT services, data editing, and dissemination. By centralizing these support functions, NSOs aim to improve efficiency in statistical production processes and overcome some of the challenges posed by the stovepipe or silo system.

⁵³ UN, 'The Handbook on Management and Organization of national Statistical Systems', 4th Edition of the Handbook of Statistical organization (2022a), p. 51.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*

⁵⁵ *ibid.*

However, despite these efforts, many NSOs still find the centralized support model to be insufficient in fully addressing the shortcomings of the stovepipe or silo system. As a result, further efforts have been made to create a more functional system for statistical production processes.⁵⁶

Hence, the creation of the Generic Statistical Business Process Model (GSBPM), which seeks to describe and guide the overall process of the statistical production as well as the individual production processes.⁵⁷ The model identifies and describes eight phases of the overall statistical production process (specify needs, design, build, collect, process, analyse, disseminate, and evaluate), divided into sub-processes; 44 sub-processes in all.

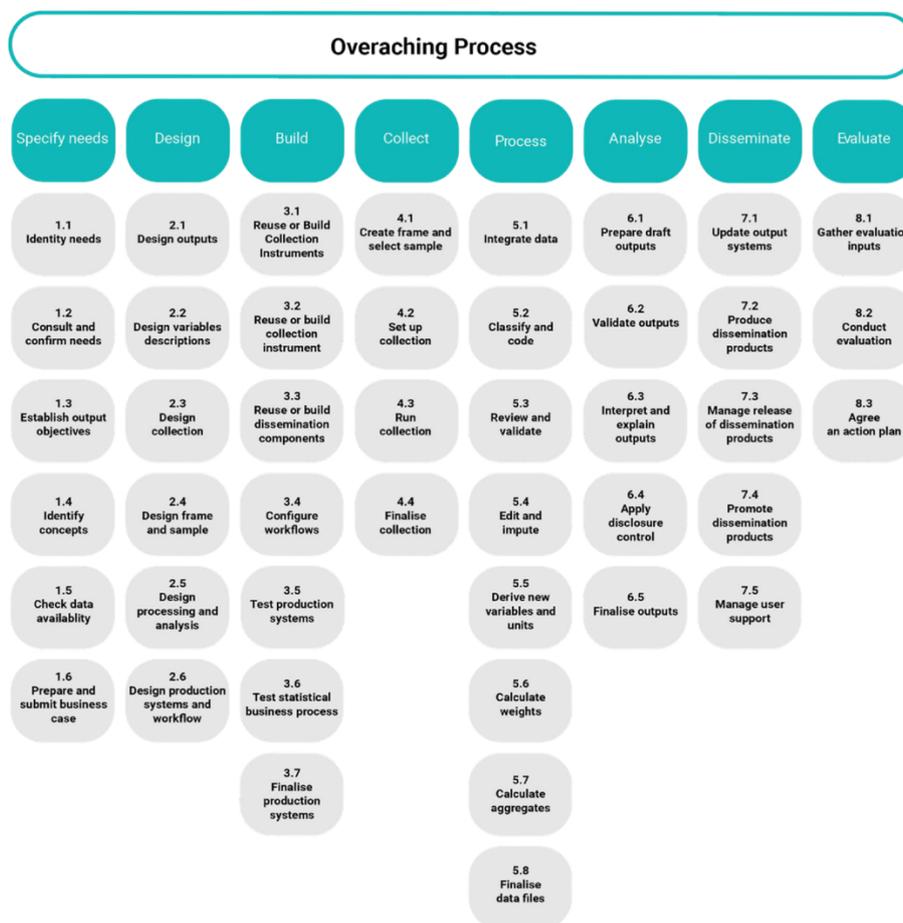


Figure 3: The statistical production process in terms of the GSBPM. Source: UN, 'The Handbook on Management and Organization of national Statistical Systems', 4th Edition of the Handbook of Statistical organization (2022a), p. 52.

⁵⁶ *ibid.*

⁵⁷ *ibid.*

A main over-arching process of GSBPM concerns quality management.⁵⁸ According to the UN Handbook, "to improve quality, quality management should be present throughout the business process model, based on the evaluation and quality control at each stage, each sub-process. If done in accordance with the suggestions of the GSBPM, quality failures can be detected and analysed at every stage of the process, traced to failures at previous stages, corrected or amended, thus raising the quality of each sub-process and the final product".⁵⁹

2.6 Quality and statistics

There is no unified glossary of quality terms in official statistics. In the endeavour to approach the topic of quality, Radermacher (2020) notes that a statistical system should meet three requirements: (i) to provide information about things that are relevant, (ii) statistics need to be supported by theory, and (iii) statistics need to be reliable, punctual, comparable, and accessible, to name a few.

The quality criteria for European statistics⁶⁰ overview:

Institutional environment	Statistical processes	Statistical output
1. Professional independence 1bis. Coordination and cooperation 2. Mandate for data collection 3. Adequacy of resources 4. Commitment to quality 5. Statistical confidentiality 6. Impartiality and objectivity	7. Sound methodology 8. Appropriate statistical procedures 9. Non-excessive burden on respondents 10. Cost effectiveness	11. Relevance 12. Accuracy and reliability 13. Timeliness and punctuality 14. Coherence and comparability 15. Accessibility and clarity

Table 2: The quality criteria for European statistics. Source: Radermacher, p. 40.

Quality of statistics is defined by Eurostat with reference to the following six criteria:

- relevance;
- accuracy;
- timeliness and punctuality;
- accessibility and clarity;
- comparability and

⁵⁸ *ibid*, p 54.

⁵⁹ *ibid*.

⁶⁰ Based on Radermacher scheme, p. 40.

- coherence.⁶¹

According to the UN Handbook on Management of Statistical Systems, the improvement of quality has been a goal and process for many NSOs and other producers of official statistics, given the interest of *international and supra-national organizations in enhancing the relevance, consistency and comparability of the official statistics of their member countries*.⁶² As a result, many National Statistical Systems have insisted on the need to "observe the quality of official statistics, at all stages in the production process as well as the end product".⁶³

The following documents serve as frameworks aimed at ensuring the quality of official statistics:

- The UN National Quality Assurance Framework for Official Statistics (NQAF);
- The Quality Assurance Framework of the European Statistical System (ESS QAF)⁶⁴;
- Data Quality Assessment Framework (DQAF) (The International Monetary Fund - in the field of economic and finance statistics).

⁶¹ Eurostat, Working Group "[Assessment of quality in statistics](#)" (2003), Doc. Eurostat/A4/Quality/03/General/Definition.

⁶² UN, 'The Handbook on Management and Organization of national Statistical Systems', 4th Edition of the Handbook of Statistical organization (2022a), p. 55.

⁶³ *ibid.*

⁶⁴ Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) defines concrete quality standards for statistical processes and outputs which are covered by principles 7 to 15 of the European Statistics Code of Practice and can be seen as an additional measure for building trust in Official Statistics. Eurostat.

3. THE ALBANIAN APPROACH TO THE STATISTICAL GOVERNANCE

This section employs the methodology used by Walter Radermacher on his five pillars of statistical governance⁶⁵, to reflect the statistical landscape in Albania. According to Radermacher, the five pillars of statistical governance are:

- Pillar 1: Who (Actors and roles)
 - Ex: The roles, functions, the rights and duties of the producers and the stakeholders of official statistics.
- Pillar 2: What (Statistical programme, products, and services)
 - Ex: The range of products and services that reflect value for taxpayer money and general information needs of society.
- Pillar 3: How (Quality assurance)
 - Ex: The quality depends on how it is produced, complying with a high-quality standard, be communicated transparently, and be certified comprehensibly.
- Pillar 4: Confidentiality
- Pillar 5: International Cooperation and relations, standards, governance

Before we continue with this exercise, Radermacher notes that "a statistical system is composed of a broad set of collaborating partners with a differentiated set of tasks and responsibilities, which need to be addressed by well-balanced governance rules".⁶⁶ Although he does not mention the content of these well-balanced governance rules, we draw from both the 'Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics'⁶⁷ and the literature on good governance on the following (possible) rules that need to govern the statistical system:

⁶⁵ See Walter J. Radermacher, 'Official Statistics 4.0-Verified Facts for People in the 21st Century', Springer (2019) <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-31492-7>, pp. 143-147.

⁶⁶ *ibid*, p. 144.

⁶⁷ UN, [Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics](#).

Rule 1: The statistical authority is guaranteed statutory independence from political interference.

Rule 2: The statistical authority has secure and stable through established mechanisms not susceptible to political influence.

Rule 3: The statistical authority employs qualified statisticians and experts based on professional skills and ethical standards.

Rule 4: The statistical authority draws formalised partnerships through agreements outlining roles, responsibilities, and data-sharing protocols for different partners.

Rule 5: There exist standardized methodologies that ensure consistent and transparent data collection, processing, and analysis methods adhering to international standards, as well as quality control procedures. The statistical system provides comprehensive and accessible metadata documentation, clearly explaining data definitions, sources, limitations, and methodologies.

Rule 6: The statistical system actively communicates with the public about data sources, methodologies, limitations, and uncertainties, fostering trust and understanding, as well as proactively release data in accessible formats and promote open data policies to enable public scrutiny and independent analysis. In this regard, it also involves civil society organizations, media outlets, and the public in data collection initiatives, public awareness campaigns, and feedback mechanisms.

Figure 4: Governance rules. Own compilation.

3.1 Pillar One: Who?

The statistical system of Albania is a *centralised system*, organised as a professionally independent body, and headed by the Institute of Statistics (INSTAT). INSTAT is "is the main producer of official statistics in the Republic of Albania (and its mission is to provide transparent, neutral and timely statistics that help the users to judge the development and transformation processes in economic and social areas within the country" (Law on Official Statistics, Article 14(1)).

In the centralised system, only one or few entities are responsible for the production of Official Statistics in the country. (...) In a centralised NSS, the NSI (and the Central Bank) are exclusive producers of Official Statistics that collect and process data and disseminate the statistical results. Some of the advantages of a centralised National Statistical System are: (i) The

concentration of expertise); (ii) User's perception of the NSI as a "brand" for Official Statistics; (iii) The less problematic coordination and enforcement of quality and standards in statistical production and dissemination within the NSI. The disadvantages are that there is a lack of non-in-house expertise and distance to (regional) users⁶⁸; whereas

In a (functionally) decentralised NSS, production of Official Statistics is often done by Ministries or other specialised agencies. The advantages are (i) Ministries maintain functions of a producer of Official Statistics in absence of respective capacities/competencies at the NSI and (ii) Closer to users of Official Statistics. Disadvantages to this system are: (i) Difficulties in maintaining effective planning and coordination across the NSS; (ii) Often significant involvement of other national administration (Ministries, etc.) which might open the door for political influences in the coordination of the NSS; and Difficulty in communicating and implementing common standards, methodologies and practices.⁶⁹

3.1.1. Producers

According to the Law on Official Statistics (Article 2/1/c), the national statistical system (NSS/SKS) "shall be composed of the official statistics producers, operating within the Republic of Albania in collecting, processing and publishing official statistics according to the official statistics program". Currently, official statistics producers in Albania are:

- INSTAT;
- Bank of Albania; and
- Other public authorities determined under the official statistics production program

In the current five-year programme, 2022-2026, the only producer in category (c) is the Ministry of Finance and Economy. As a result, the NSS in Albania consists of: INSTAT, the Bank of Albania and the Ministry of Finance and Economy.⁷⁰

The organisations that produce statistics, but are not any of these three, do not produce official statistics.

⁶⁸ Volker Täube, '[Boundaries and coordination of the National Statistical System \(NSS\)](#)', Statistical Journal of the IAOS, vol. 36, no. 2, pp. 401-406, 2020, DOI: 10.3233/SJI-200637.

⁶⁹ *ibid.*

⁷⁰ Peter Hackl, Adrian Redmon, Trobioren Carlquist, 'Peer Review report on compliance with the code of practice and the coordination role of the national statistical institute (2018), p. 14.

In 2018, in a *Peer Review* report in regard to compliance with the code of practice, the authors noted that there are some organisations that produce European Statistics that are not included in the Programme, but to which, the Peer Reviewers recommend that they "are of sufficient quality and relevance to be included in the scope of official statistics."⁷¹ Hence, a recommendation was given to expand the scope of the producers of official statistics.

It is identified that the procedure to identify producers of official statistics lacks in Law No. 17/2018 "On official Statistics". The Law mentions that producers of official statistics are "INSTAT, Banc of Albania and other public authorities, authorised to produce and publish official statistics, according to the official statistics program".⁷² The inclusion of the procedure of choosing the producers of the official statistic is considered as good practice.

INSTAT - The National Statistical office

INSTAT is a public, independent legal body. According to Richard Allen from International Monetary Fund, "independence" is a relative term, and one that depends for its legitimacy on the quality of political institutions and public perceptions, as well as legal and financial considerations."⁷³ Allen notes that the following elements/conditions could increase the likelihood that an institution is able to operate independently of the government, such as:

- (i) the "independent" legal status to be preferably recognised in an international treaty or the constitution;
- (ii) the work and independent status to be recognised by an international body;
- (iii) "the entity be separated from the executive branch of government to the maximum degree possible"⁷⁴;
- (iv) financial independence, that includes the principles "○ *the entity should be provided with a continuous source of income that enables it to carry out its functions*; ○ *the entity should be able to apply for the necessary resources through the state budget process*; and ○ *a separate "protected" budget heading should be provided from which transfers of funds to other parts of the budget cannot be made*";
- (v) the competence of the members of the independent entity to carry out their functions efficiently and effectively (connected to the existence of a nomination and selection process that is

⁷¹ The Peer Review report, p. 14.

⁷² Law no. 17/2018, Article 2, para 1, letter c.

⁷³ Richard Allen, ['Can an "Independent" Public Body be Truly Independent?'](#), International Monetary Fund, Blog (2013).

⁷⁴ Allen notes here that it cannot be to the absolute level, given that senior appointments such as the president and members of the [fiscal council] must be approved at the political level by the council of ministers, or in some countries by the parliament. Although Allen has in focus the independence of fiscal councils, it is believed that the principles outlined in his blog fall in place for our public body in focus - INSTAT.

clear, transparent and based on merit); (vi) accountability to the parliament⁷⁵ and to the public (through wide access to reports and other information); and (vii) the external perception that the entity is independent⁷⁶.

INSTAT is the coordinator of the National Statistical System, on top of being the most important authority in producing official statistics in the Republic of Albania. On this basis, given that its (in)dependence would undermine the quality and independence of the entire statistical system, *Table 1* provides a deconstruction of the concept of independence of INSTAT.

Firstly, the independent status of INSTAT is recognised in the Article 15 of the Law no.17/2018, On Official Statistics. Its independence status is not explicitly mentioned in the constitution of Albania.

Secondly, on EU level, the European Statistical Governance Advisory Board (ESGAB) is the body that gives an independent view on how the European Statistics Code of Practice (CoP) is implemented in the European Statistical System. ESGAB would have been the "international body" that Allen refers on his second condition to give the stamp of independence to a public authority. Given that Albania is not yet a member of the EU, we lack this point from ESGAB. In the Peer Review report on the "compliance with the code of practice and the coordination role of the national statistical institute" conducted by Eurostat, it was acknowledged that "the [amended] law makes the independence of INSTAT very clear".⁷⁷

Thirdly, the amended Law on Official Statistics has indeed provided a level of separation from the executive branch.

Fourthly, regarding financial autonomy, INSTAT is a "centralised, independent public institution, whose sources of funding for carrying out statistical activities are mainly provided by the state budget."⁷⁸ Other sources of financing for INSTAT are (i) international donors or donations, and (ii) as well as secondary income or funds beyond the limit, which are provided by the secondary activities carried out by INSTAT. The budget allocated to INSTAT for 2024, approved by Law no. 97,

⁷⁵ It is interesting that Allen goes further noting that, although a good indicator of independence is accountability to the parliament, this falls through in the situations when the parliament itself is not politically independent of the executive or the [president/prime minister].

⁷⁶ Allen makes a good point on the importance of being perceived as independent, even if independence can be challenged on a *de jure* basis. The point underscores that the mere existence of a legally defined independence does not guarantee true independence in practice. There might be situations where legal frameworks exist, but in reality, there are factors or influences that compromise the entity's independence. The *de facto* independence is probably better to have than the other.

⁷⁷ Peter Hackl, Adrian Redmond, Torbioern Carlquist, EUROSTAT, [Peer Review Report on compliance with the code of practice and the coordination role of the national statistical institute](#) (Republic of Albania) 2018.

⁷⁸ INSTAT, [Annual Report to the Assembly](#), 2022.

7.12.2023 "On the State Budget" is 1,182,500 mln Lekë, nearly 0.3% of the state budget (the total state budget is 408,040,194 mln Lekë).

Fifthly, as noted above, the members of the independent entity need to be competent to carry out their functions efficiently and effectively. Members of the independent entity should possess a deep understanding of statistical methods, ensuring proficiency in the design, collection, analysis, and interpretation of data. Furthermore, competent members should have a solid grasp of the legal and ethical frameworks governing statistical activities, among other elements. We lack governance statistics on this matter to scrutinise the level of competence of the employees of INSTAT.

Sixthly, in regard to oversight of the work of INSTAT, there are several mechanisms in place:

- Internal Oversight:
 - INSTAT's internal audit that conducts regular audits of its data collection, processing, and dissemination procedures. This unit helps to identify and address any internal weaknesses or errors.⁷⁹
 - INSTAT has implemented a quality management system that is based on international standards. This system helps to ensure that the institute's statistical products and services meet the quality standards.⁸⁰
- External Oversight:
 - The State Audit Office is an independent government agency that audits all public institutions, including INSTAT. The State Audit Office investigates any INSTAT's activities and makes recommendations for improvement.⁸¹
 - The Parliament controls the work and activities of INSTAT, based on the yearly reports submitted by INSTAT, where it is foreseen the performance on the functioning of the statistical national system, the implementation of the national programme, and the implementation of the year plan (Law no.17/2019, Article 13).
 - Civil society can potentially be involved in monitoring the government's statistical activities, playing the role of a *watchdog* in holding INSTAT accountable and advocating for improvements in the statistical system.

Seventhly, there needs to exist an external perception that the entity is independent. In the case of INSTAT, to the best knowledge of the author, there

⁷⁹ Law no.17/2018, Article 17, point 3.

⁸⁰ INSTAT, '[Quality guidelines for the statistical processes](#)', 2.0 (2021).

⁸¹ See for instance KLSH, '[Final Report on the Audit on the Institute of Statistics](#)', (2021).

are no surveys that focus on the corruption of the national statistical system, or trust in the institutions that make the statistical system, and specifically INSTAT. The lack of such surveys or focus on this topic could mean that (i) Stakeholders, including the public, policymakers, or other entities, may not be sufficiently aware of the importance of assessing the independence of INSTAT or the broader national statistical system, or alternatively, (ii) there might be a perception that issues related to corruption or trust are not prevalent, as there is an assumption or presumption that institutions like INSTAT are inherently independent, leading to a lack of perceived urgency in conducting surveys specifically focused on these aspects.

Table 3: Deconstructing the independence of INSTAT. Based on Richard Allen methodology. Source: Richard Allen, 'Can an "Independent" Public Body be Truly Independent?', International Monetary Fund, Blog (2013).

The General Director of INSTAT is appointed by the Assembly, with the proposal of the Council of Ministers (CM), after an open and public selection procedure (the procedure is carried out by the CM, based on the procedures determined by a Decision of Councils of Ministers (DCM) - such as the way of carrying out the procedure, notification deadlines and criteria for evaluating candidates).⁸² An *ad-hoc* committee is formed by the CM, to complete the procedure of the selection of three candidates to be submitted to the Assembly.

⁸² Decision no.669, dated 7.11.2018, [On the appointment of the procedures, evaluation criteria and notification deadlines for the selection of candidates to be appointed to the position "General Director of the Institute of Statistics"](#).

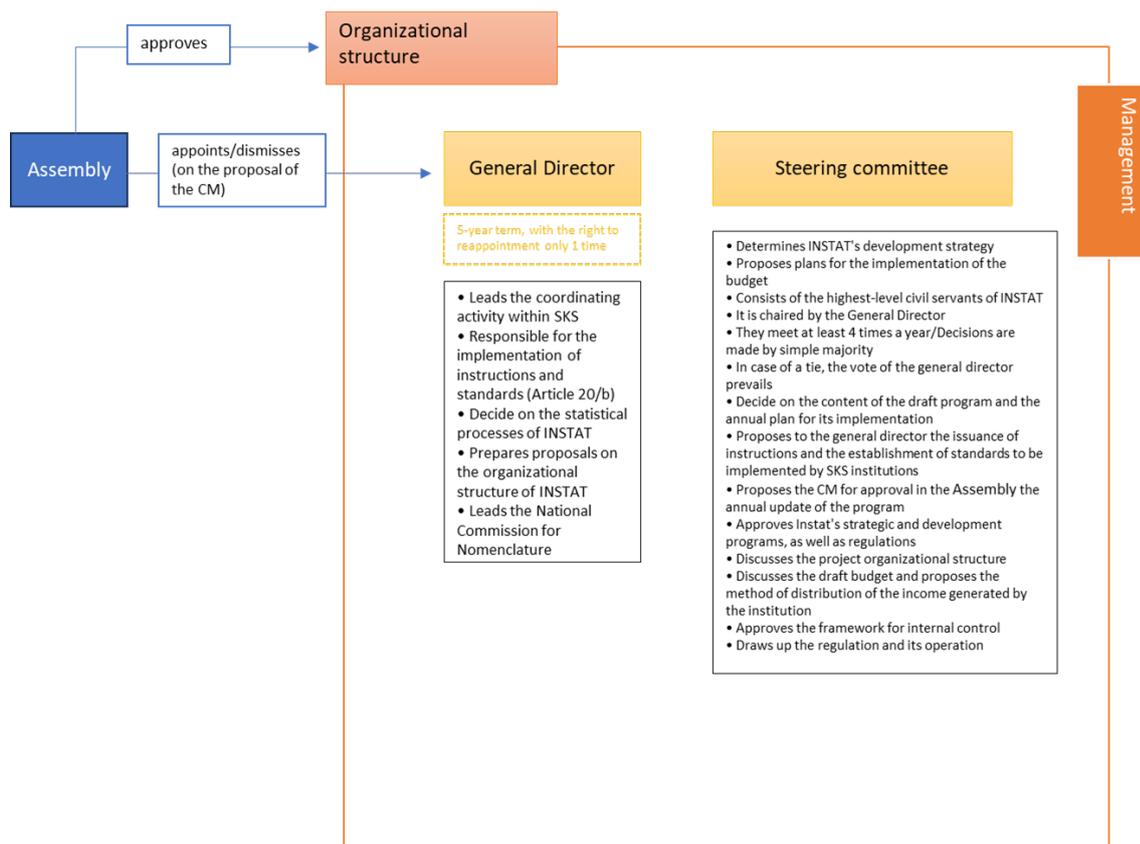


Figure 5: The (management) organizational structure of INSTAT. Source: Own compilation.

In Regulation 223/2009⁸³, it is noted that Member States shall ensure the professional independence of officials responsible for the tasks set out in the Regulation, namely: “coordinating statistical programming and reporting, quality monitoring, methodology, data transmission and communication on [European Statistical System] statistical actions”.⁸⁴ In the European statistical system, the heads of national system institutes (NSI), shall:

- decide on processes, statistical methods, standards and procedures, and on the content and timing of statistical releases and publications;
- decide on all matters regarding the internal management of the NSI;

⁸³ [Regulation \(EC\) No 223/2009](#) of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 March 2009 on European statistics and repealing Regulation (EC, Euratom) No 1101/2008 of the European Parliament and of the Council on the transmission of data subject to statistical confidentiality to the Statistical Office of the European Communities, Council Regulation (EC) No 322/97 on Community Statistics, and Council Decision 89/382/EEC, Euratom establishing a Committee on the Statistical Programmes of the European Communities (Text with relevance for the EEA and for Switzerland).

⁸⁴ *ibid*, Article 5, para 2.

- act in an independent manner -- neither seek nor take instructions from any government or other institution, body, office or entity;
- be responsible for the statistical activities and budget execution;
- publish an annual report;
- coordinate the statistical activities of all national authorities that are responsible for the development, production and dissemination of European statistics;
- produce national guidelines, where this is necessary to ensure quality in the development, production and dissemination of all European statistics within their national statistical system and monitor and review their implementation; while being responsible for ensuring compliance with those guidelines solely within the
- NSI; and
- represent their national statistical system within the ESS.⁸⁵

These elements have been considered in Article 16 of the Law no.17/2018, which lays out the tasks of the General Director of INSTAT.

It would be beneficial to note that, when Albania signs the Treaty of Accession, the EU regulations are “applied in its entirety across the EU”.⁸⁶ This means that differently to a directive, which sets out a goal that EU countries must achieve and it’s on the discretion of individual countries to devise their own laws on how to reach these goals, in the case of a “regulation”, the legal provisions are binding and directly applied. For this reason, caution must be applied when issuing laws that ‘harmonise’ with EU regulations, noting that such legal frameworks would be null by the time the Albania and EU sign the accession treaty.

To address this gap, it could be beneficial for relevant authorities, research institutions, or international organizations to consider initiating surveys or studies specifically focused on the independence of INSTAT and the broader national statistical system.

Bank of Albania

The Bank of Albania and INSTAT, both producers of official statistics, cooperate with the aim of producing official statistics according to the program and minimizing the reporting burden (respecting the divisions of official statistics and the statistical

⁸⁵ *ibid*, Article 5a, para 2, letters a-h.

⁸⁶ European Union, [Types of legislation](#).

quality criteria defined in the law). The way of cooperation is regulated by special agreements. BoA is excluded from the provisions of the Law no.17/2018:

- Article 13, point 2, letters b and c:
 - For the coordination of SKS, according to Article 12, INSTAT does not need:
 - b) to monitor the procedures for the production and distribution of official BoA statistics;
 - c) to give an opinion on each statistical survey before its start, to ensure the application of the principles of official statistics and statistical quality criteria.
- Article 25, point 3, letter c: BoA does not notify INSTAT of its contacts with international agencies for issues related to official statistics and reports on official statistical indicators in international institutions.
- Article 25, point 5: INSTAT is not informed or gives a preliminary opinion on any survey and statistical activity, including those outside the program, which will be undertaken by BoA;
- Article 25, point 7: BoA should not implement the recommendations determined by the DP of INSTAT regarding ensuring the implementation of the principles of official statistics.
- Article 38, point 1, letter c: BoA is not subject to administrative charges and fines for cases of sending official data to international institutions without the notification of INSTAT.

Ministry of Finance

Fiscal statistics are compiled by the Ministry of Finance with the main purpose of providing periodic information on the performance of Revenues, Expenditures, Deficits, etc. during a specific fiscal period (monthly, quarterly, annual).⁸⁷ In navigating the webpage of INSTAT, where the official statistics are to be disseminated in addition to the platform used by the producer of the official statistics, the following elements are identified:

- Clicking on the "Financial Statistics" link directs you to the webpage of the Ministry of Finance and Economy⁸⁸, where you can find the relevant statistical data.
- The link labeled "Debt Indicators" appears to be broken and does not lead to the intended webpage.
- The link labeled "Economic and fiscal programme" appears to be broken and does not lead to the intended webpage.

⁸⁷ INSTAT <<https://www.instat.gov.al/en/themes/economy-and-finance/fiscal-statistics/#tab1>>, last accessed 5 February 2024.

⁸⁸ Ministry of Finance and Economy, <<https://financa.gov.al/thesari-borxhi/>>, last accessed 5 February 2024.

- The link labeled "Publications" appears to be broken and does not lead to the intended webpage.
- There are no quality reports about the fiscal statistics.

Two elements are to be considered: (i) data accessibility, and (ii) dissemination by website and data portals.

According to the UN Handbook on Management of official Statistics, "providing easy access to official statistical data is a core responsibility of an NSO, as well as the commitment that the service meets user needs."⁸⁹ In this process, INSTAT needs to have a dissemination strategy and a common platform the includes data from all producers of official statistics.⁹⁰

This can help an NSO to harmonize statistical releases, tables, graphs and analysis, and terminology applied across statistical domains. It can help avoid confusion and misinterpretation and can facilitate the comparison of statistics.

The dissemination strategy needs to consider "Principle 6 - Impartiality and Objectivity" and "Principle 15 - Accessibility and Clarity".

INSTAT uses a website/data portal to provide access to data for their users, mainly as pdf format, downloadable datasets, and as interactive links to databases. UN recommends streamlining and not confuse the user with many portals but establish a coherent framework for transmitting data and metadata. In the case of the Ministry of Finance and Economy, a recommendation would be that the statistical outputs be reflected in the portal of INSTAT.

As a final note, it is important to note that even though Bank of Albania and Ministry of Finance and Economy are considered as producers of official statistics, INSTAT, as the coordinating body of the national statistical system ought to ensure the quality of the statistical activities of both the institutions.

3.1.2. Users

The relevance of the statistical products, that is, statistical products that meet the needs of users, is the requirement of Principle 11 of the European Code of Practice.

⁸⁹ UN, 'The Handbook on Management and Organization of national Statistical Systems', 4th Edition of the Handbook of Statistical organization (2022a), p. 490.

⁹⁰ *ibid*, p. 495.

To comply with this requirement the statistical authority needs to communicate effectively and to establish strong relations with users.⁹¹

The users of official statistics in Albania are local and central public authorities; (ii) politicians, (iii) businesses; (iv) researchers; (v) media; (vi) students: (vii) international organisations; (viii) embassies, and (ix) NGOs.⁹²

Elements to remember about how INSTAT can meet the needs of the users include:

- INSTAT is fully accountable to the public for the data that disseminate;
- The users expect statistical information to address their specific needs and as the ubiquity of the Internet brings news and other information to users in real-time, people want immediate answers to their questions along with the data to back it up;
- Users may expect that there is no delay between the collection of data and its publication (a delay may open the national statistics office for criticism).⁹³

On this basis, it is recommended that the NSO have a strategy on how best to engage with users, identify and respond to their requirements and issues as they arise, and to measure user satisfaction levels. Measuring and analysing user satisfaction could be conducted through *user surveys, tools such as Google Analytics and media monitoring, user profiling techniques*.⁹⁴

3.1.3. Institutions and their role in governance—participation, decision, control

The Statistics Council

The Statistics Council consists of eleven members, who are appointed by the Assembly, based on professional interests in official statistics as users of statistics, as well as experience in statistical methods, data creation processes or due to other involvements in the production of statistics. The members of the Statistics Council are users of official statistics and representatives of: a) local self-government bodies (1 member); b) Bank of Albania (1 member); c) the ministry responsible for finance (1 member); ç) main users of official statistics (2 members); d) the academic world (2 members); dh) civil society (1 member); e) Union of Chambers of Commerce and

⁹¹ Peter Hackl, Adrian Redmond, Torbioern Carlquist, EUROSTAT, [Peer Review Report on compliance with the code of practice and the coordination role of the national statistical institute](#) (Republic of Albania) 2018, p 25.

⁹² INSTAT, <<https://www.instat.gov.al/al/sistemi-komb%C3%ABtar-statistikor/>>, last accessed 5 February 2024.

⁹³ UN, 'The Handbook on Management and Organization of national Statistical Systems', 4th Edition of the Handbook of Statistical organization (2022a), p. 220.

⁹⁴ *ibid.*

Industry of Albania (1 member); ë) media (1 member); as well as f) the General Director of INSTAT.

In UNECE's Guide on Modernizing Statistical Legislation (2018)⁹⁵, the following recommendations are provided in regard to the Statistical Council:

- Add new tasks to the Statistical Council to include promotion of transparency and accountability of the NSS, promotion of the use of official statistics in society and provision of an opinion related to the implications of the budget allocation on the implementation of statistical programmes; and
- The Statistical Council to select the candidates for the General Director (in the case of Albania, the role to recommend three people for the role to the Assembly pertains to the Council of Ministers).

The Statistical Council is the mechanism for user representation in the statistical system. According to UNECE, the Statistical (advisory) Council has a dual advisory role (both towards the National Statistical System and the government and other users), and it "ensures that the views of users are taken into account when setting priorities in the statistical programme".⁹⁶

UNECE recommends that the statistical legislation should require that the council be composed of users with "advisory competences, as appropriate in the national jurisdiction". For comparison, the Bank of Albania (BoA) Supervisory Council has a complete other nature than the INSTAT's Statistical Council, in that:

- BoA's Supervisory Council is the highest decision-making and supervisory body of the Bank of Albania⁹⁷, whereas INSTAT's Statistical Council has a supervising role;
- Statistical Council is composed by 11 members who represent statistical agencies, the academic world and civil society, whereas the Supervisory Council must have educational background in economy or law, professional experience in financial and banking matters; professional qualifications of the profile; and work experience of more than five years in public administration or institutions financial and banking⁹⁸.

According to UNECE, the Statistical Advisory Body with adapt advisory competences "would act as a custodian of the principles of official statistics, ensure the relevance of official statistics and promote transparency and accountability of the NSS."⁹⁹ In

⁹⁵ See UNECE, '[Guidance on Modernizing Statistical Legislation](#)' (2018).

⁹⁶ *ibid*, p 22.

⁹⁷ Law no.8269, On the Bank of Albania.

⁹⁸ Law no.8269, On the Bank of Albania, dated 23.12.1998, as amended, Article 44, point 3, paras a-d.

⁹⁹ UNECE (2018), p 14.

the current state of the Albanian statistical system, there is no transparency on whether the Statistical Council has either evaluated the annual report of the General Director, or the implementation of statistical principles by the producers of official statistics, as foreseen in Article 21 of the Law no.17/2018. Furthermore, the law also provides that the statistical council shall "request an independent evaluation, assessment or audit from external experts on a specific area of official statistics."¹⁰⁰

On the website of INSTAT, the agendas and the decisions of the Statistical Council are published. However, they lack context, explanation, or a reply from the Statistical Council on the monitoring reports submitted by the General Director of INSTAT. On the annual reports to the Assembly, it is mentioned throughout the document that the Statistical Council has provided recommendation to certain matters, to which INSTAT has reacted.¹⁰¹ In this situation, we cannot scrutinize the work of the Statistical Council in its own. The question rises on whether they have monitored the implementation of statistical principles? If not, does that mean that we are left to believe and trust that INSTAT is producing official statistics in accordance with the statistical principles, without the need of oversight?

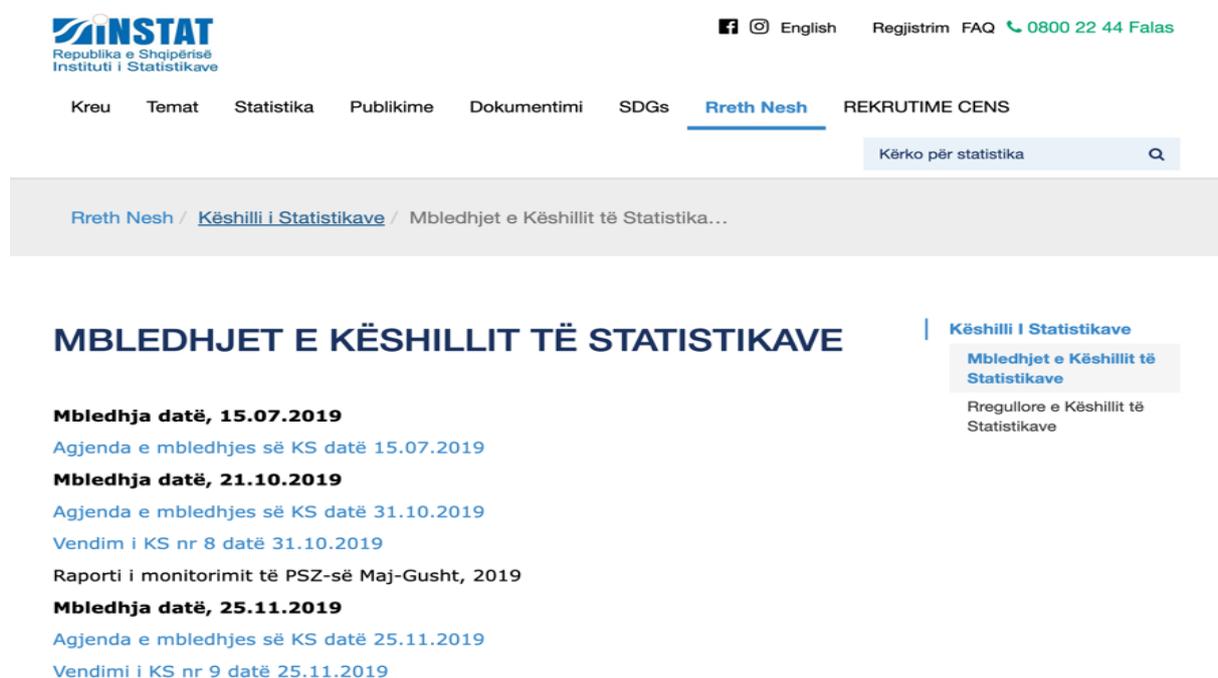


Figure 6: Meetings of the Statistical Council. The agenda and decision on the meetings in each case do not exceed one page. There are no minutes, recording or report on the content on the meetings, easily accessible to the citizens.

¹⁰⁰ Law no.17/2018, On Official Statistics Article 21, point 2, para c.

¹⁰¹ INSTAT, Annual Report to the Assembly, 2022.

The National Commission for Nomenclature

The National Commission for Nomenclature is an entity tasked with the ongoing update and adaptation of statistical, economic, and social classifications in accordance with European and international statistical classifications.

- Comprises representatives from INSTAT, statistical agencies, line ministries, and other public institutions utilizing official classifications.
- Headed by the Director-General of INSTAT.
- The establishment, composition, operational rules, and remuneration measures for members of the National Commission for Nomenclature are determined by a decision of the Council of Ministers, based on the proposal put forth by INSTAT.

Statistical Training Center

Statistical Training Center (QTS) operates within the structure and organization of INSTAT. Its objective is to enhance the professional capacities of statisticians and users, providing the necessary infrastructure to support research and scientific activities in the field of statistics.

INSTAT, as the coordinator of QTS, administers and develops appropriate training programs, aiming to enhance public trust in official statistics by improving the professional capacities of staff in statistical-producing institutions within the Republic of Albania.

3.2 Pillar Two: What?

In the realm of official statistics, the "What?" refers to the tangible output generated through statistical processes. This output comprises a diverse range of statistical products and information disseminated to the public.

For the public information infrastructure provided by official statistics, it is of great importance that the range of products and services reflect both value for taxpayer money and the general information needs of society. The job of the statistics services and the budget that they receive for it must fit together.¹⁰²

¹⁰² See Walter J. Radermacher, 'Official Statistics 4.0-Verified Facts for People in the 21st Century', Springer (2019) <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-31492-7>, p. 145.

To go to the output, the statistical office conducts statistical processed divided into four groups according to the input data source (UN methodology), namely:

- Survey¹⁰³;
- Administrative data¹⁰⁴;
- Geospatial data¹⁰⁵; and
- Big data^{106, 107}.

Estonia is well known for its innovative practices and the introduction of digital technologies and processes into its public administration. To facilitate more effective use of data sources and prevent duplication of information collected, Statistics Estonia (SE) proposed changes to its statistical law. Through this change, it has taken on the role of national data steward, tasked with coordinating data governance in Estonia. This function of SE will provide an overview, and the possibility to use a central database more efficiently for various statistical analyses since data providers (enterprises, institutions as well as and individuals) do not have to be burdened with responding to multiple questionnaires. The amended law requires all government authorities administering state databases to appoint persons responsible for data governance. It is expected that a data-sharing service will be added shortly to the statistical legislation, allowing SE to better coordinate data sharing of existing state data with other state authorities. This cross-usage of data between state authorities reduces duplication of data. It will enable SE to link data collected from different data sources and produce domain-specific data analyses and statistics while preserving statistical principles and confidentiality of data. SE provides this service only within the public sector and to research institutions. [Link to Statistics Estonia, data science competence center.](#)

Figure 7: New role for official statistics in Estonia. Source: UN, ‘The Handbook on Management and Organization of national Statistical Systems’, 4th Edition of the Handbook of Statistical organization (2022a), p. 315.

¹⁰³ The Generic Law on Official Statistics (GLOS), UNECE (2018) defines a statistical survey as ‘the primary collection of individual data from respondents of a given population carried out by a producer of official statistics exclusively for statistical purposes through the systematic use of statistical methodology’.

¹⁰⁴ The term administrative data refers here to data collected by a government ministry, department or agency primarily for administrative (not research or statistical) purposes. These administrative purposes are related to the corresponding executive or lawful functions such as authorisations, registrations, permits, payments, sanctions, control etc. Administrative data may include both data in administrative registers and data in other administrative sources.

¹⁰⁵ The term geospatial data refers to data that has a geographic component. This means that the records in a geospatial dataset have implicit locational information such as an address, city, or a postal code. A geographic information system (GIS) is a system designed to capture, store, manipulate, analyse, manage, and present geospatial data.

¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁷ UN, ‘The Handbook on Management and Organization of national Statistical Systems’, 4th Edition of the Handbook of Statistical organization (2022a), p. 313.

Estonia's approach to modernising its statistical activities is recommended as a good practice to follow.

According to the president of the International Association on Official Statistics, John Pullinger, the numbers used in the public domain are not just facts, but one can use these numbers to influence his audience.¹⁰⁸ In these cases, numbers can play a role that can be either good or bad.

In terms of quality, INSTAT aims to produce quality statistics, and is compliant to the European Statistics Code of Practice.¹⁰⁹ In accordance with the fourth principle of the European Statistics Code of Practice "Commitment to Quality", INSTAT has undertaken the following initiatives:

- The publication of the declaration of quality and commitment to quality;
- The establishment of the Quality Committee and the Quality sector, as a mechanism to oversee the quality of statistical processes;
- Drafting and publication of the Quality Guideline;
- Adoption of the Generic Statistics Business Process Model (GSBPM) model;
- Increase of professional capacities and awareness in regard to quality control;
- Making a statistical audit and self-evaluation on identifying strengths and points for improvements on quality;
- To produce user-oriented statistics (measure the fulfilment of the needs through the User Satisfaction Survey;¹¹⁰ and
- Improve the qualification and continuous training of the employees in order to enhance their capacities and competences.¹¹¹

3.3 Pillar Three: How? (Processes)

INSTAT, as well as all authorities producing official statistics, operate on the basis of the Official Statistics Program ('Program'). According to Article 7 of Law no. 17/2018, the Program defines the development strategy of (1) official statistics, as well as (2) the National Statistical System, for a period of five years. This Program establishes the framework of requirements that producers of official statistics must fulfill in order to produce quality statistics.

¹⁰⁸ John Pullinger, 'Trust in Official Statistics and Why It Matters' (2020) 36 Statistical Journal of the IAOS 343, p 1.

¹⁰⁹ [National Program of Official Statistics \(2022-2026\)](#), p. 60.

¹¹⁰ The last one published in the INSTAT's official page is in 2021.

¹¹¹ *ibid.*

Based on legal provisions, the Program is approved by the Assembly, with a proposal from the Council of Ministers, which received the Program prepared by INSTAT in cooperation with statistical agencies, as well as taking into consideration the opinion of the Statistics Council. The Assembly approves the Program with a special law, which covers a period of five years from the moment of publication in the Official Gazette.

The program approved by the Assembly must include at least:

1. description of the development objectives of official statistics;
2. the description of the main statistical activities for each field provided for in Appendix 1 of Law no. 17/2018, as well as the frequency and level of compliance with national standards;
3. the institutions responsible for the supply of administrative data, as well as the institutions responsible for the production and distribution of official statistics;
4. the analysis of the financial and human resources necessary to fulfill the activities;
5. analysis of expected risks and problems.

According to legal provisions, INSTAT is the structure responsible for coordinating programming and statistical reporting, quality monitoring, methodologies, and data transmission.

INSTAT plays a key role in the implementation of the program. This institution must ensure (implies a positive obligation to control and monitor) that the program is being implemented, and that the statistics in the program are developed, produced and distributed according to the principles provided for in this law. Simply put, INSTAT is the key entity that does most of the work in terms of writing the draft program (including cooperation with other producers of official statistics). Then, INSTAT performs the role of coordinating the work, as well as the controller of uniformity in methodology and in the content of international standards.

The model employed by INSTAT is the GSBPM model, which describes a statistical process in terms of eight phases, namely, Specify Needs, Design, Build, Collect, Process, Analyse, Disseminate and Evaluate.

The program is accompanied by an annual plan, which "serves to implement the program and covers one calendar year". The format of the annual plan is determined by INSTAT in cooperation with statistical agencies, which send INSTAT their proposals for drafting the annual plan. Also in this case, obtaining the opinion of the Statistics Council is a condition for the approval of the annual plan. INSTAT approves the draft plan, and then notifies it to the Council of Ministers, where the latter sends it to the Assembly for approval.

Statistical units



The producer of official statistics must be notified of the scope and purpose of the survey, of the rights and obligations, and of the measures to be taken to ensure statistical confidentiality:

The qualities that undermine the processes are (i) the principles, (ii) the confidentiality, and the (iii) quality control.

Statistical Performance

According to the World Bank, Albania has a statistical performance score of 83.4 in its statistical performance (in 2022).¹¹² The Statistical Performance Indicators (SPI) provide an open-source framework for assessing the performance of statistical systems in five pillars:

PILLARS	DIMENSIONS				
Data Use (User Types)	Legislature	Executive	Civil Society	Academia	International Bodies
Data Services (Service Types)	Quality of Data Releases	Richness & Openness of Online Access	Effectiveness of Advisory & Analytical Services Related to Statistics		Availability & Use of Data Services
Data Products (Topics)	Social (SDG 1-6)	Economic (SDG 7-12)	Environmental (SDG 13-15)		Institution (SDG 16-17)
Data Sources	Statistical Office (Censuses & Surveys)		Administrative Data	Geospatial Data	Private Sector Data/Citizen Generated Data
Data Infrastructure	Legislation & Governance	Standards & Methods	Skills	Partnership	Finance (Domestically & From Donors)

¹¹² The World Bank, Statistical Performance Albania (2019), <<https://datanalytics.worldbank.org/SPI/?tab=country-reports>>

Figure 8: The Pillars and Dimensions that Construct the New SPI. Source: Source: World Bank, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/programs/statistical-performance-indicators/Framework>

A deconstruction:

- **Data Use:** Statistics have value only if they are used. A successful statistical system produces data that are used widely and frequently.
- **Data Services:** A range of services connects data users to producers and facilitate dialogues between them, thus building trust and a sense of value.
- **Data Products:** User-producer dialogues shape the design and range of statistical products, as well as their accuracy, timeliness, frequency, comparability, and levels of disaggregation. The products indicate whether countries can produce indicators related to the 17 Sustainable Development Goals.
- **Data Sources:** To produce useful results, the statistical system must consult both internal and external sources. Data collection thus extends beyond traditional censuses and surveys to include administrative and geospatial data, as well as data generated by private businesses and citizens.
- **Data Infrastructure:** A mature statistical system possesses well-developed hard infrastructure (legislation, governance, standards), soft infrastructure (skills, partnerships), and financial resources to provide useful—and widely used—data products and services.

Albania

SPI overall score (Albania)	Pillar 1: Data Use ¹¹³	Pillar 2: Data Services	Pillar 3: Data Products	Pillar 4: Data Sources	Pillar 5: Data Infrastructure
75.4	90	70	87	70	100

¹¹³ The dashboard only features indicators for one of the five dimensions of data use, which is data use by international organizations. Indicators on whether statistical systems are providing useful data to their national governments (legislature and executive branches), to civil society, and to academia are absent. Thus the dashboard does not yet assess if national statistical systems are meeting the data needs of a large swathe of users. See further World Bank SPI Team, [Measuring the Statistical Performance of Countries: An Overview of Updates to the World Bank Statistical Capacity Index](#) (March 2021).

Table 4: Albania SPI Overall and pillar score. Source: World Bank Group <https://www.worldbank.org/en/programs/statistical-performance-indicators/explore-data#1>

The strongest performer is Pillar 5 'Data infrastructure' and the weakest is Pillar 4 'Data Sources'/Pillar 3 'Data Services' (Pillar 1 is a corrupted score, therefore we do not take it into account). The World Bank notes that to improve the SPI score:

- indicators on whether statistical systems are providing useful data to their users need to be created;
- measure the advisory and analytical services provided by NSOs (beyond producing data);
- More information is needed in the areas of administrative data, geospatial data, and private and citizen generated data (possible questions that could guide the operations):
 - Do countries have administrative data systems in place to measure health, education, labor, and social protection program statistics?
 - How are countries using geospatial information?
 - How national statistical systems are incorporating private, and citizen generated data (e.g., on mobility, job search, or social networking)?
 - What are the areas of skills and of partnerships between entities in the national statistical system?¹¹⁴

One key takeaway from SPI is that there is a shift towards a more quality-oriented approach in statistical programs, emphasizing the importance of relevance, usefulness, and diversity of data sources. It suggests a move beyond merely collecting large amounts of data towards ensuring that the data collected is of high quality and meets the needs of users effectively. Generally, the national statistical system is encouraged to take these points into account

3.4 Pillar Four: Confidentiality

Data distributed from publicly available sources will not be considered confidential. The data collected, processed and stored for the production of official statistics are

¹¹⁴ *ibid*, pp. 8-17.

treated as confidential by INSTAT, the statistical agencies and any organization or person designated by them, when these data lead to the statistical units being identified directly or indirectly, revealed individual data, which have not been made public for other reasons. All employees of the bodies/controllers, mentioned in the first paragraph of this point, who are made aware of the data they process during the exercise of their functions, are obliged to maintain confidentiality and reliability even after the end of the function. Direct or indirect identification. The individual data collected is used for statistical purposes only, and is not used to make any administrative decisions, including fiscal control decisions or legal investigations.

Producers of official statistics are obliged to store data collected electronically or through scanned questionnaires for at least 10 years from the date of collection. Then, these are sent to the Central State Archive (in accordance with law no. 9154/2003). Paper questionnaires are destroyed no earlier than one year after the publication of official statistics produced through the processing of these data under the supervision of the commission established by the producer of official statistics (Article 32, point 3).

INSTAT has the right to access and use administrative data in all central and local institutions (free of charge), to the extent necessary for the production and distribution of official statistics to avoid burdens in response to statistical units. Through Memorandums of Understanding (MoU), INSTAT gains the explicit right to access and utilize administrative data from both central and local institutions, with the provision that such access is granted without any associated charges. This right is essential for facilitating the production and dissemination of official statistics. The aim is to ensure a streamlined and efficient process in gathering necessary data for statistical purposes, eliminating any financial burdens or constraints on the entities providing administrative data. The issues that have been flagged in terms of using administrative data instead of statistical observations, are as follow:

- Inconsistencies may arise from the use of disparate definitions and classifications of variables in administrative sources. For the integrated dataset to be uniform, standard definitions and classifications must be established.
- The stringent quality control procedures applied to data specifically gathered for statistical purposes might not be present in administrative data. It becomes imperative to implement quality control procedures in order to detect and address errors or inconsistencies.

3.5 Pillar Five: International Cooperation and relations, standards, governance

INSTAT recognises the importance of coordination and cooperation between INSTAT (the National Statistical Office of Albania) and Eurostat (the statistical office of the European Union) in developing, producing, and disseminating European statistics. This collaboration ensures alignment with the European Statistics Code of Practice,

which prioritizes coordination among statistical authorities to maintain the quality and reliability of statistical data at both national and European levels.¹¹⁵

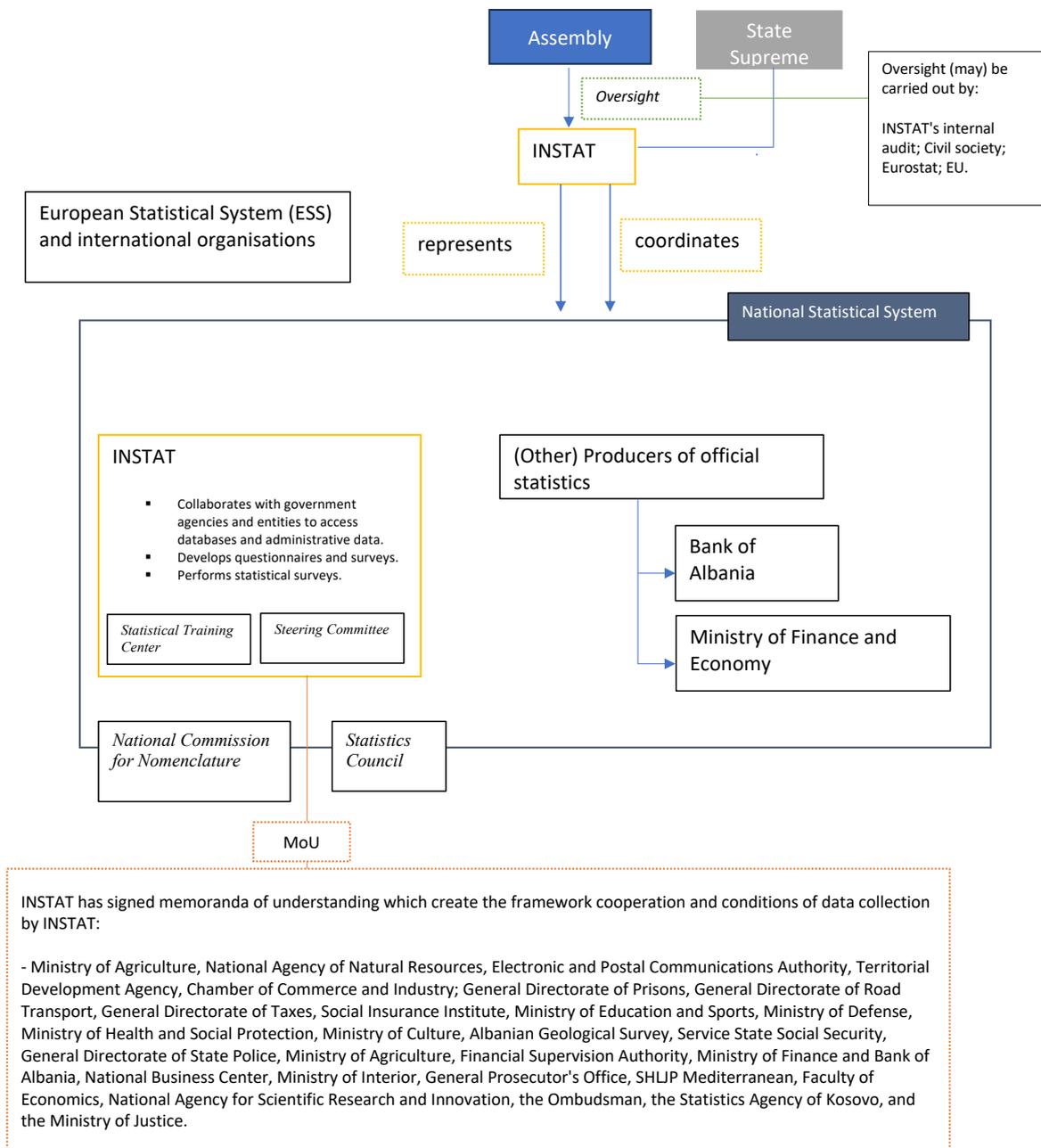


Figure 9: Albanian Statistical Governance. Own compilation.

¹¹⁵ National Programme of Official Statistics (2022-2026), p. 93.

4. TOWARDS THE EUROPEAN STANDARD ON STATISTICS

In the Albania Progress Reports, the European Commission states that "EU rules require that Member States are able to produce statistics based on professional independence, impartiality, reliability, transparency, and confidentiality. Common rules are provided for the methodology, production, and dissemination of statistical information."¹¹⁶

The EU *acquis* in statistics is almost exclusively legislation that is directly applicable in Member States, i.e. European Parliament and Council Regulations and Commission Regulations.¹¹⁷

The *acquis* (EU laws, norms and regulations) refers to a set of common rights and obligations that all EU member states must follow. Candidate countries have to accept the *acquis* before they can join the EU and make EU law part of their own national legislation.¹¹⁸

The area of official statistics is represented in the negotiation process as a separate negotiating (Chapter 18) chapter, but it is also of great importance for other chapters, given its connection with many areas within the negotiation process.

4.1 Tracking Progress on Chapter 18 (2015-2023)

In 2015, Albania was noted to have some level of preparation in the field of statistics.¹¹⁹ Thereafter, from 2016 to 2023, Albania was evaluated to be *moderately prepared* in the field of statistics.

Chapter 18: Statistics	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
	some level of preparation	some level of preparation/moderately prepared		moderately prepared	moderately prepared	moderately prepared	moderately prepared	moderately prepared	moderately prepared

¹¹⁶Albania Report 2015, p. 46.

¹¹⁷ Albania Cluster 1 Screening Report, p 118.

¹¹⁸ [FAQ accession negotiations](#).

¹¹⁹ibid.

The European Commission stated that there was a significant need for (1) the human and financial resources of INSTAT to be in compliance with European standards, (2) the quality of statistics to be improved, and (3) social, agriculture, and in the business statistics to be in compliance with the EU acquis.¹²⁰

The European Commission noted a "general lack of capacity to produce reliable statistical data" in other domains, such as the rule of law. One may wonder why it's crucial to draw attention to statistical advancements in chapters other than Chapter 18.¹²¹ The primary producer and coordinator of Albania's statistical system is INSTAT, in accordance with the governance model discussed above. This organisation has obligations regarding the quality of the data it releases in its capacity as the statistics coordinator. The following theory is put forth, using statistics related to the rule of law as an example.

The statistics on the rule of law, specifically related to "crimes and criminal justice", are one of the demographic and social indicators of the statistics published by INSTAT. According to INSTAT, "crime statistics reflect data for every link of the Justice system, which includes the Police - Prosecutor - Ministry of Justice - and Prisons." Here, data on criminal offenses, perpetrators and injured persons, as well as persons who were tortured and imprisoned for several years, are recorded.



Figure 10: Crime and Criminal Justice section on INSTAT. Source: <https://www.instat.gov.al/>

¹²⁰ibid., p. 46.

¹²¹Ibid., p. 15.

For example, in the MoU between INSTAT and Ministry of Justice¹²² in 2021, it is noted that:

- the institutions that collect and analyse administrative data (in this case, Ministry of Justice) must adhere to the principles of the European Statistics Code of Practice (principles of trust, reliability, objectivity of the statistical data);¹²³
- a working group is created to coordinate the activities, made of two members chosen with the consensus of the heads of the institutions¹²⁴:
 - o representative of INSTAT heads the working group;
 - o meets once in every six months, or when requested by one of the parties;
 - o can invite experts or functionaries to provide opinions in the meeting;
- Ministry of Justice agrees to conduct the necessary processes to collect, correct, and analyse the information agreed by the parties in the Annex of the MoU¹²⁵;
- Ministry of Justice provides the data every year. on 30 June, in excel format.¹²⁶

In the MoU, it is noted that INSTAT can be invited to provide its opinion when drafting the data forms to ascertain that the definitions and classifications are in accordance with those used by INSTAT and the SKS.¹²⁷

¹²² MoU, Instat and Ministry of Justice, Nr. prot 110/5, dated 11.11.2021.

¹²³ *ibid*, Article 2.

¹²⁴ *ibid*, Article 3.

¹²⁵ *ibid*, Annex, points 1-5.

¹²⁶ *ibid*, Annex, p. 2.

¹²⁷ *ibid*, Article 6, para 5.

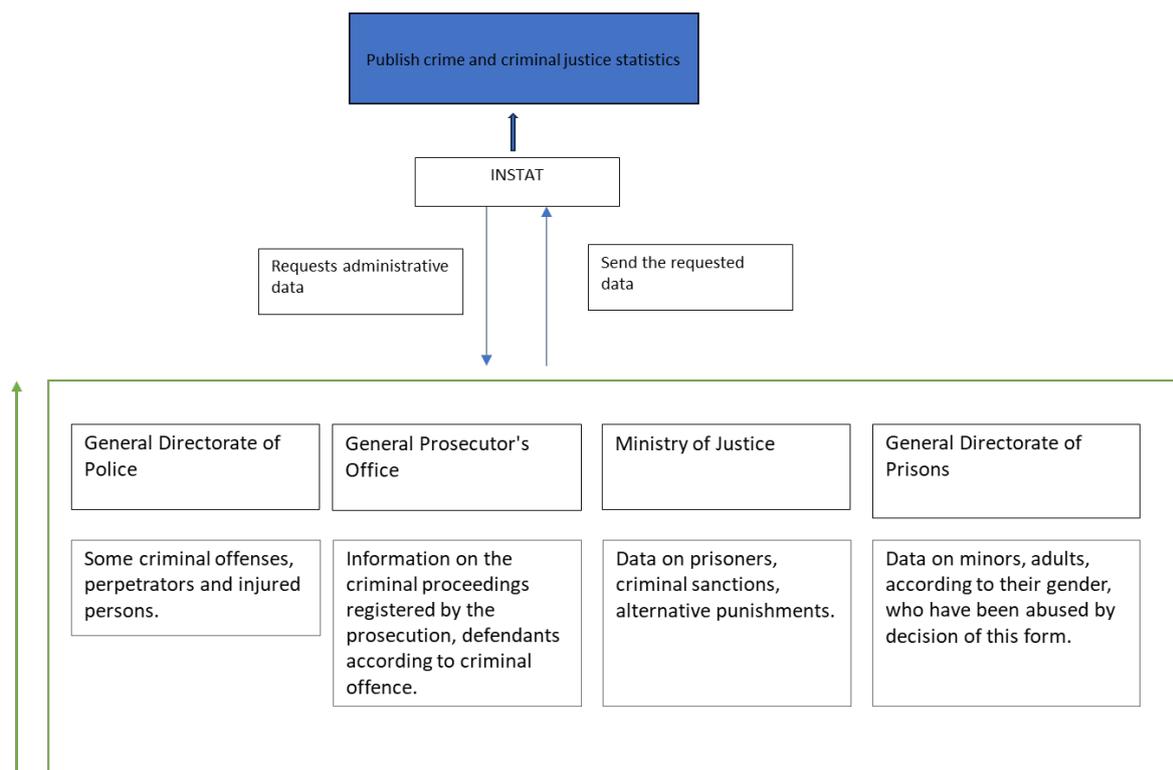


Figure 11: Collaboration between INSTAT, as an official producer of official data, and public institutions in the field of criminal justice, Ministry of Justice, General Directorate of Police, General Prosecutor's Office and General Directorate of Prisons.

The cooperation between INSTAT and these institutions is mostly uniform. The obligation of INSTAT to coordinate the work group, monitor the compliance with the European Statistics Code of Practice and its principles is well established in the MoUs.

MoU between INSTAT and	General Directorate of Police ¹²⁸	General Prosecutor's Office ¹²⁹	Ministry of Justice ¹³⁰	General Directorate of Prisons ¹³¹
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¹²⁸ amended with the "Agreement to amend the MoU between INSTAT and General Directorate of Police", Nr. 138/13, dated 24.02.2020.

¹²⁹ [MoU](#) between INSTAT and General Prosecutor's Office, Nr. 1169/2, dated 30.10.2019.

¹³⁰ MoU between INSTAT and Ministry of Justice, Nr prot 110/5, dated 11.11.2021.

¹³¹ [MoU](#) between INSTAT and General Directorate of Prisons, dated 17.11.2017, and amended by [Agreement](#) No. 131/11, dated 31.08.2020.

Professional Independence	Must adhere to the principles of European Statistics Code of Practice	Adheres to the principle of reliability, impartiality and objectivity (although European Statistics Code of Practice not explicitly mentioned)	Must adhere to the principles of European Statistics Code of Practice	Must adhere to the principles of European Statistics Code of Practice
Work group	min. 4 members (representatives from both institution); gathers every three months.	min. 4 members (representatives from both institution); gathers every three months; the duties of the work group explicitly mentioned in the MoU.	min. 2 members (representatives from both Institutions); gathers every six months.	min. 4 members (representatives from both institution); gathers every three months; the duties of the work group explicitly mentioned in the MoU.
Professional Standards guidelines and trainings (classifications and terminology)	Obligation of INSTAT	Obligation of INSTAT	Obligation of INSTAT	Obligation of INSTAT
The right of access and data exchange	General Directorate of Police provides the data in the Annex	Not explicitly mentioned	Ministry of Justice provides the data in the Annex once per year	General Directorate of Prisons provides the data in the Annex to INSTAT
Check the compliance with the Programme	Obligation of INSTAT	Not mentioned	Obligation of INSTAT	Obligation of INSTAT

As mentioned above, administrative data is one of main sources of data for official statistics.¹³² It is considered as secondary data as the primary purpose for its collection is administrative but not statistical.¹³³ In the case of rule of law statistics, the European Commission has called in the country reports focusing on Albania to:

¹³² UN Handbook (2022), p 23.

¹³³ *ibid*, p 43.

- Ensure the accuracy of statistical data of the relevant units in the justice institutions¹³⁴;
- Improve the collection and reporting of judicial statistical data¹³⁵; and
- Improve the collection, analysis, and reporting of statistical data on free legal aid¹³⁶.

Flawed data can paint a misleading picture of progress, raise concerns about rule of law compliance, and hinder effective policymaking. This not only jeopardizes Albania's EU aspirations but also perpetuates internal injustices and fosters distrust in the legal system.

Possibly these challenges could be addressed with the amendments introduced in the Law No. 17/2018 On Statistics, where INSTAT has:

- the obligation to participate in the process of creation and development of the administrative data systems (Article 13, point 1(ç));
- the right of access directly to the administrative registers, which lightens the burden to respond from statistical units (Article 33, point 1).

Also, it is worth noted that according to the Programme 2022-2026 and INSTAT's commitment to the formalization of the International Classification of Crime Statistics for statistical purposes (ICCS), it is expected that there will be an improvement in access to statistics in the field of crime and criminal justice in Albania, in particular to improving the methodology and classification of the criminal offenses system, increasing the accuracy and depth of data collection, and enhancing coordinate statistical activities in the field of justice and crime with the relevant structures, ensuring a common and coherent approach to data collection and interpretation.

However, it is concerning that in the Programme, compliance to the ICCs will transition from not aligned (2022) to partly aligned (2026).¹³⁷ Given the importance and the challenges related to the rule of law statistics, it is recommended for the statistics to be fully compliant to the ICCS¹³⁸.

Circling back to Chapter 18, it, has been one of the more successful chapters in Albania's EU accession negotiations. Albania has a relatively well-developed

¹³⁴ Albania report 2023, p. 19.

¹³⁵ *ibid*, p. 25.

¹³⁶ *ibid*, p. 40.

¹³⁷ PSZ, p. 44.

¹³⁸ UNODC, [International Classification for statistical purposes](#) (2015).

statistical system, and it has made good progress in aligning its statistical practices with EU standards.

The Cluster 1 Screening report provides the following assessment in regards to Chapter 18:

- (i) Statistical infrastructure: Partially in line with the acquis and international standards. It is recommended for Albania to have an active policy retaining staff and to pro-actively fill vacancies.
- (ii) Albania has implemented the main EU classification with various degrees of acquis compliance. Further work on statistical registers is required for full compliance with the acquis.
- (iii) Albania is partially aligned with the EU acquis on sectoral statistics (macroeconomics, business, social and agriculture statistics). Further progress is needed in all statistical areas to reach full alignment.

To assess Albania's recommendations and progress in Chapter 18, we created the table below using data from Albania's country records spanning 2015 to 2023. In the table, 'x' indicates a recommendation, '+' denotes progress, and the cell states "aligned" when the European Commission notes it.

		EU Progress Report									
	x - recommendation not fulfilled (repeated) ~ - some progress v - progress N/A - not mentioned aligned - aligned	Recommendation Consistency & Follow up									
		Cluster 1 Albania									
	Recommendations	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	
Statistics Chapter 18											
	Strengthen the human and financial resources of INSTAT	x	x		x	~	~	~	~	~	
	Strengthen the position of INSTAT in the public administration	x	x		x	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	
	Improve the professional independence of INSTAT	x	x		x	v					
	Enhance the role of INSTAT as coordinator of national statistics system	x			~	v	v	v	v	v	
	Coordinating role in the national statistical system (MoUs)	x	~		~	v					
	Changes in the statistical law	x	x		~	v	v	v	v	v	
	Improve the quality of statistics	x	~		~	~					
	Ensure the alignment of agriculture, business and social statistics	x	x		~	~	~				
	Align statistics with the European system of accounts (ESA 2010)	x	~		~	v	v	v	v	v	
	Data sources for macro-economic statistics need to be improved, in particular by data holders outside INSTAT	x	~		~	v					
	Statistics on research and development, information and communication technologies and innovation still need to be aligned	x	~		N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	
	External migration statistics still need to be developed	x	N/A		~	~	~	v	v	v	
	Statistical farm register has not been finalised	x	x		x	x	~	~	~	~	
	Agricultural statistics are partially aligned with the acquis	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	
	Environment and energy statistics are partially in line with the acquis	x	x		x	x	~	~			
	Energy balances for other energy sources are missing	x	~		~	N/A	~	~		v	
	Further quality improvements are needed to improve statistics for the service sector	x	N/A		N/A	N/A	N/A				
	Statistics on waste, on water and on waste water need to be further developed	x	N/A		v	v	v	v			
	Material flow balances and environmental protection expenditure statistics are not yet produced	x	x		x	N/A	N/A				
	Further efforts will be needed to produce health, education, crime and migration statistics in line with the acquis		x		~	~	~	~	~	~	
	Data on air emissions are produced, but only partially in line with the EU standards		x		x	x	x	x	x	x	
	Improve communication with users and other stakeholders					x	x	x	N/A	N/A	
	The scope of official statistics should be redefined to include all European statistics and to improve access to the additional official statistics.					x	x	N/A	N/A	N/A	
	Methods of data collection need to be modernised and statistical production processes should be improved.					x	x	x	x	x	
	Further improvements are needed in Government Finance Statistics					x	x	~	~	v	
	Further improve communication and consultation with users, including major stakeholders, including producers, the media, representative organisations, and the research community					x	x				
	Adopt the Law on Population and Housing census							x	v		
	Appoint a Director General for INSTAT							x	v		

Moving from an enlarged view of the entire Cluster 1, to one of its component chapters--which is also the focus of this study--Chapter 18 'Statistics', these elements emerge:

- Albania's performance in Chapter 18 has a direct impact on the progress and pace of the negotiation process.
- Despite being a separate chapter, statistics, and the leading and main institution of the statistical system in Albania, INSTAT, are a common element of all the chapters that are part of the first group-chapter.
- Statistics are inherently cross-cutting because they provide data and knowledge that are relevant to many sectors and policy areas.
- Statistics form the basis for data-based decision-making. Whether in the judiciary, public administration, economic development or other fields, accurate and reliable data is essential for policymakers to make informed decisions.
- The process of monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of policies and reforms requires data. Statistics play a key role in analysing progress, identifying challenges and evaluating the results of reforms undertaken in various chapters.
- Statistics make it possible to make comparisons based on standards, which is important in the context of EU membership. Comparison of Albania's performance with EU standards and other candidate countries is facilitated by statistical data.
- The statistical data of INSTAT are important for evaluating the functioning of democratic institutions. They provide knowledge on public administration, transparency and the protection of human rights - key elements of democratic governance.

In this context, good performance in Chapter 18 has a direct impact on the performance of Cluster 1. Qualitative statistical data are essential to determine social, economic, and legal trends, which are part of other Cluster 1 chapters. So, an improvement in statistics can positively affect the overall and individual rating of the chapters of this group-chapter.

4.2. Modernising official statistics

The contemporary landscape is inundated with an unprecedented volume of data, necessitating a fundamental shift in how official statistics are collected, analysed,

and disseminated.¹³⁹ As society becomes increasingly data-driven, it is essential that national statistical systems evolve to meet the needs of the modern era.

The UN highlights two key notions: (i) transformation, and (ii) modernisation. Both these two elements call for:

- (i) Formulating a strategic plan to modernise and integrate statistical production processes across various sectors within the national statistical systems; and
- (ii) Enhancing the capacity of national statistical systems to meet the growing demand efficiently and effectively for statistical information.¹⁴⁰

Modernisation and transformation are regarded as essential for "official statistics to meet the widening and increasing requirements of policymakers, researchers, the media, and civil society for high-quality, timely and disaggregated statistics".¹⁴¹ Considering and understanding the different approaches, models, and practices, in modernising the national statistical systems, the following elements are emphasised for consideration:

- The modernisation of operations and products of NSOs (due to technological developments):
 - Improved services regarding (i) availability and coverage of statistics, (ii) periodicity, (iii) ease of access, (iv) quality, (v) disaggregation, and (vi) relevance¹⁴²;
 - Data collection transformed from paper questionnaires to electronic questionnaires via the internet, which is transferred to the central databases of the institutions¹⁴³;
 - NSO collects data from businesses through web-portals¹⁴⁴;
 - Improved collection of data and information using aerial photography (particularly in agricultural and environment statistics)¹⁴⁵;
 - Machine to machine transfer of data, transferring data between computers¹⁴⁶;
 - Large increases in data storage and computing capacity¹⁴⁷;

¹³⁹ UN, 'The Handbook on Management and Organization of national Statistical Systems', 4th Edition of the Handbook of Statistical organization (2022a), p. 12.

¹⁴⁰ *ibid*, p. 13.

¹⁴¹ *ibid*, p. 13.

¹⁴² *ibid*, p. 62.

¹⁴³ *ibid*.

¹⁴⁴ *ibid*.

¹⁴⁵ *ibid*.

¹⁴⁶ *ibid*.

¹⁴⁷ *ibid*.

- Advances in manual handling of data transformed to digital handling, facilitating many tasks and processes, and increasing speed and quality of processes through automation¹⁴⁸;
- Enhanced data security and confidentiality ¹⁴⁹.
- Restructuring of the statistical business process in accordance with the GSBPM (=greater efficiency and higher quality in operations of the NSO)¹⁵⁰:
 - Planning to reuse digital application and specific functions between different subject and departments; and
 - break down the stove-pipe barriers.¹⁵¹
- Infrastructure and resources. Operating an NSO requires building space, equipment and human and financial resources:
 - Building Space:
 - Not a very specialised space and infrastructure;
 - Basic needs are office space, meeting rooms, reception area, library, study area for visitors, facilities for storing archives safely, and spaces for servers of appropriate quality and security (fireproof if possible).¹⁵²
 - Equipment:
 - A NSO cannot function without *modern computer equipment, such as servers, network workstations, laptops and/or tables, printers*;
 - One workstation per staff member, and laptops able to work remotely;
 - Software tools, which include virus protections, and apply standard protocols for data exchange;
 - Both hardware and software must be regularly updated (recommended for the NSO to formulate a medium-term/4-5 years IT strategy);
 - Buy systems and software which are open-source, generally free of charge and free to use, to adapt to the need of users (saves

¹⁴⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p. 63.

¹⁵⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁵¹ *ibid.* To further explain, rather than creating new digital tools or functions specifically for each statistical task or department, the NSO intends to develop applications and functions that are cross-domain compatible. This method guarantees uniformity and standardisation in the procedures of data collection, analysis, and distribution while also saving time and resources. Meanwhile, the term "stove-pipe barriers" describes how various departments or units within an NSO are isolated from one another or compartmentalised, which hinders communication, collaboration, and the sharing of resources or information. In the new approach, the NSO promotes cross-departmental collaboration and integration, allowing for smoother workflows, knowledge sharing, and resource optimization.

¹⁵² *ibid.*, p. 64.

money, adds flexibility to IT operations/ explore the cloud technology)¹⁵³

- Human resources (a modern NSO):
 - Staff with mixed but relatively high professional skills and expertise;
 - Field workers for data collection;
 - All staff receive training regularly;
 - Multi-annual training programme on how the office intends to satisfy the needs and training interests of staff;
 - New staff receives introductory training.¹⁵⁴
- Financial resources¹⁵⁵:
 - Modes of financing:
 - (i) The NSOs and other producers are financed through the central government budget;
 - (ii) The annual budget allocation is made directly to the NSO based on its original budget proposal or request (the recommended mode of financing official statistical activities);**
 - (iii) The budget of the NSO is set out specifically in the government budget and approved as such, however it is still subject to particular scrutiny and approval by the relevant ministry, often the Ministry of Finance¹⁵⁶;
 - (iv) In developing world, many NSOs rely on donor funding for essential parts of their operations - considered as not sustainable¹⁵⁷.

This paper has focused on official statistics and traditional statistical governance practices and models. A dilemma has risen as to whether new data sources will replace traditional statistical exercises, such as surveys or censuses, which are complicated and/or time consuming and can be especially difficult to organise in

¹⁵³ *ibid*, p. 65.

¹⁵⁴ *ibid*.

¹⁵⁵ According to UN: "It is a sad thing to relate that most NSOs in the world are underfunded. The same applies to other producers of official statistics in MDAs (Ministries, Departments and Agencies). NSOs and official statistics are not very popular phenomena; they are not held in high esteem, are considered un-sexy, to use the popular speech. In many countries, wage and salary levels in NSOs are lower than in other government agencies, in some countries much lower." UN, 'The Handbook on Management and Organization of national Statistical Systems', 4th Edition of the Handbook of Statistical organization (2022a), p. 66.

¹⁵⁶ According to UN: "This implies that the NSO cannot be sure that it will receive all the funds approved on the budget, receive it regularly or evenly over the fiscal year. This practice is considered much inferior as it involves great uncertainty about the operations of the NSO, the conduct of its survey programme, and prevents all flexibility in the operations and spending." UN Handbook, p. 65. This is currently Albania's mode of financing.

¹⁵⁷ It entails that the NSO does not have full control of its operations and cannot formulate and implement its statistical programme in accordance with national priorities.

poor economies and/or remote areas.¹⁵⁸ However, it is widely agreed by various authors and authorities that big data complements official statistics.¹⁵⁹ And that the key to modernising official statistics lies in the big data.¹⁶⁰

Analysing in depth big data in official statistics fall outside the scope of this policy paper. However, a schematic outline of this topic, which is thoroughly examined by the Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek (CBS - Statistics Office Netherlands), is given below.

Examples of big data in official statistics	A framework for assessing the quality of big data statistics	Big Data as statistics	Integration of big data with other statistical source
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - social media messages, - traffic-loop data, - mobile phone data, - web scraping, - scanner data, - satellite images and - banking transactions. 	<p>Following</p> <p>1) the EU Statistical Law (statistical quality): Relevance, accuracy, timeliness, accessibility, comparability, coherence (statistical quality);</p> <p>and</p> <p>2) Statistical principles: independence, impartiality, objectivity, reliability, confidentiality, and cost effectiveness.</p>	<p>One way to implement big data in official statistics is to regard big data aggregates as statistics.</p> <p>Challenges: uncontrolled changes in sources, continuity and comparability issues, refer indirectly to phenomena of statistics interest. maybe highly volatile and selective.</p>	<p>1) Big data as auxiliary data (combined with other statistical data from surveys or administrative data)</p> <p>2) Coverage and selective (big data and other sources may be combined)</p> <p>3) Disclosure control with big data (ethical, methodological problems in sharing databases - disclosure issues)</p>

Table 5: An outline of the connection of big data and official statistics, as provided in the Source: Barteld Braaksma, Kees Zeelenberg, Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, Discussion paper, Big data in official statistics, 2020.

¹⁵⁸ Irena Krizman, Bruno Tissot, Data Governance: issues for the National Statistical System, IFC Bulletin 54, p. 8.

¹⁵⁹ Krizman and Tissot, p. 9;

¹⁶⁰ Barteld Braaksma, Kees Zeelenberg, Discussion paper, Big data in official statistics (2020).

The Statistics Office Netherlands argues that a statistical office can have two approaches to data: (i) To accept data as imperfect and timely indicator of the society; or (ii) For NSOs to model data using with the purpose of creating official statistics.¹⁶¹ The Statistics Office of Netherlands notes that data could be useful in "in solving several of the major challenges to official statistics, in particular the quality of national accounts (rate of growth of gross national product or GNP), the timeliness of official statistics, and the statistical analysis of complex and coherent phenomena."¹⁶² That said, such approach could be useful to be explored in the case of Albania as well.

¹⁶¹ Barteld Braaksma, Kees Zeelenberg, Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, Discussion paper, Big data in official statistics (2020), p. 4.

¹⁶² *ibid.*

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

To conclude, a thorough exploration of the infrastructure of official statistics reveals its critical role in shaping the reliability, transparency, and accessibility of statistical information in Albania. Good statistics that reflect the reality and the needs of the citizens, could potentially be central to good governance. A government that bases its policies on sound statistics, that are accurate, independent, and impartial, has the vision to run the country efficiently.

The importance of statistics to good governance cannot be overestimated. The importance of independence and the trust to the statistical system cannot be overestimated as well. The foundation is based on the need to change people's perceptions of the importance of statistics; producing them is neither the purpose nor goal. INSTAT and the entire statistical system should produce outcomes that people value (i.e. recognise as important) and that improve people's lives.

This study attempted to open the discussion on the importance of trust in numbers, as well as trust in the institutions that generate them, in order to create a snowball effect on the discourse on the importance of evidence-based decision making.

More research is needed to examine how governments use statistics in their decision, and how the Albanian statistical system can be modernised.

Based on the findings and gaps highlighted in the study, this policy paper provides the following recommendations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To the Government:

- The government is recommended to actively promote the integration of official statistics into policymaking, underlining the key role of statistics in informed decision-making. Raising the profile of statistics ensures that data-driven knowledge becomes an integral part of policy formulation. This integration promotes transparency, accountability, and evidence-based decision-making, which are essential elements for good governance.

To the Statistical Agencies:

- Statistical agencies provide researchers with data collected, classified, combined, analysed, and corrected in the compilation of official statistics. Data come from multiple sources, such as censuses, surveys, and population and business registers. It is recommended that these entities explore the possibility of providing access to metadata, to increase transparency and the level of research in the country.
- It is recommended to increase the availability of easily accessible data sets (open data) and usable for public analysis and research, encouraging citizen participation and data-based decision-making.

To the Institute of Statistics:

- Foster a culture of knowledge sharing among statistical agencies, academia, and stakeholders. Establishing regular forums for dialogue and collaboration between these entities will promote the exchange of expertise, innovative methodologies, and practical insights.
- It is recommended that INSTAT undertake strategies for the recognition and promotion of the brand and its platform. As stated above, statistics are not considered useful if they are not used, either by policy makers or citizens. For this reason, INSTAT is recommended to consider organizing staff training sessions on communication, or hiring external experts, to increase the visibility of the official statistics in the country.
- It is recommended that INSTAT develop or improve the data sharing platform to make data access more user-friendly, adapting to the different needs and skill levels of users.

To the Assembly:

- The Assembly is recommended to evaluate and, if necessary, assess the Statistical Council's role and efficacy and make necessary improvements. This might include reviewing its composition, responsibilities, and powers to ensure it serves as an effective oversight body for statistical matters.
- The Assembly is recommended to provide sufficient funding to statistical organisations, particularly INSTAT, to guarantee the implementation of

reliable data collection methods, advanced technologies, and ongoing training for statisticians.

- Encourage the integration of statistical data into the policymaking process. The Assembly is recommended to promote and advocate for training sessions on the proper use of official statistics in the creation of evidence-based policy.
- The Assembly is recommended to strengthen the supervision of INSTAT by conducting regular hearings, investigations and evaluations of its performance and compliance with the legal framework, as well as to evaluate the performance of government agencies for providing accurate and timely data to INSTAT, guarantee the completeness and reliability of official statistics.

To Civil Society:

- Civil society is recommended to advocate for transparency, more friendly platforms, as well as open data initiatives, to increase citizens' access to official statistics. Also, it is recommended to increase cooperation between INSTAT, civil society, and educational institutions, to increase awareness on statistics, 'data literacy' and 'statistical literacy' (the ability to read, process and analyse data and statistics), and the critical role of accessible data in good governance.
- Civil society is recommended to conduct awareness campaigns highlighting the tangible impact of reliable statistics on policy decisions, resource allocation, and overall governance, as well as push the agenda of including governance statistics to a higher level in the statistical activities of the producers of the official statistics.
- It is recommended to monitor and report on issues related to the integrity of statistical data, possible misuse of statistics and violations of data privacy regulations, demanding responsibility to the relevant authorities.

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