

Coordination within the national statistical system – experiences from Denmark

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Abstract

Statistics Denmark started working on developing national guidelines for official statistics for other national authorities (ONAs) producing official statistics in 2017. This paper will describe the process of developing and finalising the national guidelines for official statistics. The national guidelines for official statistics are prepared as a shortened version of the ESS CoP in order to give the ONAs guidelines that are more accessible to someone who does not have statistics production as their core task. The development of the guidelines has been in progress over a number of years, as they have been continuously revised in relation to the experience the ONAs have had in dealing with them. This paper will also describe the process of monitoring compliance with the national guidelines for official statistics and the follow-up processes. We will conclude with a discussion of the challenges the ONAs have expressed in dealing with the guidelines and complying with them and the way forward.

Keywords: National guidelines for official statistics, Monitoring compliance, Coordination in NSS, Cooperation in NSS

1. Introduction

With the update of the regulation 223/2009 on the development, production and dissemination of European statistics in 2015, Statistic Denmark started developing a set of guidelines for European statistics for the Other National Authorities (ONAs) producing European statistics. With the update of the European regulation on statistics, the Act on Statistics Denmark, was updated in 2018, stating that Statistics Denmark, as NSI, must coordinate activities in connection with the development, collection, production and dissemination of official statistics by the ONAs in accordance with the guidelines that apply for official statistics produced by other national authorities. Following the Act on Statistics Denmark, Statistics Denmark must also produce, maintain and publish a list of statistics produced by other national authorities.

With the updated Act on Statistics Denmark the ONAs are obliged to report to Statistics Denmark for continuous evaluation of their compliance with the guidelines. As a result of this, Statistics Denmark runs an annual monitoring process of the ONA's compliance with the

guidelines for official statistics. The guidelines started out as guidelines for European Statistics, but with the update of the Act on Statistics Denmark ONAs could also apply for an inclusion of national statistics into the official statistics portfolio. This in itself did not constitute a change in the guidelines.

Public authorities and institutions that want their publicly produced general public statistics to be included in the official publicly produced statistics, must request Statistics Denmark for this. All statistics produced in Denmark for the EU's statistical program are treated as official publicly produced statistics. Statistics Denmark maintains a common public portal for official publicly produced statistics, which provides access to the statistics and their announced time of publication.

There is a National Coordination Committee for Official Statistics, with the National Statistician as the chair. The committee meets at least once a year, and the meeting is used to keep the ONAs updated on new developments in the ESS. An organisational set up is in place for Statistics Denmark to manage the role as sole contact point.

2. National guidelines for official statistics for ONAs

Statistics Denmark has, in cooperation with the ONAs, developed guidelines for official statistics based on the Code of Practice. The development of the guidelines started in 2015. A first draft was prepared by Statistics Denmark and two of the ONAs were taken on board to complete the draft to be discussed with the whole group of ONAs. When the first draft was in place, the ONAs were consulted when developing a self-assessment questionnaire to be used in the first round of monitoring compliance in 2016.

The first round of self-assessment by the ONAs revealed quite different interpretations of the guidelines. It was decided that Statistics Denmark would visit all the ONA's to get an overview of the circumstances around the production of statistics in the ONAs. In this round of visits Statistics Denmark also presented the quality framework that the guidelines were constructed on the basis of. A short introduction was also given to the Generic Statistical Business Process Model (GSBPM) to illustrate how Statistics Denmark understood a production process for statistics. After the round of visits, the guidelines were updated and ready for the next round of monitoring compliance in 2017. The guidelines have been adjusted every year since, to

ensure better comprehension. The recent updates have, however, only been minor adjustments in comparison with the update from 2016 to 2017.

In the guidelines for official statistics, the 16 principles and 84 indicators of the ES CoP have been reduced to 16 guidelines with 44 underlying criteria. The guidelines are meant to reflect the ES CoP, but is down scaled to help the ONAs, which do not have production of statistics as their core task, to better understand the principles for official statistics. An extract of the guidelines can be seen in figure 1. On the left side the relevant area is shown. The left column gives the guideline and an explanation to help the ONAs understand the reason for having this guideline. In the middle column, the criteria are listed and in the right column some best practises are shown. Most of these best practices are still sourced from Statistics Denmark, but the hope is that more and more in the future will be sourced from ONAs.

Figure 1. Extract from the guidelines for official statistics in Denmark.

| Guidelines | Criteria | Examples of good practise |
|---|--|---|
| <p>1. The production of European statistics shall be professionally independent.</p> <p><i>Users must be able to count on the statistics being produced based on objective methods and without regard to political or economic interests.</i></p> | <p>1a. It is ensured that the statistical-producing unit can work professionally independently, e.g. in the legal basis, the authority's mandate, functional description, organisational arrangement, etc.</p> | <p>Professional independence is ensured for Statistics Denmark in the Statistics Denmark Act. The law stipulates that Statistics Denmark is professionally and politically independent, and that the organization has the authority to collect data.</p> <p>As examples of good practice, for example, the Danish Financial Supervisory Authority has a board that ensures professional independence. The Danish Patent and Trademark Office has a cross-cutting statistical group with a terms of reference.</p> |
| <p>2. The head of the statistical unit shall be solely responsible for determining the statistical methods, standards and procedures, as well as for the content and timing of the statistics.</p> <p><i>By ensuring that decisions regarding methods, publication times, etc. taken only by the producer of the statistics, it is protected against political interference in the statistical work. A statistical unit can be an entire organization, a department, an office, a part of an office, a cross-cutting function or the like. - depending on who is responsible for statistical production.</i></p> | <p>2a. A manager responsible for statistical production has been appointed in the authority.</p> <p>2b. The recruitment and possible dismissal of the manager responsible for the production of statistics shall not be justified by factors which may jeopardise professional independence.</p> <p>2c. Decisions on methods, standards, procedures and content of the publications are exempt from ministerial/political approval.</p> | <p>The Act on Statistics Denmark states that the National Statistician is responsible for the professional and administrative management of Statistics Denmark.</p> |

PROFESSIONAL INDEPENDENCE

3. Monitoring compliance with guidelines

According to the Act on Statistics Denmark an annual monitoring of compliance is implemented. The compliance with the guidelines is monitored using a self-assessment questionnaire annually and approximately every five years by a more thorough review of the ONA – a peer review. The self-assessment questionnaire is based on the guidelines for official statistics for Denmark and thus deals in general terms with: 1) the institutional framework for the production of statistics, 2) the statistical procedures and 3) the statistical products. The questions are directly based on each underlying criterion linked to the guidelines. Compliance with selected criteria is mandatory and this is stated in the self-assessment form. An extract from the questions in the self-assessment-questionnaire is given in figure 2. The questionnaire is set up in Blaise and can be completed electronically.

Figure 2. Example of questions in the self-assessment questionnaire used to monitor compliance with the guidelines for official statistics in Denmark.

| Guideline | Criteria | Question |
|--|---|---|
| <i>Institutional framework</i> | | |
| 1. The production of European statistics shall be professionally independent. | 1a. It is ensured that the statistical-producing unit can work professionally independently, e.g. in the legal basis, the authority's mandate, functional description, organisational arrangement, etc. | Is there a mandate, a functional description, etc., to ensure that the statistical unit can work professionally independently? (mandatory criteria) |
| | | |
| 2. The head of the statistical unit shall be solely responsible for determining the statistical methods, standards and procedures, as well as for the content and timing of the statistics. | 2a. A manager responsible for statistical production has been appointed in the authority. | Has a manager been appointed in charge of statistical production? (mandatory criteria) |
| | 2b. The recruitment and possible dismissal of the manager responsible for the production of statistics shall not be justified by factors which may jeopardise professional independence. | Can it be ruled out that the manager responsible for statistical production is dismissed for reasons that jeopardise statistical independence? (mandatory criteria) |
| | 2c. Decisions on methods, standards, procedures and content of the publications are exempt from ministerial/political approval. | Is the choice of methods, standards, procedures and content in the publications exempt from ministerial/political approval? (mandatory criteria) |

The ONAs have received the self-assessment questionnaire in May every year, and have been obliged to complete it and submit it to Statistics Denmark by the end of June. This year the questionnaires were sent out in March and answers came in in April making it possible to conduct peer reviews in three ONAs during April and May. Some years Statistics Denmark have arranged a workshop for the ONAs – last year a workshop was arranged where any clarification and explanations needed to complete the self-assessment questionnaire were given.

In the questionnaire for 2021, a wish to ease the burden of the ONAs, they were asked relevant questions. For example, it was initially asked whether the authority itself published the European statistics. If this was not the case, there would be no further questions concerning publication. This did not really work as intended. In many cases we realised that only small

adjustments in the statistics compared to the statistics sent to Eurostat was interpreted as a different statistical product. It was therefore decided to reformulate this, and ask all questions to all ONAs, but supplementing the possible answers categories.

In the questionnaire for 2024 questions were included to prepare for the follow up on some of the recommendations given related to ONAs in the European peer review of the Danish statistical system.

Questions on mandatory criteria have the answer categories: *Yes* and *No*. If the question is answered with *Yes*, the criterion is considered to be met. If the question is answered with *No*, the criterion is considered not to be met, and it will appear from the report that the guidelines are not complied with. A plan for how to achieve a *Yes* must also be described (in the comments field).

Questions on the remaining criteria have the categories *Yes*, *Yes, partly* and *No* as possible replies. If the question is answered with *Yes*, the criterion is considered to be met. If the reply is *Yes, partly*, the criterion is considered to be met, but a plan must be described for how a *Yes* is achieved (in the comments field). If the reply is *No*, the criterion is considered not to have been met and this will appear as an improvement point in the report. A plan for how to achieve a *Yes* must also be described (in the comments field).

The completed self-assessment questionnaires from the ONAs are reviewed and a summary of the monitoring with the highlights is presented at the annual meeting of the National Coordination Committee for Official Statistics. The results are also presented in a yearly report to the Minister of Digital Government and Gender Equality (which Statistics Denmark is the resort of).

Each ONA can expect to be subject to a peer review approximately every five years and the aim is to carry out reviews on three ONAs every year. These peer reviews are carried out by Statistics Denmark with the participation of representatives from two other ONAs. The representation from the ONAs rotates. Each ONA is part of the peer review team for two years and ONAs are replaced alternately, so that there is only one new representative each year.

The peer reviews follow the model of the peer reviews of the European statistical system – just in miniature. The completed self-assessment questionnaire from the ONAs is used as a

starting point for the review team together with relevant and available documentation from the ONA. A review visit of two – three hours takes place with the participation of relevant persons from the ONA, with representatives from the two other ONAs and representatives from Statistics Denmark. The quality coordinator of Statistics Denmark chairs the reviews. The reviews cover how the ONA handles user needs, how the ONA collects data, processes data, analyse, disseminate statistics, and evaluate the production process. The reviews results in a peer review report describing the statistical system and production of the ONA and recommendations of actions to be taken in order to improve, are given.

The results of the peer reviews are presented together with the results of the monitoring of all the ONAs in the yearly report to the Minister of Digital Government and Gender Equality (which Statistics Denmark is the resort of).

4. Conclusions ad way forward

The annual monitoring of compliance of the guidelines for official statistics together with peer reviews approximately every five years is planned to continue in the coming years.

Some issues need to be improved like sharing best practices and the use of standards. There is a common understanding of the need to share and this will continue and increase in the coming years. To follow up on the European peer review actions are also needed to share more good practices and to implement common standards for e.g. quality reporting in the national statistical system.

Statistics Denmark monitors compliance with the national guidelines for official statistics and the Minister of Digital Government and Gender Equality is responsible for executing actions in case of non-compliance. So far, there has been no need for executing any recommendations due to lack of compliance and it is yet to be tested if the enforcement procedure will be effective in practice. If actions to follow up on the given recommendations are not executed in cases of non-compliance, it can reduce the value of the national guidelines for official statistics on the quality of official statistics.

Statistics Denmark could be moving towards more transparency by e.g. future public access to the different review reports that result from peer reviews of ONAs and perhaps also from Statistics Denmark's internal reviews. This could contribute to a larger degree of sharing best

practises and learning from each other. Opportunities for closer collaboration with the ONAs, in areas where the statistical expertise of Statistics Denmark are needed should be explored.

The Danish ONAs are positive to the cooperation and coordination in the national statistical system. For most of the ONAs the cooperation a positive contribution to the solution of their statistical tasks. For some, however, one important question is how far we can come to ensuring compliance with the ES CoP in institutions that do not have statistics as their core tasks. Some ONAs have very limited resources dedicated to producing statistics and the question is whether it will make sense at all to engage in any issues connected to the ES CoP without is taking up more resources than is allocated to the production of statistics.

5. References

UNECE (2018), Generic Statistical Business Process Model - Version 5.1.

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