

Light Peer Review of the Implementation of the European Statistics Code of Practice in the occupied Palestinian territory

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PREFACE

The light peer review (LPR) of the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) was undertaken in the framework of the EUROSTAT funded project 'Global assessments of statistical systems of candidate and potential candidate countries as well as ENP countries'. Based on the Memorandum of Understanding between EUROSTAT and the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), the latter also contributed to the LPR. The company ICON-INSTITUT Public Sector GmbH, under contract with EUROSTAT, was responsible for organising all activities and tasks relating to the LPR.

Light peer reviews are based on the structure and procedures of the ESS (European Statistical System) peer reviews and are designed for candidate countries and countries with a developed statistical system. The objectives of these reviews are, in particular, to assess compliance of the reviewed National Statistical Institute (NSI) with Principles 1-6 and 15 of the European Statistics Code of Practice, to evaluate the coordination role of the NSI within the statistical system, to highlight transferable practices suitable to foster compliance with the Code of Practice and to recommend improvement actions needed in view of fully complying with the Code.

It should be mentioned that the LPR of the oPt takes into account the fact that the PCBS applies international standards in statistics. Although the office is interested and well-acquainted with the EU statistical standards due to the active participation in the subsequent MEDSTAT programmes, the assessment of the compliance with the requirements of the ESS European standards is not a primary objective of the LPR but compliance with the principles of the European Statistics Code of Practice is important. This perspective has implications for the assessment of the adequacy the PCBS resources and the capacity of the PCBS to comply with the requirements of the national and international users.

The review process was initiated by EUROSTAT at the request of the PCBS made in September 2011. The review was conducted by three experts, Peter Hackl (former Director General of Statistics Austria) who was the leading expert, Jolanta Szczerbinska (EUROSTAT), and Volker Täube (Swiss Federal Statistical Office, representing the European Free Trade Association (EFTA)). The review mission in form of a visit on-site took place from 6 to 9 February 2012 (see Annex 1). Written material and links to documents published at the PCBS website were made available by the PCBS in advance and during the assessment mission. A key document was the completed self-assessment questionnaire provided by end of December 2011 by the PCBS.

While the peer reviewers will undertake to base their assessment to the extent possible on factual information, it is worth noting some of the limitations of the peer review process: (i) The peer reviewers are dependent upon the resources made available to them. (ii) The review is conducted on a strategic, organisation-wide and system-wide basis; accordingly it is not straightforward to ascertain that certain practices or behaviours or systems operate in all statistical domains.

The peer review team very much appreciated the well-prepared meetings and the openness of the communication both with the staff of the PCBS and with representatives from partner and stakeholder organisations. It is hoped that the review will be of benefit for the further development of the PCBS.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The main goal of this Light Peer Review (LPR) was to evaluate the compliance of the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) with selected principles of the European Statistics Code of Practice, in order to point out strengths and weaknesses and to support the further improvement of the PCBS.
2. The PCBS is a young and ambitious organisation, which is manifested by its aspiration to be one of the leading NSIs in the region. It appears to be very well managed and governed. It has a strong commitment to quality which pervades all aspects of its work, and it has become increasingly efficient in recent years – a move to new accommodation in 2010 seems to be beneficial for the internal coordination and to reinforce the impression of a modern, well-equipped organisation.
3. The peer review team felt that both, management and staff at all levels were enthusiastic and committed to their activities and the development of the PCBS. The relatively young and highly qualified workforce leaves the impression of a well trained staff. All stakeholders interviewed as well as the international observers (IMF, UNO, World Bank) noted that significant improvements have been achieved in the PCBS's work and its standing in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) during the last few years. The office and its products and services seem to be well-regarded by users and media, and no major points of critic were stated.
4. The General Statistical Law (GSL) specifies the legal basis for the production and dissemination of official statistics and also for the organisation of the system of official statistics in the oPt. From the discussions during the LPR the peers felt that the PCBS produces and disseminates official statistics in ways that respect the principles of professional independence, impartiality and objectivity, and statistical confidentiality. However, an amendment of the Statistics Law is recommended for a number of reasons:
 - It is obvious that the PCBS has a strong position both in public administration and in society with respect to professional independence. However, in order to enhance the perception of independence at the national and international level and secure this position for the future, it is recommended that in the course of a future revision of the GSL the professional independence should explicitly be expressed. With the same objective, it is recommended that the position of the president of the PCBS, in particular the conditions of appointment and dismissal are specified in the GSL; this suggests considering a fixed term of office for the president.
 - Like for most NSIs, the GSL foresees an Advisory Council for Statistics (ACS) with a strong role in the process of generating the annual and multi-annual programmes. Transparency would further increase the trust in the PCBS and the statistical products. It is recommended that in a future revision of the GSL the composition of the ACS and the appointment procedure of its members are regulated.
5. It appears that the financial but also the human and IT resources are adequate for the tasks currently to be fulfilled. However, the financial resources heavily depend on external funding which could endanger the long-term sustainability of the PCBS and the NSS as a whole. Thus, it is recommended to work on the long-term financial independence of the PCBS. Options in this regard are increasing the contribution of administrative bodies to the production of official statistics of the national statistical system (NSS), making more use of data from administrative sources, and reducing the costs within the PCBS. Cost reductions

are possible by using modern technology for data collection, e.g., hand-held devices for household and internet-based questionnaires for business surveys, respectively.

6. The peer review team welcomes the modern view and the provisions in the National Strategy for the Development of Statistics (NSDS) of needs and options of data collection. The GSL authorises in Article 14 the PCBS to use data from administrative sources; in addition to that the owners of administrative data have the duty to discuss changes and new administrative data with the PCBS. With these provisions, the PCBS has a sound means for developing a comprehensive database encompassing both surveys and statistical registers which will allow an efficient production of high-quality statistical products. This will give the PCBS also a strong position with regard to other producers of official statistics in the national statistical system of the oPt.
7. The PCBS presents its statistics clearly and the data are well accessible, although the statistical releases could be made more informative, e.g. by adding short descriptions of content. All of its statistical releases are published on the website of the PCBS, usually both in Arabic and English. Reports are accompanied by supporting metadata; for press releases, links to metadata and corresponding reports would be helpful. Also links that point immediately to updated data or tables would be helpful. However, the PCBS website itself requires further development to enhance its functionality and the accessibility of the statistical products. The annual and multi-annual programmes and the annual reports should be made public on the website. The website does, neither in content nor via links, provide access to statistics of other producers of official statistics; in the future, the PCBS website should be developed into a portal for the entire NSS of the oPt with links to other producers of official statistics.
8. The PCBS produces the largest share of official statistics in the oPt. The GSL establishes some important features of the wider co-ordination role of the PCBS within the NSS. Collaboration between the PCBS and certain external providers of statistics within the NSS is established (e.g. Palestinian Monetary Authority, Ministry of Health) although collaboration among all stakeholders of the NSS seems to be rather punctual. Endeavours should be expanded so as to cover all producers of data and statistics in the NSS with the PCBS being in the coordination role as a technical supervisor. Alignment of all bodies within the NSS with the Code of Practice would be a step forward towards harmonisation. The comprehensive use of data from administrative sources and the establishment of statistical registers should be fostered under the guidance of the PCBS. Also the derivation of the annual programme that encompasses the statistical products of all producers should be coordinated by the PCBS and published on the PCBS website. The publication of all release dates for data and statistics within the NSS in form of a national release calendar hosted by the PCBS and the use of the PCBS website as a portal for all kinds of official statistics would also be desirable. This would also give more visibility to the PCBS as the coordinating instance in the NSS and to the NSS as a whole.
9. The considerable progress made by the PCBS within the last couple of years is also stressed by other international institutions in the field, such as the IMF, the UNO (UNFPA) or the World Bank. As concerns for example provision of metadata standards as formulated by the IMF, the PCBS is actually a member of the GDDS. Preparations for signing up with SDDS are almost finished and the official switch will be made within the next two to three months. The PCBS will then be amongst only a few other countries in the region that adhere to this standard. (Note: As mentioned on the Dissemination Standards Bulletin Board of the IMF, the oPt (West Bank/Gaza) became in the meantime subscriber to the SDDS). Another example is the independence of the PCBS when it comes to publishing reliable figures as was pointed out by a delegate from the World Bank in one of the interviews during the LPR.

1. FINDINGS PER PRINCIPLE

1.1 Principle 1: Professional independence

The professional independence of statistical authorities from other policy, regulatory or administrative departments and bodies, as well as from private sector operators, ensures the credibility of European Statistics.

Overall assessment: The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) is the rather young National Statistical Institute of the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt), founded in 1993. The PCBS is formally a government institution that is operating on the basis of the General Statistical Law (GSL) from 2000 on and is directly accountable to the Council of Ministers. The professional independence of the PCBS is not explicitly stated in the GSL; a decision of the Council of Ministers stresses the importance of the professional independence of the PCBS. The PCBS has rather strong relation with other bodies of the public administration: E.g., the President of the PCBS is appointed by the President of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA), and the head of the Advisory Council for Statistics (ACS) is the Palestinian Prime Minister. The practices of the PCBS seem to be fully in line with the stipulations of Principle 1; from the discussions of the peer review team with the management and other staff of the PCBS as well as with members of the Advisory Council and with representatives of various user groups the peers gained the impression that the PCBS acts independently in practice and that there is no interference from politicians or other actors.

The ACS is responsible for the general framework as well as for directing the priorities of the statistical program. The GSL defines the duties of the ACS in Article 12, but not the composition and the appointment procedure of its members. The composition of the ACS is published (in Arabic) on the PCBS website for the years up to 2009. Public information about the appointment procedure of ACS members and evaluation reports about the annual and multi-annual programmes and about the annual report could further back the professional independence of the PCBS. The annual programme and annual reports as well as the evaluation reports should be shown on the PCBS website.

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

The professional independence of the PCBS is not explicitly stated in the GSL. However, a decision of the Council of Ministers stresses the importance of the professional independence of the PCBS for enhancing the credibility of statistical figures and the confidence of individuals and institutions in statistics. In addition, the Council of Ministers approved the adoption of the UN Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics, and the PCBS states on the website that the PCBS operates in accordance with the Palestinian Code of Practice for Official Statistics as well as with the Declaration on Professional Ethics that was adopted by the International Statistical Institute in 1985.

The peer review team got the impression that in spite of strong ties between the PCBS and other bodies of the public administration, no violations of professional independence exist in practice.

1.1.2 Indicator 1.2: The head of the statistical authority has sufficiently high hierarchical standing to ensure senior level access to policy authorities and administrative public bodies. He/she should be of the highest professional calibre.

According to information provided to the peer review team, the position of the President of the PCBS is that of a Deputy Minister. The high hierarchical standing of the President corresponds to the fact that the highest authorities, the President of the Palestinian National Authority and the Council of Ministers are involved in the appointment process (as stated in Article 6 of the

GLS). The President of the PCBS has a sufficiently high standing to enable access to policy authorities and administrative public bodies.

Article 6 of the GLS also defines the required qualifications of the President of the PCBS. The Statistics Law does not foresee a fixed term mandate for the President of the PCBS, it does not specify reasons and a procedure for dismissal, and thus does not give protection against inappropriate dismissal of the President of the PCBS during his or her term of office.

1.1.3 Indicator 1.3: The head of the statistical authority and, where appropriate, the heads of its statistical bodies have responsibility for ensuring that European Statistics are produced and disseminated in an independent manner.

The GSL does not assign special responsibilities, functions, or tasks with respect to the production and dissemination of Official Statistics.

1.1.4 Indicator 1.4: The head of the statistical authority and, where appropriate, the heads of its statistical bodies have the sole responsibility for deciding on statistical methods, standards and procedures, and on the content and timing of statistical releases.

The Statistics Law does not state that the head or any other representative of the PCBS has the sole responsibility for deciding on statistical methods, standards and procedures, and on the content and timing of statistical releases. The peer review team got the impression that, nevertheless, the PCBS meets the standards of the CoP in practice with respect to the responsibility for deciding on statistical methods, standards and procedures, and on the content and timing of statistical releases. Those interviewed during the peer review imparted a positive picture of the PCBS's independence in the production and dissemination activities.

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

The GSL describes the areas in which statistical products are to be delivered by the statistical authority and other producers of official statistics in Article 5; Article 12 states that the ACS is entitled to review the annual programme and to define areas of priority in the strategic planning. Apart from this, the process of planning the statistical work programme is not regulated in the Statistics Law, neither the annual nor the role of the multi-year programme; the publication of statistical work programmes is not mandated. The peer review team got the impression that users of official statistics and other producers of official statistics are involved in the planning process, but that this involvement as well as the programming process is not formalised and documented and visible for the public.

A National Strategy for the Development of Statistics (NSDS) for the period 2009-2013 has been developed, adopted by the ACS and the Council of Ministers, and published. Annual reports describe in general terms the activities of the PCBS and the progress achieved. The reporting about the implementation of the National Strategy is restricted to rather general observations.

Information about the composition and the appointment procedure of members of the ACS seems not to be available to the public. The fact that the Palestinian Prime Minister is the head of the ACS is already mentioned above; forming ACS working groups may be beneficial, e.g., a Programme Working Group for presenting an evaluation report about the Annual Programme to the ACS in order to guarantee profound ACS deliberations of the programme and to base the ACS decision about the programme on more detailed facts. Analogously, progress reports like the Annual Report should be evaluated.

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

It seems to be the policy of the PCBS not to include any political comments in their statistical releases. The policy seems to be well adopted in the organisation. The releases that the peer reviewers looked at did not contain any political comments, and this was confirmed in discussions with users, in particular with the media.

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

The peer review team was informed that the PCBS intervenes publicly in cases of the misuse or misinterpretation of PCBS's statistics in the media. The Press Law stipulates the complainant's right to require a correction of incorrect information in the media. It appears that an internal policy and a well established procedure on how to react exist; a written description of the policy and the procedure is, however, not yet available.

1.2 Principle 2: Mandate for data collection

Statistical authorities must have a clear legal mandate to collect information for European statistical purposes. Administrations, enterprises and households, and the public at large may be compelled by law to allow access to or deliver data for European statistical purposes at the request of statistical authorities.

Overall assessment: The senior staff and the top management of the PCBS as well as users from the scientific community and the media judge the legal mandate for the collection and dissemination of data by the statistical office as being sufficient. Also representatives of the ACS consider the legal basis for data collection as sound. As the management of the PCBS stressed, the participation of individuals and enterprises in surveys and censuses is very satisfying.

Already the PCBS master plans for the years 1995-2000 and 2001-2010 recommended that official statistics should be based on administrative records and registers to the greatest possible extent. The master plan was replaced by the National Strategy for the Development of Statistics (NSDS) in 2009. The NSDS will be updated every six years. The NSDS takes up the priorities already formulated in the master plan as concerns data collection by means of setting up and making use of administrative records and statistical registers.

As the PCBS top management stated during the LPR discussions, 47% of the indicators provided by the PCBS are based on data from registers. The use of statistical registers and administrative data appears to be a good strategy to reconcile quality demands for statistical raw data with limited financial resources. Hence, the increased use of registers could also be one step towards a more sustainable solution in ensuring provision of high quality data since this might reduce the dependency of the PCBS on donors. However, until today only few administrative registers are in place and well functioning (amongst those a mirror register of the population register at the Ministry of Interior and the establishments register at the PCBS). The PCBS is currently setting up an agricultural register with the data collected during the agricultural census 2010. Furthermore, works on a diseases register which shall be placed at the Palestinian Health Ministry are underway. As a formal basis for the use of data from administrative registers the PCBS concludes Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) with the respective external administrative data producers. Asked for the legal significance of such a MoU the management of the PCBS and representatives of the Statistical Council claimed that these agreements have the status of by-laws.

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

The PCBS is mandated by law to collect data for specified branches as stipulated in the GSL. The respective articles are:

- Article 3, point 5: conduct of population, housing, and establishment censuses;
- Article 5: collection of data in the fields of population size and structure, social affairs, national economy, and area and other statistics.

Furthermore, Article 5 of the GSL specifies that - apart from the specified list of statistics - “The Bureau may collect statistical data on any other area as decided by the Council of Ministers at the recommendation of the President” of the PCBS.

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

Article 14, point 2 of the GSL states that “The Bureau has the right to obtain administrative records data from government departments to be used for statistical purposes.”

Although it seems that central registers are still at an early stage of development, the population register, which is updated and maintained by the Ministry of Interior, the establishments register and the housing and buildings register, updated and maintained by the PCBS, are already in place while the agricultural register and the disease register are currently set up.

Especially the topic of access and use of administrative records and data from administrative registers by the PCBS points to the necessity for the strengthening of the statistical office as the focal point in the NSS. In addition to having access to such data it is also important that the PCBS has a clear coordinating competence with respect to issues such as methods, classifications, and other standards that administrative data should meet. Such endeavours are in line with the third strategic objective and the corresponding operational objectives 3.1 and 3.2 of the NSDS.

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

As is determined by Article 15, points 3 and 4 of the GSL in the Chapter on “Censuses”, all individuals, judicial persons or their representatives in the country are requested to complete and respond to census questionnaires. In the same Chapter, Article 16 specifies that “In accordance with the provisions of this law the Bureau and its employees shall respect the right to privacy of individuals and households, including their right to refuse participation in a statistical survey”; this is somewhat confusing. The management of the PCBS clarified after respective demand that Article 16 of the GSL makes only reference to surveys (and not to censuses). Having this article placed in Chapter 6 on “Censuses” might lead to misinterpretations.

1.3 Principle 3: Adequacy of resources

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

Overall assessment: It appears that the financial, human and IT resources are adequate for the tasks currently to be fulfilled. However, the financial resources heavily depend on external funding which could endanger the long-term sustainability of the PCBS and the NSS as a whole. Thus it is recommended to work on the long-term financial independence of the PCBS. Options in this regard are to increase the contribution of administrative bodies to the production of official statistics of the NSS, to make increased use of data from administrative sources, and to reduce the costs within the PCBS. Cost reductions are possible by using modern technology

for data collection, e.g., hand-held devices for household and internet-based questionnaires for business surveys, respectively.

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

The assessment of this principle concerns the adequacy of staff, financial, and IT resources for producing good quality statistics for national and international needs; in the given context, it does not refer to current European statistics needs. Although the PCBS expressed its interest in European statistics methodology and actively gets acquainted with European standards in statistics via the participation in the MEDSTAT programme the compliance with the EU standards in the daily practice is not its primary concern or obligation.

The discussions with the top management and the senior and junior staff of the PCBS as well as the other producers of statistics and the users of statistical data revealed that at present the human, financial, and IT resources are adequate to satisfy the current needs for statistical data. Staff is generally well-educated and possesses the necessary skills to provide high quality service. The PCBS encourages enhancing professional skills by internal training workshops and seminars, on the job training and by providing support for a number of employees who would like to obtain a university degree. The IT staff is competent and capable to develop necessary applications to support the conduct of statistical surveys like for example the price quotation survey, or redesigning the website so as to make it more-user friendly, or computerise the administrative procedures in the office. The IT equipment is modern and adequate for the activities performed. Each employee is equipped with a desk top computer and a number of hand-held devices are available for the staff working in the field.

The financial resources seem to be sufficient to provide high quality service, minor tasks even without charging, and carry on the planned activities. A detailed accounting system is in place providing information on production factors like labour costs, computing time, and unit costs per questionnaire and interview, which allows efficient management and monitoring of all activities carried out by the PCBS. The sound management of the financial resources is decisive in building up confidence of the donors in that the allocated resources are appropriately used.

Nevertheless, the PCBS heavily depends on external funding which could endanger the long-term sustainability of the office and the NSS as a whole. The share of external contributions to the PCBS budget in 2010 amounted to 51 % while the remaining part was provided by the Palestinian National Authority. For the sake of long-term sustainability and lower dependence on external assistance the PCBS should consider working towards increasing the contribution of administrative bodies to the production of official statistics of the NSS, making more use of data from administrative sources and reducing the costs within the PCBS. Cost reductions are possible by using modern technology for data collection, e.g., hand-held devices for household and internet-based questionnaire for business surveys, respectively. These recommendations are in line with the NSDS.

1.4 Principle 4: Quality commitment

All ESS members commit themselves to work and co-operate according to the principles fixed in the Quality Declaration of the European Statistical System (ESS).

Overall assessment: The PCBS started establishing a quality management system in 2008. The peer review team was informed that the PCBS has committed itself to work according to the quality standards as defined through the ISO 9001 standard and has received the respective official certification. Hence, the reference for the quality standards is not explicitly the Quality Declaration of the European Statistical System although a high overlap between the formal goals specified by the PCBS and the Quality Declaration seem to be obvious.

The declaration on the quality policy and objectives is shown on the PCBS website. In addition, the Annual Report 2010 contains a chapter on total quality management. The central points of the PCBS quality management are mentioned in the report; these are:

- To improve the competency of employees and provide them with necessary professional developments and incentives;
- To reduce bureaucratic procedures to improve work efficiency;
- To provide PCBS with competitive edge locally and internationally;
- To improve the practice of responsibilities, authorities and delegations at all managerial levels;
- To improve coherence among the different units in the organisation.

It is further mentioned on the website that the PCBS is "...committed to develop performance indicators to monitor, check and measure the achievement of quality objectives, and to review these objectives periodically to ensure their relevance."

Quality management at the PCBS is process oriented while comparing the planned default values with actual ones. In case of deviations improvements and changes are defined and planned in the sense of a PDCA (Plan – Do – Check – Act) cycle.

Currently 15 persons from all directorates within the PCBS and four full time posts are involved in quality management. As the PCBS top management stated during the LPR discussions, actually 85% of all processes in the PCBS and 25 procedures are covered by respective quality controls. All components for the quality management are available via intranet and 95% of the total quality management indicators have been integrated. In 2011, 65 internal audits on surveys and statistical products of the PCBS were conducted, trying to address amongst other things issues of non-conformity.

The PCBS considers the ISO 9001 standard but one step towards the application of the model of the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) which might be in place from 2016 onwards.

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

The peers were informed that the product quality is regularly monitored by means of internal audits. In order to implement quality monitoring activities on a more regular basis in the future, the Quality Department sets up an Internal Audit Plan for every year. According to the PCBS, about 65 internal audits have been conducted in 2011. For 2012 the areas of audit as defined in the Internal Audit Plan contain (among others):

- (QP-01) management review to quality system
- (QP-02) control of documents and records
- QP-03) corrective and preventive actions

- (QP-04) internal control to quality system
- (QP-05) development and approval of documents
- (QP-06) approval of annual plan
- (QP-08) achieve quality objectives
- (QP-12) training
- (QP-13) formation and control of administrative committees
- (QP-14) user services
- (QP-16) preparation and implementation of statistical survey
- (QP-22) Implementation of administrative records project

The PCBS has also prepared quality reports on the labor force survey (published in October 2011) and on the expenditure survey (published in 2012). A summary of the quality report for the labor and wages survey can be found on the PCBS website:

The PCBS plans to increasingly cover surveys by quality reports within the next years.

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

The peers were informed that quality controls are realised at all stages of the survey related processes by means of audits conducted by the Quality Department throughout the year. Although at first sight the quality monitoring might seem problematic – especially with regard to field work in more remote areas due to travel restrictions, the PCBS assured during the interviews with the top management that in regional municipalities the regional offices of the PCBS take care of quality controls. However, as the PCBS stated, probably the most problematic issue in the value chain of statistical production rests with assuring quality standards in the field work.

With regard to quality standards in the development of surveys and related instruments such as questionnaires, one of the usual procedures in setting up surveys is to regularly conduct pilot studies in order to test a given questionnaire on a subsample of the target population.

The peers were informed that DESAP checklist assessment questions are regularly answered by the survey managers.

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

The PCBS is always committed to keep up with timeliness and accuracy in parallel. In case that time is scarce the decision (e.g., to postpone a publication or not) would always go in the direction to assure quality, e.g., in the case of the Informal Sector Survey 2008 the publication of results had been postponed in order to clarify a question related to accuracy thoroughly. The propositions for new surveys and the planning for existing ones are discussed with the Statistical Committee.

The PCBS management seems to be well aware of the fact that the production of high quality products is decisive for the good reputation of official statistics.

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

Quality guidelines are at the disposal of the PCBS staff via the intranet. Procedures to follow for surveys are well documented and always consulted by the responsible persons. Especially newcomers receive intense on the job training that entails also procedures aiming at assuring

quality. During this orientation course on fundamental principles of official statistics a full day is assigned to the introduction to principles of data quality. Topics covered in this course are:

- Concepts of data quality
- The importance of data quality in statistics
- UN fundamental principles of official statistics
- Dimensions, elements and indicators of quality
- The international framework on data quality
 - Data quality assessment framework (DQAF)
 - European Framework for Quality of Statistics
- Means & tools for assuring quality
- Sources of data error
 - Statistical errors (sampling)
 - Non-statistical errors (coverage, non-response, measurements, data processing)
- Evaluation of quality in demographic data (age heaping index)

In addition to the training course for newcomers, a training course on advanced quality issues is delivered to senior staff.

The PCBS is distributing a document to its staff on “Data Quality Control and Enhancing” in Arabic. The quality guidelines are not published on the PCBS website.

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

In addition to the quality controls affected by the PCBS the ACS assures the quality of statistical outputs. Also the regular use of data and statistics by journalists, researchers, and universities provides regular feedback on the quality of statistical products. The PCBS provides also workshops open to all sorts of external data users in order to enhance comprehension of data and methodological concepts. Such measures aim at further stimulating the use of official data and provide also feedback on the statistical outputs generated. Although already a lot seems to be done with regard to reviewing key statistical outputs, members of the ACS see still place for improvements, especially with regard to production and reviewing time series.

1.5 Principle 5: Statistical confidentiality

The privacy of data providers (households, enterprises, administrations and other respondents), the confidentiality of the information they provide and its use only for statistical purposes must be absolutely guaranteed.

Overall assessment: Statistical confidentiality is protected by Article 19 of the GSL. The peer review team felt that statistical confidentiality is taken seriously by the PCBS. Access to micro-data is given only in anonymised format; tabulated statistics contain at minimum three cases per cell in order to prevent identification. The PCBS seeks the active discussion with data users on the issue of the balance between optimal usability and highest possible protection. Penalties for breaches of confidentiality are stipulated in the GSL. The peers were informed that until now no case of disclosure of individuals or enterprises are known. The PCBS also explained that in what concerns external attacks on data processing facilities, the actual security measures in place are up to date.

1.5.1 Indicator 5.1 Statistical confidentiality is guaranteed by law.

The necessity for the PCBS to take care of statistical confidentiality issues in the collection of data and the production of statistics is explicitly mentioned in Article 17 of the GSL.

1.5.2 Indicator 5.2 Statistical authority staff signs legal confidentiality commitments on appointment.

As foreseen by point 3 of Article 17 of the GSL the PCBS staff has to sign a legal commitment that she or he shall not divulge, disseminate, or transmit any information or data that is protected as confidential.

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

Points 1 and 2 of Article 19 of the GSL specify penalties in form of a fine up to 200 JDs (approximately 200 Euro) and/or up to three months imprisonment for employees, representatives or any person who acquires confidential information or data.

1.5.4 Indicator 5.4 Instructions and guidelines are provided on the protection of statistical confidentiality in the production and dissemination processes. These guidelines are spelled out in writing and made known to the public.

Guidelines and data confidentiality declarations are spelled out in writing, e.g. on questionnaires or accompanying letters. The "Declaration on Professional Ethics" which can be found on the PCBS website makes reference to confidentiality issues under the points 4.4, 4.5, and 4.6. However, the principles of data confidentiality as specified in Article 17 of the GSL could also be highlighted on the website in order to give increased visibility to this important point.

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

All data servers of the PCBS are in a special secured data server room with restricted access which was presented by the PCBS during the light peer review mission. The PCBS employs in addition up-to-date security measures (firewall, virus- and spyware-protection) to protect the statistical data bases.

1.5.6 Indicator 5.6 Strict protocols apply to external users accessing statistical micro-data for research purposes.

Micro-data are given to researchers and other individuals and institutions with interest in analyses under clearly defined rules (anonymised, contract with data users). Moreover, in a new initiative the PCBS has established a "research centre" in the PCBS library where registered users are allowed to access anonymised micro-data on a work station (without any means to save data on external devices) within the PCBS premises.

1.6 Principle 6: Impartiality and objectivity

Statistical authorities must produce and disseminate European Statistics respecting scientific independence in an objective, professional and transparent manner in which all users are treated equitably.

Overall assessment: The PCBS complies to a large extent with this principle. Observations made during the LPR provided reasonable assurance that the PCBS respects scientific independence in producing and disseminating official statistics, and that it carries out its tasks in an objective manner. Neither the impartiality nor the objectivity of the PCBS were questioned at any stage of the LPR but were rather confirmed by all groups of users interviewed. However, formalisation of available procedures would be a means to improve the future perception of the PCBS as an impartial and objective NSI. It is recommended that procedures how to deal with errors in published statistics, how to revise the release calendar, and how to control and document pre-release access should be developed and made public.

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

The GLS does not regulate the working mode of the PCBS or other bodies of official statistics; it does not stipulate that PCBS's staff can act independently, free from any instructions from outside, in the implementation of the Statistical Programme. On the website of the PCBS is stated that the PCBS operates in accordance with the UN Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics, the Palestinian Code of Practice for Official Statistics as well as the Declaration on Professional Ethics as adopted by the International Statistical Institute. Though the PCBS mentions in the self-assessment that mass media criticised the results of consumer price statistics all stakeholders interviewed during the LPR including representatives of the media felt confident that the PCBS compiles statistics on an objective basis determined by statistical considerations.

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

The LPR questionnaire indicates that a policy is in place stating that data sources and statistical techniques are selected by statistical considerations only. This was confirmed during the LPR by the PCBS staff and in the discussion with members from the ACS. Those stakeholders interviewed confirmed their trust in the professionalism of PCBS's staff. The representative of the World Bank reported on the good experiences made with the PCBS in cooperation on issues related to national accounts; the techniques corresponded to standards set by the World Bank.

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

A formal procedure for recording information about errors discovered in published statistics and a rule or policy for error treatment has not been developed so far. If errors are identified in a published statistics they are corrected and users are informed, chiefly via the medium in which the incorrect statistic was disseminated. A policy to be followed in case of errors should be developed and published on the PCBS's website.

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

Metadata are provided in the format of the Accelerated Data Program (ADP) and regularly updated for the statistical products; the metadata are available on the PCBS website. Also, reports on statistical products contain a chapter on metadata which gives the users access to an

extensive amount of information describing the data. This may be helpful for evaluating the statistical process and the quality in the wider sense of official statistics and their compliance with the principles. These data are to a large extent also available in English. The GSL does not regulate the dissemination of statistical products in general and the access to metadata in particular.

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

At the beginning of each year the PCBS publishes an advance release calendar for all statistical products. Release times are currently not pre-announced. A procedure to revise this calendar while also integrating other producers of official statistics within the NSS should be developed.

1.6.6 Indicator 6.6: All users have equal access to statistical releases at the same time and any privileged pre-release access to any outside user is limited, controlled and publicised. In the event that leaks occur, pre-release arrangements should be revised so as to ensure impartiality.

The principle that all users have equal access to statistical releases at the same time seems to be applied in practice; in cases where statistics are produced in cooperation with other official sides (e.g., ministries) that partnership also refers to the production of the statistical release. This practice seems to be generally accepted by the users. The peer review team was told that no cases of divulgence prior to the official release (leaks) happened during the last two years. A procedure according to which embargoed pre-release access is controlled and documented has not been established so far. The establishment and publication of a policy concerning embargoed pre-release access and corresponding documentations is recommended.

1.6.7 Indicator 6.7: Statistical releases and statements made in press conferences are objective and non-partisan.

The press releases of the PCBS contain little commentary which is limited to a pure description of the statistical results and figures. Internal procedures are in place on how to prepare and approve press releases; these should be included in the dissemination strategy or in a separate document on the website of the PCBS.

1.7 Principle 15: Accessibility and clarity

European Statistics should be presented in a clear and understandable form, disseminated in a suitable and convenient manner, available and accessible on an impartial basis with supporting metadata and guidance

Overall assessment: The PCBS presents its statistics clearly and well accessible, although its statistical releases could be made more informative. All of its statistical releases are published on the website of the PCBS, usually both in Arabic and English. A lot of information is also actively disseminated via e-mail to a wide range of targeted users in the form of press releases, some also published in connection with various national and international events (e.g., Statistics Day, or Women's Day). The PCBS produces also a wide range of statistical publications. Reports are accompanied by supporting metadata; for press releases, links to metadata and corresponding reports would be helpful. However, the website itself requires further development to enhance its functionality and the accessibility of the statistical products. The annual and multi-annual programmes and the annual reports should be made public on the website. The website does, neither in content nor via links, provide access to statistics of other producers of official statistics.

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

The PCBS publishes its press releases and a broad range of key statistics in form of reports or in table format, both in Arabic and in English. A topical presentation structure and more user-friendly formats for downloading statistics as well as a better integration of metadata are straightforward ways to improve the accessibility of statistical products on the website; in general, orientation on the website is not easy. Users' views collected during the peer review broadly confirmed this assessment. Nevertheless, the users seemed to be satisfied with the contents of the statistical releases. Workshops organised by the PCBS are helpful for users to understand and work with the statistical products. However, the peer review team recommends that the statistical releases are made more informative; for example, releases could include international besides regional comparisons, and more time series would be welcomed by many users. A new design of the website is to be launched by end of April 2012 and the peer review team is confident that many improvements will be realised. In a future step, the PCBS website should be developed into a portal for the entire Statistical System of the oPt.

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

All main statistics are published free of charge on the website: A wide range of key statistics in table format in Arabic and English, partly in Excel, are complemented by a range of publications which are available in electronic format to be downloaded free-of-charge from the online catalogue or in paper format to be ordered and sent by the PCBS office. Major tailor-made information upon request is charged for. The website itself requires further development to enhance its functionality and the accessibility of the statistical products. The users uniformly confirmed this view. The new website to be launched (see 1.7.1) will be structured clearer and will offer more user-friendly presentations and improved functionalities, e.g., an efficient search engine, tables downloadable in Excel, customer-designed tables and graphs possibly using PC-axis. The relevance of a professional website for the image of the PCBS in the public cannot be overestimated.

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

The PCBS's User Services offers statistical information upon request. The service is well organised and seems to work efficiently. Major custom-designed analyses are charged for. The publication of custom-designed analyses is not the usual practice.

1.7.4 Indicator 15.4: Access to micro-data can be allowed for research purposes. This access is subject to strict protocols.

Third party access to micro-data is not regulated in the GSL. The PCBS supports the access to anonymised micro-data by a rich offer of public use files on the PCBS website; datasets from both household and business survey are available. CD-ROMs of the datasets are distributed upon request. The service is well organised; analysis or research outcomes and feedback from the users is not monitored and documented. The peer review team could not clarify whether the disclosure control techniques that are used to anonymise business survey micro-data are appropriate to also prevent indirect identification. A rather new means to provide researchers with access to micro-data is the "research room", a PC with limited output devices that can be used within the PCBS office.

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

Metadata of the statistical products are documented in the format of the Accelerated Data Program (ADP) and regularly updated for the statistical products; the metadata are to a large

extent also available in English. The presentation of quantitative indicators in the metadata reports, in particular for quality aspects, should be extended, standardised, and homogeneous for all statistical products.

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

The metadata are available to users on the PCBS website and in the reports on the statistical products. In the discussions during the LPR, users confirmed that sufficient metadata are available for their purposes. The PCBS also organises workshops for users to help them to understand and work with the statistical products.

2. COORDINATION ROLE OF THE NATIONAL STATISTICAL INSTITUTE

This assessment takes into account the relevant legal and policy framework as well as the related de facto co-ordination mechanism and bodies and their functioning in practice. It also considers the initiatives developed in the NSDS for 2009-2013 and the comments given in the External Review Report from September 2011.

The tasks assigned to the PCBS by the General Statistics Law (GSL) not only affect the PCBS itself but the National Statistical System (NSS) as a whole. Article 3 defines as functions of the PCBS to establish a comprehensive and unified statistical system, to establish statistical training centres for all governmental and non-governmental actors and other institutions which are serving needs of the whole NSS. Article 5 says that the statistical programme shall be conducted by the PCBS in coordination with the relevant ministries. Article 13 says that the statistical units within the ministries shall coordinate their activities with the PCBS and shall abide with technical definitions and concepts of the PCBS.

The responsibility for developing NSS is currently mainstreamed in the PCBS organisation. The PCBS has been pro-active to involve the other partners in the NSS

- in training courses,
- committees for new surveys and statistics,
- seminars for presentation and explanation of results,
- consultations in the planning processes (e.g. the NSDS), and
- improvements of the use of administrative records and registers.

Most activities have been bilateral between the PCBS and their partners. This has created much of the needed infrastructure for an integrated system (e.g., MoU with partners).

The National Strategy for the Development of Statistics for 2009-2013 (NSDS) suggests a number of measures for strengthening and consolidating the NSS.

- Integrating the NSS by developing its infrastructure and improving its coordination.
- Developing the role of statistical units in line ministries and public agencies and, if necessary, creating such units
- Developing the role of bodies supporting the NSS

For each of these operational objectives, a number of very concrete sub-objectives have been defined many of them with a concrete output.

The External Review Report from Sept 2011 (ERR) comments on these goals and suggests concentrating on some specific and concrete aims like

- participatory and need/result based long- or medium- term planning,
- a holistic view of data sources within the NSS,
- standards, methodologies and quality management for the whole NSS,
- a common website for the NSS,
- a holistic human resource development for the NSS.

A central point of the proposal in the ERR is the reorganisation of all NSS-related activities into a common directorate or office directly under the PCBS President. By this it will be more visible that the staff is working for the NSS including (but not exclusively for) the PCBS (some

are already doing that). The other advantage will be that those working for NSS will come closer to each other for more efficient cooperation. An alternative would be to have an NSS coordinator on a rather high position within the PCBS. An important supplement would be to support the coordinating activities by evaluations and feedback of the ACS and task-specific working-groups of the ACS.

A precondition for the functioning of the NSS will be that each producer is obliged to follow and implement the principles of the CoP. Professional independence, impartiality and objectivity, quality commitment, etc. are crucial for trust in the institutions and their statistical products and the acceptance in the public.

It is recommended that the PCBS

- is designated explicitly in the GSL as the coordinating body (“focal point”) of the NSS,
- has the responsibility for coordinating all official statistical activities at national level,
- is in charge of the development, production, and dissemination of official statistics, and
- acts as a contact point for all national and international bodies on statistical matters.

In particular it is recommended that

- administrative data and corresponding statistical registers are comprehensively used by all producers of official statistics under coordination of the PCBS,
- the annual programme and release calendar should include all producers of official statistics, and
- a website is organised by the PCBS as the national portal of official statistics with links to other producers of official statistics such as the Palestinian Monetary Authority.

This mandate should allow the PCBS to have a leading and decisive role on methodological issues vis-à-vis all producers of official statistics in the country.

3. GOOD PRACTICES TO BE HIGHLIGHTED

One of the good practices observed during the LPR exercise that could be recommended to other NSIs is the use of a sound accounting system for monitoring the costs, time and labour consumption of all statistical activities. The system is computerised and easily accessible by authorised persons. The statistical activities are broken down by project; for each project costs are calculated for staff required, including fieldwork, data processing and dissemination taking into account financial resources, time and labour. The system allows monitoring the costs of single operations such as costs per questionnaire or interview and the information could be used for an analysis of the efficiency and ways of further reduction of the costs of statistical activities. It seems to be a good tool for project management.

4. LIST OF IMPROVEMENT ACTIONS BY PRINCIPLE OF THE CODE

4.1 Improvement Actions Principle 1: Professional Independence

Improvement actions	Timetable
In a future revised GSL, the professional independence shall explicitly be expressed.	2013
In a future revised GSL, the position of the president of the PCBS, in particular the conditions of appointment and dismissal shall be stated; this suggests considering a fixed term of office.	2013
The ACS or a Working Group of the ACS should prepare an evaluation report on the annual and multi-annual programmes; the report should be discussed in the decision process of the programme and the final report should be published on the PCBS website.	2012
The ACS or a Working Group of the ACS should prepare an evaluation report about the annual report; the annual report, supplemented with the evaluation should also be published on the PCBS website.	2012

4.2 Improvement Actions Principle 2: Mandate for Data Collection

Improvement actions	Timetable
A future revised GSL shall clarify that the Article 14 also covers the development of new types of administrative data and the setting up of statistical registers.	2013

4.3 Improvement Actions Principle 3: Adequacy of Resources

Improvement actions	Timetable
Development of a strategy to achieve the long-term financial independence of the PCBS.	2013
Develop a master plan for the increase of the contribution of administrative bodies to the production of official statistics of the (NSS).	2013
Develop a master plan for the increase of the use of data from administrative sources	2013
Develop and establish a internet-based questionnaire device for business surveys.	2013

4.4 Improvement Actions Principle 4: Quality Commitment

Improvement actions	Timetable
Extend endeavours in the direction of an EFQM-oriented quality system.	Until 2016
Standardise the system of metadata reports including the quality dimension and give more weight to numerical quality indicators.	Until 2012
The annual programme of the PCBS shall cover the conduct of audit activities and the publication of metadata reports.	Until 2013

4.5 Improvement Actions Principle 5: Statistical Confidentiality

Improvement actions	Timetable
Provisions as concerns avoiding cross-connecting information from different registers by external users that would allow for identification of individual units should be planned and established for a future with more administrative data and registers.	Until 2016
In conducting the research centre for researchers, experiences of NSIs like the Danish office with respect to confidentiality issues related to use of micro-data should be used and applied in practice.	2013
The principles of statistical confidentiality as specified in Article 17 of the GSL should be highlighted on the website.	Until 2012

4.6 Improvement Actions Principle 6: Impartiality and Objectivity

Improvement actions	Timetable
A future revised GSL should stipulate that the staff of the PCBS acts independently, free from any instructions from outside, in the implementation of the Statistical Programme.	2013
A policy for changes in the release calendar should be available and made public.	2012
A policy for pre-releases should be developed including a procedure according to which embargoed pre-release access is controlled and documented. The policy should be made public.	2012

4.7 Improvement Actions Principle 7: Sound Methodology

Improvement actions	Timetable
Develop in dialog with the relevant shareholders a strategy and a master plan for the future use of administrative data sources and registers in the NSS.	2013
The PCBS should develop and document a strategy for improving the statistical methodology used by other producers of official statistics within the NSS.	Until 2013

4.8 Improvement Actions Principle 8: Appropriate Statistical Procedures

Improvement actions	Timetable
The PCBS should develop in cooperation with other agents within the NSS appropriate statistical procedures for other producers of official statistics.	2013

4.9 Improvement Actions Principle 9: Non-excessive Burden on Respondents

Improvement actions	Timetable
Develop a measuring device for monitoring the response burden.	2013
Develop a concept for the annual reporting of statistical indicators from the monitoring of the response burden.	2013

4.10 Improvement Actions Principle 10: Cost Effectiveness

Improvement actions	Timetable
The PCBS should investigate the potential effects on cost effectiveness that concepts like, data collection with hand-held devices, internet-based data collection, but also the increased use of administrative data and statistical registers may induce.	2013

4.11 Improvement Actions Principle 11: Relevance

Improvement actions	Timetable
The PCBS should develop a strategy to reconcile user needs with the work programme of the PCBS and its priorities.	2012

4.12 Improvement Actions Principle 12: Accuracy and Reliability

Improvement actions	Timetable
The presentation of quantitative indicators in the metadata reports, in particular for quality aspects, should be extended, standardised, and homogeneous for all statistical products.	Until 2013
The PCBS should develop a policy for revisions of statistical products and for the publication of revised statistics.	Until 2012

4.13 Improvement Actions Principle 13: Timeliness and Punctuality

Improvement actions	Timetable

4.14 Improvement Actions Principle 14: Coherence and Comparability

Improvement actions	Timetable
The presentation of time series should be extended on the PCBS website.	2012

4.15 Improvement Actions Principle 15: Accessibility and Clarity

Improvement actions	Timetable
The website needs a clear structure, more user-friendly presentations and improved functionalities such as an efficient search engine, tables downloadable in Excel, customer-designed tables and graphs.	2012
In metadata reports the presentation of quantitative indicators, in particular for quality aspects, should be extended, standardised, and homogeneous for all statistical products.	2013
The website should be a national portal of official statistics with links to other producers of official statistics such as the Palestinian Monetary Authority.	2016
An exact time of the day for all press releases should be stated.	2012

5. ANNEXES

5.1 Agenda of the LPR

5.2 List of participants

5.3 General Statistics Law

5.4 List of abbreviations