REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA
NATIONAL STATISTICAL INSTITUTE

REPORT

ON IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NATIONAL STATISTICAL PROGRAMME AND THE ACTIVITY OF THE NATIONAL STATISTICAL INSTITUTE IN 2023

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CONTENTS

LIST OF BULGARIAN ABBREVIATIONS

BSEC	Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization
CA	Customs Agency
EAMA	Executive Agency "Maritime administration"
EAVW	Executive Agency on vine and wine
EC	European Commission
ESA 2010	European System of Accounts 2010
ESS	European Statistical System
EU	European Union
ExEA	Executive Environment Agency
FMCS	Financial Management and Control system
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GNI	Gross National Income
HIAU	Head of Internal Audit unit
HICP	Harmonized Index of Consumer Prices
HO	Head Office
IAU	Internal Audit unit
ICT	Information and communications technology
INTRASTAT	Information system for Intra-Community trade in goods
IPA	Institute of Public Administration
IS	Information system
KAIS	Cadastral-Administrative Information System
MAF	Ministry of Agriculture and Food
ME	Ministry of Energy
MEW	Ministry of Environment and Water
MF	Ministry of Finance
MH	Ministry of Health
MI	Ministry of Interior
NEA	National Employment Agency
NRA	National Revenue Agency
NRPP	National register of populated places
NSI	National Statistical Institute
NSP	National Statistical Programme
NSS	National Statistical System
NSSI	National Social Security Institute
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
OP	Operational programme
PCHCRBA	Population Census and Housing Census in the Republic of Bulgaria Act
PPPs	Purchasing Power Parities
PR	Property registry
PRODCOM	Survey on output and sales of industrial products
PRODCOM.BG	Nomenclature of Industrial Production
RA	Registry Agency
R & D	Research and Development activity
RSO	Regional Statistical Office
RSU	Register of statistical units
SAR	State Agency for Refugees
SEDA	Sustainable Energy Development Agency
SSD	Statistical surveys Department
STS	Short-term Business Statistics
UN	United Nations
WG	Working group

LIST OF ENGLISH ABBREVIATIONS

ESTP	European Statistical Training Programme
FATS	Foreign Affiliates Trade Statistics
SDMX	Statistical Data and Metadata Exchange
VIES	VAT Information Exchange System

INTRODUCTION

The Report on implementation of the National Statistical Programme and the activity of the National Statistical Institute in 2023 is developed in compliance with Art. 9 (6) of the Law on Statistics.

The report is structured into six sections and presents the implementation of the tasks of the National Statistical Programme and the activities of the NSI and other Bodies of statistics in 2023.

The first section pays special attention to statistical surveys and activities performed for the first time in 2023.

The second section describes the results achieved on implementation of strategic goals laid down in the Strategy for Development of the National Statistical System of the Republic of Bulgaria for the period 2021 - 2027.

The third section presents the implementation of activities on the production of statistical information in the different thematic areas - demographic and social statistics, macroeconomic statistics, business statistics, statistics on agriculture, forestry and fisheries, multi-domain statistics, information technologies, statistical infrastructure and other activities.

The fourth section presents the resources needed in order to implement the activities of the NSI in 2023.

The fifth section introduces the audit assignments performed by the Internal Audit Unit and the activities implemented by the Inspectorate and the Finance Controller in 2023.

MAIN EVENTS IN 2023

- In the period 28 - 31 March 2023, the first mission of the OECD to Bulgaria took place in NSI in connection with the technical review on the compatibility of national legislation under the legal instrument of the OECD - OECD/LEGAL/0417 - Recommendation of the Council on good statistical practice.
- On 1 of June, a press conference was held jointly with UNICEF-Bulgaria and the electronic publication "The Children of Bulgaria" 2022 was presented. It contains summarized data for children up to 17 years of age according to basic indicators grouped in 8 parts - population, education, health care, justice, social inclusion and living conditions, labour force and culture.
- The NSI together with the leading and partner institutions developed the National set of indicators for monitoring and reporting on progress towards the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals adopted by Decision No. 613/11.09.2023 of the Council of Ministers.

1. INTRODUCING FOR THE FIRST TIME IN 2023

The National Statistical Institute:
- Performed countermeasures against fake news related to statistics and disinformation. The NSI joined the initiative of the European Commission "Bulgarian coalition against disinformation" - a partnership between Bulgarian and European institutions, journalists, representatives of the non-governmental sector and academia.
- Published results of a pilot survey "Equality between women and men in management 2021".
- Used the SIMS standard to complete and send to Eurostat metadata and quality report on the Statistics of Income and Living Conditions (SILC) survey.
- Provided data on non-financial indicators in the field of health statistics in implementation of Commission Regulation (EU) 2022/2294 as regards statistics on healthcare facilities, healthcare human resources and healthcare utilisation.
- Provided the OECD with data on a certain set of indicators for the innovative activity of enterprises in 2020.
- Developed and sent to Eurostat an Auxiliary table for state interventions to reduce the negative effect of high-energy prices.
- Used the SDMX technical standard to fill in and send to Eurostat the inventories of the housing price indices and the housing sales indicators.
- Started earlier reporting of data on the Energy Balances and the Overall Energy Balance Sheet of the country in accordance with the requirements of Commission Regulation (EU) 2022/132 of 28 January 2022 amending Regulation (EC) No 1099/2008 of the European Parliament and of the Council on energy statistics, as regards the implementation of updates for the annual, monthly and short-term monthly energy statistics.
- Reported on a mandatory basis preliminary data for the Energy balance - "Energy supply" section for 2022.
- Reported on a mandatory basis detailed data on the consumption of Biomass for energy production in 2021, by type of biomass.

2. IMPLEMENTATION OF STRATEGIC GOALS OF THE STRATEGY FOR DEVELOPMENT OF THE NATIONAL STATISTICAL SYSTEM, 2021 - 2027

Main direction in the activity of the NSI in 2023 was the realization of strategic goals and activities within the framework of the Strategy for Development of the National Statistical System of the Republic of Bulgaria for the period 2021 - 2027.

2.1. Goal 1: Modern and effective National Statistical System

Activity 2.1.1. Development and implementation of new methods and technologies

In 2023, a web-based application regarding the Annual Report of Agricultural Holdings was developed. It will collect information in real time for the formation of the necessary, according to the legal framework of the EU, indicators related to the economic accounts for agriculture.

The NSI started the development of a new web application "Household budget survey" and continued the development of a web application "Labor force survey". The two web applications will replace the desktop applications used so far.

Activity 2.1.2. Use more administrative and new data sources

In 2023, the NSI continued to interact with the institutions for the use of administrative data for the needs of the production of statistical information on environment and energy: Ministry of Environment and Water, Ministry of Energy, Ministry of Agriculture and Food, State Agency "State Reserve and Wartime stocks", ExEA, Forestry Executive Agency, Executive Agency "Study and Maintenance of the Danube River", Geodesy, Cartography and Cadastre Agency, Public Procurement Agency, Sustainable Energy Development Agency, Customs Agency, NRA, General Directorate Civil Aviation Administration, National Center for Public Health and Analysis, National Institute of Meteorology and Hydrology. Contacts, including meetings, were made with administrations and organizations in connection with the need for administrative data for the implementation of the new requirements of European legislation in the field of environment and energy.

In 2023, meetings were held with the Bulgarian Food Safety Agency to provide access to the VetIS information system and the preparation of inquiries to extract aggregated data needed in the preparation of economic accounts for agriculture.

In 2023, along with the survey on average land prices and rents in agriculture, an experimental analysis was conducted in parallel with administrative data provided by the Ministry of Agriculture and Food on average land rent prices grouped by permanent use and by areas. The purpose of the analysis is to establish the possibility of future use of the administrative data.

2.2. Goal 2: High quality and confidence in official statistics

Activity 2.2.1. Strengthening communication with stakeholders

In August 2023, the NSI together with the National Association of the Municipalities in the Republic of Bulgaria, held training for representatives of municipalities on environmental surveys. The purpose was to provide methodological support to municipal administrations, presenting both the essence and context of environmental statistics, as well as specific practical instructions for filling out survey forms and working with the IS "Environmental Statistics".

The tools in the field of environment and energy has been regularly reviewed and updated to provide greater clarity and ease for respondents.

The quarterly survey of the Economic Accounts for Agriculture discontinued in 2023 in order to reduce the burden on respondents. Data from the Bulgarian Food Safety Agency and analyzes from the Agrostatistics Department, Ministry of Agriculture and Food were used for the needs of producing statistical information.

The main channel for dissemination of statistical information and easy access to it was the NSI's website. The number of visits to the site averages 7 854[1] visits per day.

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[1] The data on site visits and the number of published materials are as of the end of October.

During the year, 1 330 time series in Bulgarian and English were published, as well as the corresponding tables with the latest data and metadata in 46 statistical sections, 270 press releases and 161 news, as well as announcements for 74 competitions and 2 auctions.

745 press releases with regional statistics were published..

The time series that generated the most interest and downloaded the most times during the year are in English from the following areas:
- Industrial Production Indices;
- Consumer Price Indices;
- Industrial Turnover Indices.

The Top 3 publications downloaded from the NSI's website in digital format are:
- Classification of economic activities (NACE.BG-2008);
- Healthcare;
- Road Traffic Accidents in the Republic of Bulgaria.

The press releases that generated the greatest interest during the year were about inflation and consumer price indices, prices of agricultural land and rent in agriculture, as well as the published data from the Census 2021 of the population of Bulgaria on the website of the NSI.

For the first time, press releases were published on the quarterly indicators on the registration and bankruptcies of legal entities in the "Business statistics" section, new indicators on accommodation establishments in "Tourism" section, indicators on energy balances - "Energy supplies" in "Energy" section.

Information was published on the terms and conditions for reporting irregularities in the implementation of projects under the Recovery and Resilience Plan and under the Act on Protection of Persons, Reporting Information, or Publicly Disclosing Information about Breaches.

The content of some of the site's sections was restructured to make it easier for users to find the information they were looking for.

In 2023, 1,205 one-off requests and 135 periodic requests for statistical information were satisfied. Six requests for access to anonymized data were fulfilled according to the Rules for Provision of Anonymised Individual Data for Scientific and Research Purposes of the NSI.

In 2023, NSI provided statistical information on 87 questionnaires and 4 agreements and processed 851 specific requests through IS INFOSTAT.

Activity 2.2.2. Inclusion and active participation of the public

In fulfillment of Goal 2 "High quality and confidence in official statistics" from 2020, the NSI included the organization of outdoor exhibitions in its toolset for popularizing the statistical institution and its activities. These exhibitions also turned out to be the only possible format for interacting with the public during the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2023, the exhibition was entitled: "Transforming Our World. Sustainable Development Goals 2030" and was presented in Sofia and Ruse. The large audience of the capital and the city - a port on the Danube river had the opportunity to learn about the goals that the United Nations and the European Union have outlined to ensure sustainable development of the planet, to reduce the harmful impact of human activity on the climate and to strengthen and develop the protection of human rights. Attendance was measured through the organization of accompanying initiatives - a QR quiz and a "Take a photo with the statistics!" game.

Activity 2.2.3. Open quality management

Open quality management of the European statistics is a priority direction in the development of the ESS. Quality management of the European statistics requires all Member States to implement effectively the legislation in the field of statistics and principles of the European Statistics Code of Practice.

In order to improve the data quality and to help the respondents, a periodic review and

update, if necessary, of the instructions to the environmental and energy reports is carried out. Time series are regularly reviewed and updated in connection with updating methodology and/or new regulatory requirements.

In 2023, active work with the SSD in the field of environment and energy continued. In March, specialized training held for experts from SSD-Sofia and SSD-Sofia Region on environmental surveys, and in June, a seminar "Annual Meeting "Statistics for the Environment and Energy" was held with the participation of experts from all SSD. The main goal of the trainings was to improve the work by increasing the expert capacity in SSD, and as a result - improving the quality of statistical data.

2.3. Goal 3: Transition from statistics to value-added statistics

Activity 2.3.1. Modern and effective communication

In 2023, the NSI continued and strengthened the good cooperation with national and regional media. During this period over 270 press releases with statistical information and over 90 news topics from various national and international events were disseminated to the media. The NSI continued to send informational press releases to the press centers of ministries and other institutions, as well as the Bulgarian embassies abroad - a tradition that has lasted for more than 15 years.

Until the middle of 2023, the focus of NSI's communication activity continued to be Census 2021, and the latest results of the largest statistical survey were announced. The campaign basically followed the communication strategy created in 2019 to popularize the survey.

A joint press conference with UNICEF was held on the occasion of June 1 - Children's Day.

During the year, the first activities were launched for targeted countermeasures against fake news related to statistical data and disinformation. The NSI joined the initiative of the European Commission "Bulgarian coalition against disinformation" - a partnership between Bulgarian and European institutions, journalists, representatives of the non-governmental sector and academia.

Talks were held and a cooperation agreement is about to be signed with the Factcheck.bg journalists' group for the provision of assistance by the NSI in providing statistical information and methodological assistance to refute fake news.

The NSI continued work on coverage on social networks - mainly Facebook through the NSI institutional profile and Youtube. Social networks were frequently used to inform the public and receive feedback when announcing the results of Census 2021 and other statistics. During the year, the number of followers on the NSI Facebook page increased to over 12,500 people. The new technologies helped the NSI in optimizing the dissemination of the produced information.

Statistical information rich in volume and content in press releases and periodical publications supply state institutions, businesses, the academic community and the whole society with timely, objective, useful and European-quality statistical information about the current state of the various economic, social, educational and cultural activities in the country. The NSI issued 16 publications - printed and electronic (on the NSI website) which are bilingual - in Bulgarian and English and contain national and regional data from various statistical areas. "Statistical Yearbook 2022", "Statistical Reference Book 2023" and "Statistics" magazine comprehensively cover statistical information and satisfy the needs of different categories of users.

The NSI Digital Library continued to hold a leading position on national scale in the field of creation, management and online dissemination of digital information resources. During the reporting period, 24 471 user visits were registered. Users read 625 025 digital

pages. The traditional library was visited by 72 users who used 208 volumes of statistical publications.

Activity 2.3.2. Easily accessible and understandable statistics

The initiatives to increase statistical literacy and culture, which NSI has been working on for years, continued by organizing: the 6th European Statistics Competition for students, the International Statistics Poster Competition, the Statistical Essay Competition for students and an exhibition in the Open Air Gallery "Transforming Our World. Sustainable Development Goals 2030". 310 teams from 79 educational centers in the country participated in the European Statistics Competition, 165 teams from 34 populated places participated in the International Statistics Poster Competition, 83 students from 23 cities participated in the Statistical Essay Competition. The DATATHON competition was organized for the first time and 27 teams from 11 cities in Bulgaria took part. The NSI exhibition was shown in Sofia and Ruse. The organization and registration of participants in the Seventh European Statistics Competition has begun. Mass participation in statistical initiatives is a convincing proof that NSI is working in the right direction and attracts with each passing year more and more young people who expand their knowledge and skills in statistics.

Activity 2.3.3. Conditions for active participation of the media

The media is a key stakeholder, an important partner and a major user of the NSI data. The institute relies on open, timely and effective communication with them. One of the main policies in this regard, laid down in the European Statistics Code of Practice, is the equality of the media, together with all users, in the dissemination of statistical products and services. This means that the media are informed in advance when and what data will be published through the Release calendar announced at the beginning of the year, and they receive the press releases always at the same time. This policy was strictly followed in 2023.

The media was a natural partner of the NSI in order to popularize the activities of the institution. During the year, the NSI held numerous meetings and interviews and answered their inquiries. The NSI established new contacts and new media and journalists were introduced to the work of the institute and the importance of statistical information for society.

2.4. Goal 4: Active cooperation with national and international partners

Activity 2.4.1. Promoting partnerships at national level

In 2023, a partnership was established with the National Association of the Municipalities in the Republic of Bulgaria, within the framework of which methodological support will be provided to municipal administrations to fulfill their obligations as respondents to surveys in the field of environmental statistics. As a first event in August 2023, training was held for representatives of municipalities both on the nature and context of environmental statistics, as well as on specific practical issues related to surveys and work with IS "Environmental Statistics".

Within the framework of the project "Establishing access to geospatial data through linking geocoded and statistical data" under a Grant Agreement with the EC, communication with state institutions was improved: Geodesy, cartography and cadastre agency as the main provider of data on cadastral plots, buildings and their owners through regular exchange and updates of geospatial data from the cadastral map for statistical purposes; MAF for declared agricultural plots and farm blocks, Executive Forest Agency for the forest plots from the forestry plans and felling permits; SEDA for renewable energy facilities, ExEA for treatment facilities and installations by environmental components - for air, water and waste, MEW - for flood zones.

NSI employees participated in meetings of the National Committee for the Farm Accountancy Data Network, the Monitoring Committee of the Strategic Plan for the Development of Agriculture and Rural Areas 2023 - 2027, the Monitoring Committee of the

Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Program 2021 - 2027 and the Council for Sustainable Forest Management and Certification in Bulgaria. The NSI currently sent written opinions on conciliation procedures to the interdepartmental WG 7 "Agriculture" and WG 8 "Fisheries". Experts from the NSI took part in the working groups for the preparation of proposals and additions to Ordinance No. 3 on the creation and maintenance of a register of farmers and "Integrated Farm Statistics 2023".

Activity 2.4.2. Extension of international cooperation

In 2023, the activities in the field of international cooperation were again aimed at strengthening the authority of NSI as a responsible and active partner both within the European Statistical System, and in a number of international organizations, including the United Nations, OECD, International Labour Organization and others.

Our country's full membership in the OECD was a top priority for the institution. NSI is the leading institution in the review under the Council's Recommendation for good statistical practice (OECD/LEGAL/0417), as well as jointly with the BNB under the Council's Recommendation regarding the OECD's definition of foreign direct investment (OECD/LEGAL/0363).

In the period 28 - 31 March 2023, the first mission of the OECD to Bulgaria took place in the NSI in connection with the technical review on the compatibility of the national legislation under the legal instrument of the OECD - OECD/LEGAL/0417. The mission was attended by experts from all the NSI directorates, as well as representatives of the Statistics Directorate of the BNB and the Agrostatistics Department of the Ministry of Agriculture and Food. The opening and closing sessions were also attended by a representative of the "Foreign Economic Relations and Cooperation for Development" Directorate of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA). The mission was successful as each of the participants made presentations on the topics of their competence. During the closing session, an Action Plan with 18 specific recommendations and recommended deadlines for implementation was presented and discussed. Eight of the OECD recommendations made during the mission, which were due to be implemented by the end of May 2023, have been implemented, and the remaining recommendations are in the implementation stage. All self-assessment questionnaires provided by the OECD were also completed and submitted by 31 May.

The NSI has been identified as a partner institution in the preparation of self-assessments for 17 technical reviews under OECD legal instruments. In this context, the institute continued to provide the necessary timely and reliable information to the Bulgarian institutions for the conduct of these reviws, and if necessary, it also sends experts to assist the relevant administrative structures directly in the preparation of the self-assessments and to take part in the technical review missions.

In June, the president of the NSI took part in the 20th meeting of the OECD Committee on Statistics and Statistical Policies.

Throughout the year, the NSI was an active partner within the European Statistical System (ESS). In connection with last year's third Peer Review of the National Statistical System (NSS) of Bulgaria within the framework of its membership in the ESS and the recommendations made during it, an action plan for their implementation was developed and adopted. The plan is published on the NSI website in Bulgarian and English, as well as on the website of Eurostat.

Our country was represented in all three regular meetings of the European Statistical System Committee (ESSC) - in February and May in Luxembourg, and October in Cork, Ireland, as well as at an extraordinary online meeting in April to discuss the proposal amending Regulation (EC) 223/2009 on European statistics. At these meetings, a total of 11 implementing acts were considered and adopted within the framework of the comitology procedure.

Among the more important forums within the ESS during the year were the high-level workshop of Directors-General on the topic "Data Governance Act - Challenges and opportunities for national statistical institutes" (9 February 2023), the meeting under the Swedish Presidency of the Council of the EU dedicated to "Statistical Leadership in Emerging Digital Societies" (April 12 - 13, 2023, Stockholm), as well as the high-level meeting within the framework of the Spanish Presidency on "Integration and interoperability strategies to modernise official statistics" (November 27 - 28, 2023, Seville). Just before the last ESSC meeting in October, the Director Generals' Meeting (DGINS) on "Official statistics in the emerging data ecosystems: opportunities and challenges in the context of climate change and energy crises" traditionally took place. The president of the NSI made a speech during the session dedicated to the future actions that should take at the national and European level to change the public attitude towards cooperation with statistical organizations.

In 2023, NSI representatives continued to participate in the meetings of various working groups in the field of statistics at the European and national level. As usual, among the particularly important international meetings were those of the EU Council Working Party on Statistics (CWPS).

In the first half of 2023, the Presidency of the Council of the EU was led by Sweden, and within the framework of the Council of the EU, the expert work on the following dossiers was completed: Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Regulation (EU) No 549/2013 on the European system of national and regional accounts in the European Union and repealing 11 legal acts in the field of national accounts, and Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on European statistics on population and housing, amending Regulation (EC) No 862/2007 and repealing Regulations (EC) No 763/2008 and (EU) No 1260/2013.

The NSI achieved its goals set at the beginning of the negotiations and laid down in the Framework positions approved by the president of the NSI and adopted by the Council of Ministers.

The Presidency from July until the end of 2023 was taken over by Spain. In this period, the main activity of the working group was focused on the consideration of a draft Regulation amending Regulation (EC) No. 223/2009 on European statistics which is the main legislative act defining the operation of the European Statistical System. A written consultation was also held between the Member States on the proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on European Union labour market statistics on businesses, repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 530/1999 and Regulations (EC) No 450/2003 and (EC) No 453/2008 of the European Parliament and of the Council.

Due to limited financial resources for some of the meetings, the NSI had to rely on the support of the Permanent Representation of the Republic of Bulgaria to the EU to appoint a national representative to participate in the thematic discussions. Nevertheless, NSI experts continued to work from Sofia to prepare detailed positions, opinions and comments on the items on the agenda and provided them in the form of instructions to the Bulgarian diplomats in Brussels, so as to guarantee the effective protection of the Bulgarian interest in the drafting of European legislation in statistics.

The NSI continued to participate actively in all international forums and discussions concerning current challenges and opportunities for official statistics.

In line with the cooperation with the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), in June 2023, the NSI management participated in the 71st plenary session of the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) held in Geneva, Switzerland. Among the topics covered were data ethics as a key factor for social continuity; measuring well-being; the role of national statistical institutes in the management and coordination of public data, and others.

The president of NSI also represented the country at the 54th session of the United Nations Statistical Commission (UNSC) held from February 28 to March 3, 2023 in the city of New York.

In the period April 24 - 27, 2023, the deputy president of the NSI participated online in the UN World Data Forum held in the city of Hangzhou, China.

At the beginning of July, the NSI president was approved as a member of the High-level Group for Partnership, Coordination and Capacity-Building for statistics for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (HLG-PCCB) at the UNSC as one of the five representatives for North America and Europe. Two online meetings of the Group were held during the year to discuss preparations for the next UN World Data Forum, global initiatives related to data and statistics funding, and the need to revise the Cape Town Global Action Plan.

NSI experts regularly participated in various seminars at the invitation of or organized by the UN.

In 2023, the NSI continued its membership in the International Statistical Institute (ISI) and the International Association for Official Statistics (IAOS). The NSI president took part in the largest event in this year's statistical calendar organized by ISI and gathering statisticians from all around the world, representatives of academia, business leaders, analysts and politicians - the 64th World Statistical Congress held in Ottawa from 16 to 20 July 2023.

The NSI took part in the 21st International Conference of Labor Statisticians held at the ILO headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland in the period 11 - 20 October 2023. This year's conference marked the 100th anniversary of the first conference of labor statisticians and the adoption of the first standards in the field of labor statistics allowing greater comparability between countries' data.

In 2023, the NSI successfully completed the implementation of nine projects financed by grants from the European Commission and co-financed by the state budget in the field of demographic and social statistics, business statistics and multidomain statistics. During the year, the NSI applied for, concluded and is about to sign contracts with the EC for 10 new projects that are scheduled to be implemented in the period 2022 - 2024. The funding attracted by them is 490,000 EUR or nearly 958,000 BGN.

In May, six EC projects were audited under Eurostat Annual ex post control that was successfully completed.

Activity 2.4.3. Improving the scope of agreements and partnerships

The National Statistical Institute continued to pursue a consistent policy for the development of bilateral cooperation with the countries of the European Neighborhood Policy - Eastern Partnership, Southern Partnership and the countries from the Western Balkans.

In this regard, the NSI, as part of a consortium with the company GOPA Worldwide Consultants GmbH (lead partner), Statistics Netherlands and Statistics Finland, is a partner in the implementation of projects under the instrument of pre-accession assistance "IPA 2019 Multi-beneficiary statistical cooperation programme" to support the statistical authorities of the countries of the Western Balkans (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Republic of North Macedonia, Serbia, Montenegro, Kosovo) and Turkey for future EU membership.

In line with the IPA 2019 instrument, in 2023, NSI experts conducted 2 expert missions in Kosovo in the field of "Price Statistics - PPP" in May and October, as well as 2 expert missions in the Statistical Office of the Republic of North Macedonia in the field of "HIPC and CPI" in October and in the field of "Quality Management" in November.

The NSI hosted a study visit to experts from the Statistical Offices of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the field of "Implementation of Data and Metadata Exchange Standards" in July. In December, training was held at the NSI for experts from the statistical offices of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo in the field of "Quality Management". The participation

of NSI representatives in the expert missions is an important factor for the further bilateral cooperation of the Republic of Bulgaria with these countries.

Under the instrument of pre-accession assistance IPA 2019, the NSI accepted three experts from statistical offices of the Republic of Serbia, Republika Srpska - Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Republic of North Macedonia to conduct three-month traineeships in the areas of "Quality Management" and "Use of multiple sources - administrative, big data and geospatial data for the production of official statistics".

In 2023, the NSI submitted tender documents for Multinational Statistical Cooperation Program under IPA 2022 in a consortium with the German company GOPA Worldwide Consultants Gmbh (lead partner), Statistics Finland, Statistical Office of Hungary, Croatian Bureau of Statistics and Artemis Information Management S.A.

The NSI as a subcontractor of the company GOPA Worldwide Consultants Gmbh took part in a twinning project of the World Bank "Modernization of the tax administration and statistical system of Kyrgyzstan". A state expert of the NSI conducted an expert mission in the city of Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan and assessed the metadata status of the National Statistical Committee of Kyrgyzstan.

The NSI has bilateral agreements on cooperation in the field of statistics with the Republic of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Croatia, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, the Republic of North Macedonia, Palestine, Romania, Serbia. The Bulgarian side cooperates with these countries on the basis of three-year action plans. In 2023, the preparation of a Plan for joint activities between the NSI and the State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan for the next three-year period was launched. Talks about signing a bilateral cooperation agreement with the Statistical Institute of Argentina are also ongoing.

At the invitation of the president of the Hellenic Statistical Authority (ELSTAT), the deputy president of the NSI attended the opening of the ELSTAT stand at the 87th Thessaloniki International Fair where Bulgaria was the guest of honor this year. New areas of mutual interest were discussed as well as opportunities for future development of the traditionally good relations between the statistical offices of the two countries through the signing of a Memorandum of understanding between the two institutions.

3. REPORT BY THEMATIC DOMAINS

3.1. Demographic and social statistics

Population and housing census in the Republic of Bulgaria in 2021

In 2023, the publication of data from the Population and Housing Census in the Republic of Bulgaria in 2021 continued according to the Release calendar. Press releases, infographics and tables and metadata were published on the topics of housing, buildings, households and families. Main results of the two sample surveys conducted during the census - Migration and migration behavior of the population and Fertility and reproductive behavior of the population – were also published.

Pursuant to Regulation (EU) 2017/712 of the Commission concerning the reference year and program for statistical data and metadata for the population and housing census, as provided for in Regulation (EC) 763/2008 of the European Parliament and of The Council, the National Statistical Institute provided a reference infrastructure for the storage of census data according to the content, scope and structure defined in the Regulation, as well as established links between the national infrastructure and CensusHub. By the end of March 2024, census data from all Member States will be available to users through the CensusHub app.

The work on The Harmonized European Time Use Survey completed in 2023. It was conducted in EU countries in order to measure the time which persons spend on different activities including paid labour and productivity of households; family care, personal care, voluntary work, social life, travel and leisure. In Bulgaria, the survey was conducted for the

sixth time and was part of the Census 2021 programme. In 2023, the fieldwork was completed, the input of information from the respondents' diaries and the processing of the primary data were completed.

Based on § 17, para. 1, item 2 of the Transitional and Final Provisions to the Law on Amendments and Supplements to the Law on Local Taxes and Fees and in connection with Art. 6, para. 4, Art. 9b, para. 2, item 3 and art. 24, para. 1 of the Statistics Act and Art. 9, para. 3 of the Law on Local Self-Government and Local Administration, a Framework Agreement was signed between the National Statistical Institute and the National Association of Municipalities in the Republic of Bulgaria. According to the agreement, the National Statistical Institute provided the municipalities with the necessary data from Census 2021 for determining the number of service users under Art. 62 of the Law on Local Taxes and Fees.

Demographic statistics

In the field of demographic statistics all statistical surveys included in the NSP were conducted according to schedule. The regular processing and production of data on birth, mortality, migration, marriages and divorces surveys provided the necessary information to calculate the number and structures of the population and the main demographic indicators, in accordance with the requirements of Regulation № 1260/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council on European demographic statistics. The data for the reference year 2022 was published and submitted to the EC in accordance with the deadlines set.

Based on the Census 2021, a revision of the population was made for the period between the two last population censuses in 2011 and 2021. The revision of the population in the Republic of Bulgaria during the period 2012 - 2021 was carried out by regions, single ages, sex, country of birth and citizenship.

The population projection was updated based on data from the Census 2021. The projection has a horizon until 2090 distributed by sex and age of the persons and by regions.

The work continued on the preparation and provision of data pursuant to Art. 5, 6 and 7 of Regulation № 862/2007 of the European Parliament and of the Council on "Data on the prevention of the illegal entry and residence", "Statistics on permanent residence permits and permanent resident citizens from third countries" and "Data on returns" sourced by the Ministry of Interior. The NSI continued to provide data to Eurostat under Article 4 of Regulation № 862/2007 of the European Parliament and of the Council on statistics on international protection sourced by the SAR.

The NSI continued to provide weekly data on mortality to the EC, and to publish weekly data on mortality on the NSI website, once a month, 10 days after the end of the last reference week of the month.

In the field of population and demographic processes, the NSI prepared and provided data on questionnaires of the ILO, the World Health Organization, as well as on joint questionnaires of Eurostat and the UN.

Labour market

In 2023, the NSI started implementation of the additional module to the Labor Force Survey - "Pension and labour market participation" as well as the preparation for the implementation in 2024 of the additional variables with an eight-year periodicity on the topic "Young people in the labor market". Work on the EC project "Labour Force Survey (LFS) - Job skills – 2022 module" completed.

Data from the 2022 Labor Force Survey (quarterly and annual) were recalculated with population data based on the 2021 Census.

Data for the wage variable INCGROSS, for the reference year 2021, were collected and provided to Eurostat in accordance with the requirements of Regulation (EU) 2019/1700 of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing a common framework for

European statistics relating to persons and households and of Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2019/2240.

In the field of statistical information provided by enterprises on wages and labour costs, the work continued on the regular annual and short-term surveys of employment and labour costs as well as the regular receipt of information from the administrative register of insured persons by the NSSI, which contributes to improve the quality and completeness of the statistics on employees and average wage. In 2023, the Structure of Earnings Survey started for the sixth time. It has a four-year periodicity and aims to provide detailed and comparable information on the European level about the distribution and the relationship between the amount of labor remuneration, the individual characteristics of the employed persons and those of their employer.

The National Employment Agency as an institution - the main contractor of the state employment policy - collects, processes and disseminates data on the participants and the results of the implementation of measures laid down in it. The implementation of statistical activities in 2023 was based on the collection of register data through the IS of the NEA - National database for labour market and ESF as well as national representative survey on employers' attitudes in the country towards hiring a labour force with certain skills.

The NEA successfully carried out the following activities in 2023:

• Participation in data provision for the preparation of Eurostat's project ESSPROS Unemployment benefits recipients. Annual data for 2022 on unemployed persons - recipients of periodic cash benefits on training as well as benefits in kind related to increasing their professional qualifications or key competences, was provided to NSI in the end of June 2023;

• Participation of the NEA's experts in the WG on pilot data collection for unemployment benefits recipients. The data is exchanged with the NSSI where it is checked for "double counting";

• Preparation and provision of data on seasonal workers from third countries to the NSI according to Regulation № 862/2007 of the European Parliament and of the Council on Community statistics on migration and international protection;

• Preparation and provision to MLSP a set of 44 statistical reports on participants and paid out funds for labour market policies in 2022. The data are part of the Labour market policy (LMP) Database of the EC according to the Eurostat methodology and are in the process of validation by the Commission;

• Conduction of a nationally representative survey among employers across the country on their labour force needs over the next 12 months. The survey was conducted through an online survey among 4,000 respondents, active legal entities in 2022. The analytical report of the survey together with the one-dimensional and two-dimensional distributions by regions, economic activities and type of enterprises were published on the NEA website;

• Regular weekly exchange of register aggregated data on newly registered unemployed persons and unemployed persons who have started work by districts as well as data on registered Ukrainian jobseekers with temporary protection status pursuant to Council Implementing Decision (EU) 2022/382 of 4 March 2022 establishing the existence of a mass influx of displaced persons from Ukraine within the meaning of Article 5 of Directive 2001/55/EC, and having the effect of introducing temporary protection;

• Undertook measures to eliminate gaps found during the Peer Review regarding compliance with the European Statistics Code of Practice and further improvement of the development of the National Statistical System of the Republic of Bulgaria. An action plan was drawn up and approved which foresees the correction of the gaps.

Education and lifelong learning

In the past year, regular exhaustive statistical surveys of educational institutions in Bulgaria were carried out in accordance with the requirements of national and European

legislation under Regulation (EU) No. 912/2013 concerning the production and development of statistics on education and lifelong learning. In 2023, the surveys on pre-primary, basic and secondary education carried out entirely based on administrative registers of the Ministry of Education and Science. A transition was prepared to use the administrative registers of the National Center for Information and Documentation for surveys of tertiary education and doctor's degree. The NSI provided data on financial and non-financial indicators in the field of education statistics according to joint questionnaires of Eurostat, OECD and UNESCO.

During the year, the work on the Adult Education Survey completed. The survey carried out in all EU member states according to a uniform methodology and through a common harmonized questionnaire in accordance with Regulation (EU) 2019/1700 of the European Parliament and of Council of October 10, 2019. A dedicated press release was published and Eurostat validated the microdata and quality report. For the preparation of the survey, the NSI used financial support from the EC under Grant Agreement No. 101051892-2021-BG-AES in order to build statistical infrastructure and capacity for the current and subsequent waves.

In 2023, the NSI published data on the availability of gyms, adapted sports facilities and swimming pools in kindergartens and schools. It was the result of one-time survey in connection with the need of the Ministry of Youth and Sports for adequate, timely and accurate statistical information.

Culture

The NSI's statistical surveys in the field of culture provide information on the activities of museums, theaters, libraries, cinemas, radio- and television programme activity, film production and publishing activity. The main indicators and the scope of the surveys are in accordance with the methodological recommendations of UNESCO. All statistical surveys were carried out on time and with high quality.

In 2023, the NSI conducted an exceptionally exhaustive survey of the activities of the community clubs. The survey of these unique cultural institutions conducts once every 5 years, and detailed information was collected and published about the organized cultural and creative events, amateur artistic creativity, the members of the community clubs and the provision of services.

Public health and healthy and safe working conditions

According to Regulation (EC) № 1338/2008 of the European Parliament and of the Council on Community statistics in the field of public health and healthy and safe working conditions, the NSI carried out statistical surveys qualitatively and on time providing information in the various fields of public health statistics.

In accordance with the requirements of Regulation (EU) № 328/2011, the individual data for 2021 on deaths and stillbirths for reasons at the level of the fourth sign of the International Classification of Diseases, X revision, was submitted and validated to European Commission. The NSI established the necessary organization to implement new classification codes in order to report deaths from COVID-19, as well as additional validation rules.

At the end of 2022, Commission Regulation (EU) 2022/2294 implementing Regulation (EC) No 1338/2008 of the European Parliament and of the Council as regards statistics on healthcare facilities, healthcare human resources and healthcare utilisation was adopted. Data from joint questionnaires of Eurostat, OECD and World Health Organization on financial and non-financial indicators in the field of health statistics was provided in implementation of the new legislation. Within the survey System of health accounts, the NSI prepared data on health expenditure related to COVID-19 for a second year.

In order to ensure high-quality statistical data in compliance with Regulation (EC) No. 1338/2008, two seminars were organized during the year with the participation of experts, representatives of the statistical authorities in the field of public health, the Regional Health

Inspectorates and the National Center of Public Health and Analyses, on the topic of "Increasing data quality of statistical information in the field of public health in implementation of European legislation".

National Health Data and eHealth Directorate at the National Center for Public Health and Analysis at the Ministry of Health performed all statistical surveys and activities included in the NSP. As a body of statistics, it conducted the planned surveys on time and disseminated information on the main statistical indicators.

In implementation of the survey "Accidents at work", **the National Social Security Institute** processed information on accidents at work registered in 2021. The data was processed according to the methodology defined by the Statistical System "Accidents at work", which includes all classifications and variables necessary to characterize the accidents at work. The methodology fully complies with the national legislation and ensures the application of the European statistics on accidents at work. The NSSI developed an electronic information publication "Accidents at work - number, distribution and indicators 2021". The publication contains data on the number, distribution and indicators on accidents at work for 2021; comparative tables on the number and indicators on accidents at work registered in 2019, 2020 and 2021; comparison with data for previous years showing the trends of occupational injuries in the country. The data was published on the NSSI's website under the section "Statistics". The requirements of Commission Regulation (EU) 349/2011 of 11 April 2011 implementing Regulation (EC) № 1338/2008 of the European Parliament and of the Council on Community statistics in the field of public health and healthy and safe working conditions were met in relation to statistical data on accidents at work. Statistical information on accidents at work registered in 2023 was sent directly to Eurostat through the single entry point for exchange of statistical data e-Damis, which guarantees secure exchange and protection of data. The NSSI also sent an information on the scope and the number of insured persons for accidents at work distributed by economic activities of the NACE.BG-2008. The NSSI also submitted to Eurostat metadata on accidents at work through web application "ESS-Metadata Handler". The statistical information on accidents at work for the period 2017 - 2021 was also sent to the International Labour Organization through the NSI.

In implementation of the survey "Occupational diseases", the NSSI processed the information on the new cases of occupational diseases registered in 2021. Based on the data on cause of death provided by IS "Demography" of the NSI, the cases in which the person died in 2021 due to a recognized occupational disease in the past were also registered. The data was processed according to the methodology defined by the Statistical System "Occupational diseases", which includes all the classifications and variables necessary to characterize the occupational disease. The methodology fully complies with national legislation and ensures the implementation of the Guide for the collection and provision of data on European statistics on occupational diseases (document version 14 of June 2022, Eurostat). The data was published on the NSSI's website under the section "Statistics". Data and metadata on occupational diseases were submitted directly to Eurostat electronically (e-Damis).

Incomes and living conditions

In 2023, the Household Budget Survey, which assesses household income, expenditure and consumption, was conducted according to the deadlines set in the National Statistical Programme.

In 2023, the NSI started work on the project "Income and Living Conditions (ILC) - Statistical infrastructure under IESS - SILC 2024 6-year module "Access to services" - Pilot collection of annual data for 2023" implemented under a Grant agreement with the EC 101122129 - 2022-BG-ILC-SILC. Some of the project activities aimed to continue data collection through a supplementary questionnaire on social inclusion, living conditions and well-being to the Household Budget Survey. The additional survey is an initiative of Eurostat

and is conducted according to a uniform methodology within the framework of the European survey Infra-annual data collection on living conditions (IALC). The main objective of the survey is to continue the quarterly monitoring of changes in the living conditions of households in the country because of the COVID-19 pandemic and to provide up-to-date information on harmonized European comparisons. The results of the conducted surveys were published on the NSI website by quarters of 2023.

In 2023, the survey "Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (SILC)" was carried out under the framework Regulation (EU) 2019/1700 of the European Parliament and of the Council on household surveys. In addition to the standard target variables, the survey included additional variables on government financial assistance from schemes related to the COVID-19 crisis in 2022. The variables of the 2023 module "Intergenerational transmission of advantages and disadvantages, housing difficulties; Labour Market and Housing; Ad-hoc policy need – Energy efficiency/poverty" were also included. The observation unit for the variables related to the intergenerational transmission of advantages and disadvantages is each household member 25-59 years of age. Information on the housing difficulties; labour market and housing is provided for all household members aged 16 and over. The observation unit for variables related to energy efficiency is the household as a whole.

The fieldwork was carried out between April and June 2023. The processing and analysis of the survey information were carried out according to the deadlines set in the NSP. Preliminary data with survey results was submitted to Eurostat in December 2023 in accordance with the new requirements on information timeliness.

In order to improve the scope and quality of income statistics in 2023, the NSI continued to use the NSSI's data on the amount of pensions received, pension supplements and additional benefits and allowances by type and month from the Pension Register, as well as annual data on persons receiving benefits and allowances under the Social Insurance Code (Register of benefits). The NSI supplemented the missing information on income and validated the data by using data on insured persons from the NSSI, data for persons receiving benefits from the Social Assistance Agency, and data for persons submitted an annual tax return from the NRA.

Social protection

Pursuant to Regulation № 458/2007 of the European Parliament and of the Council on the European system of integrated social protection statistics in 2023, the completion of statistical data for 2021 under core system and module on pension beneficiaries ended. The core system contains data on revenues and expenditures by social protection schemes and by functions. The requirements of Commission Regulation № 110/2011 regarding the appropriate data transmission formats, the results, which shall be transmitted and the quality measurement criteria for the ESSPROS module on net social protection benefits have been met. The source of data on social protection statistics are the information systems and registers of ministries and departments managing social protection schemes. The NSSI provided annual data on revenues and expenditures under schemes 01 to 06 (ESSPROS core system), as well as data on the number of pension beneficiaries divided by schemes, by type of pension and by sex, in accordance with the form for providing information on module on pension beneficiaries.

In September, early estimates were prepared and sent to Eurostat for the social protection expenditures incurred in the country by ESSPROS functions relevant for 2022. The submission of early estimates under the core system is a pilot submission and is not the subject of implementation of a specific Regulation - the estimates are sent voluntarily by the countries willing to participate.

In 2023, statistical data on the recipients of benefits and unemployment benefits in Bulgaria were sent within the framework of the European system of integrated social protection statistics (ESSPROS) according to the methodology proposed by Eurostat for the

voluntary collection of this type of data. The NSI, together with experts from the NSSI and the NEA, processed the available data from the register of recipients of unemployment benefits at the NSSI and the register of persons registered in the Labor office at the NEA.

As a result of the activities carried out, data was sent on the number of periodical cash unemployment benefits recipients in Bulgaria, including unemployment benefits under Art. 54a, para. 1 of the Social Insurance Code and under Art. 230 and 231 of the Law on Defense and Armed Forces of the Republic of Bulgaria, as well as scholarships, transport and accommodation expenses paid to unemployed persons participating in training for literacy, acquisition of professional qualification or key competences (for the duration of the training). In accordance with the requirement to eliminate double counting of recipients of benefits/assistance falling under the unemployment function, the NSSI made vertical aggregation of data on unemployment benefits recipients and of data on "occupational allowance" recipients for the same reference period. The first type of data (unemployment benefits recipients) was administrated by NSSI; the second type of data ("occupational allowance" recipients) was administrated by NEA. The questionnaire on qualitative information of module was completed and sent to NSI. The data was sent to Eurostat and covers 2021, showing the total number of recipients of at least one of the listed benefits during the year on the one hand and the average monthly number of benefits received during the period of reference year in total, by sex and by age group.

Crime and Justice

In 2023, the NSI carried out qualitatively and on time the statistical surveys on crimes, accused and persons convicted, and activity of the Local commissions for prevention of juvenile delinquency.

In fulfillment of its commitments as a national coordinator in the field of crime and criminal justice, and in accordance with national legislation, the NSI provided statistical information on:
• the joint UN/Eurostat questionnaire, which includes data from all stages of the criminal process, illegal migration, crimes related to attacks against information systems and regional data on crimes registered by the police, according to the definitions of the International Classification of Crimes for statistical purposes developed by UN;
• data on human traffic, in accordance with the definitions of Directive 2011/36/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council on preventing and combating human traffic and protecting its victims;
• statistical data and metadata at the national level in accordance with the requirements of Directive 2014/42/EU and Regulation (EU) 2018/1805 of the European Parliament and of the Council on the mutual recognition of freezing orders and confiscation orders. Data and additional information within the scope of the indicators defined in Article 11 of the Directive were summarized at the national level.

NSI experts actively participated in the work of interdepartmental working groups "Prevention of violence and abuse of children" and "Development of basic indicators for measuring violence against children" at the National Council for Child Protection at the State Agency for Child Protection.

In 2023, NSI employees participated in national and international meetings and conferences on crime and justice topics.

3.2. Macroeconomic statistics

Annual economic accounts and Quarterly accounts

In 2023, the NSI compiled annual and quarterly data on GDP and its components by output method, income method and expenditure method; national financial accounts; data on employment and person-hours worked; regional accounts; quarterly non-financial accounts by institutional sector.

In the field of non-financial national accounts, a revision of indicators for the period

2010-2021 was carried out. In 2023, work continued on the development and improvement of national financial accounts. Pursuant to the Eurostat programme for data provision in the field of national accounts, data for 2022 was developed and submitted. The entire time series of data for the period 2006 - 2021 was revised.

Government Finance Statistics

Efforts in the field of Government Finance Statistics were focused on further methodological development and improving the quality of data.

The work on reporting the Notification tables for debt and deficit of General Government sector twice a year continued - preliminary and final data. According to the ESA 2010, data for 2022 as well as revised data for the period 2018 - 2021 have been provided.

Work continued on the development and publication of monthly, quarterly and annual data on the deficit of the EU Member States, based on the obligations under EU Directive 85/2011.

In accordance with the requirements for the provision of additional data on the basis of EU Directive 85/2011, the work continued on providing information on an annual basis on non-performing loans to the "General Government" sector; for the liabilities of public corporations and the participation of government in the capital of corporations as a percentage of GDP.

According to the Eurostat Programme for data provision in the field of government finance statistics, data was developed and provided according to ESA 2010:

• Table 2. Main macroeconomic indicators for the institutional sector "General government" – new data for 2022 as well as revised data for the period 2018 - 2021;

• Table 9. Taxes and social contribution by type of taxes and by subsectors of "General government" – new data for 2022;

• Table 11 - General Government expenditure by function – new data for 2022 as well as revised data for the period 2018 - 2021;

• Table 25. Quarterly non-financial accounts of the institutional sector "General government" – new data for 2022 as well as revised data for the period 2018 – 2021.

In 2023, in connection with the implementation of the "Pension entitlements in social insurance", the NSSI provided data for 2019, 2020 and 2021 necessary as input data to the NSI model for calculating pension entitlements in the public pension scheme and filling in table 29 for Eurostat. The data provided for the specified reference years cover the number of pensioners and average pension distributed by type, single age and sex - newly retired, terminated and status; number of insured persons and average insurance income distributed by sex and single age and work categories; report of pension costs by year - by type of leading pension and by source of pension funding; average insurance income by months and years.

Monitoring Own Resources

The quality report and the GNI questionnaire were submitted to the EU on time and data correction was performed on the basis of revisions of input information for 2020 and 2021 and methodological changes for 2010 - 2021.

In connection with the implementation of the own resources system (Decision of the Council of Ministers № 229 of 20.03.2021 determining responsible institutions in the Republic of Bulgaria for the implementation of the EU's own resources system), the NSI provided data on the amount of plastic packaging put on market at the national level. The data is necessary for the fulfillment of the country's obligations under the implementation of the European Union's own resources system.

In 2023, the preparation of Bulgaria for the upcoming audit by the EC regarding the

implementation of the own resource system based on non-recycled plastic packaging waste began. The NSI involved by competence by filling in the Questionnaire on the sources and methods for determining non-recycled waste from plastic packaging, as well as by participating in a series of workshops organized in this regard with representatives of the Ministry of Environment and Water, the ExEA and the organizations on the recovery of packaging waste.

Consumer Prices

The main priority in 2023 was the conduction of monthly statistical surveys of consumer prices, which provided the necessary information for the calculation of consumer price indices and inflation. In 2023, the ICP weights were produced according to Eurostat's methodological recommendations on the construction of HICP weights in case of large changes in consumer expenditure.

The work continued on improving the methodology, construction and production of consumer price indices in connection with the harmonization with the European and international standards. In 2023, the sample of outlets was updated, the selection of goods and services included in the consumer basket was improved. The scope of some sub-indices was expanded, the system of statistical weights has been improved through the expanded use of information from additional sources.

The inventory of the sources and methods for the production of the HICP and the report on the sources and methods used to collect information necessary for the calculation of purchasing power parities were updated and sent to Eurostat. The special SDMX standard was implemented for filling in and sending to Eurostat the inventories of housing price indices and house sales indicators.

Within a pilot EC project, the preparatory work on the implementation of the COICOP 2018 classification in the field of HIPC begun. The successful implementation of the planned activities will be the basis for the introduction of the new classification from 2026 and for the compilation of the HIPC retrospective series.

In the field of housing statistics work continued on incorporating methodological improvements, optimizing data collection and production processes, and introducing new data sources. The NSI continued to use two administrative sources – Property register to the RA supplemented with information from CAIS (Cadastral-Administrative Information System). This improved the quality and scope of the data and increased the reliability of the information collected.

The NSI continued its participation in the European Comparison Programme on PPPs that is part of the current EC programme on statistics coordinated by Eurostat/OECD, and achieved the goals set in the European work plan for calculation of PPPs. In 2023, the NSI conducted the planned six price surveys, two of which were on goods and services on harmonized European consumer baskets for the groups: E23-1 Services and E23-2 Furniture and health. Four specialized price surveys were conducted: "Health services in hospitals"; for housing rents in selected real estate agencies in the capital; for selected conditional construction sites; for machinery and equipment. Additional national statistical information was prepared and sent to Eurostat in a timely manner.

In the field of consumer price, housing price and PPPs statistics in 2023, the NSI's experts actively participated in the work of the Eurostat WG on Price Statistics, Real Estate Statistics and Purchasing Power Parities, as well as in Eurostat video conferences on "Commercial Real Estate Statistics", "Commercial Real Estate Indicators" and "Harmonized Indices of Consumer Prices".

3.3. Business Statistics

Annual Business Statistics

All activities on conducting regular annual surveys and data production in the field of SBS, statistics of foreign affiliates (FATS), foreign direct investments, expenditure on

acquisition of tangible fixed assets, sales revenue of enterprises providing business services, statistics of financial and non-financial enterprises and annual specific surveys on economic activities, as well as monthly and annual survey on output and sales of industrial products (PRODCOM) were performed with high quality and on time.

In 2023, the NSI made an annual update of IS "Business Statistics" in relation to the requirements of European regulations in the field of business statistics and changes at the national level.

The NSI prepared and submitted to Eurostat preliminary data for 2022 in the field of business statistics at national level on the activity of enterprises in implementation of the requirements of Regulation (EU) № 2019/2152 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 November 2019 on European business statistics and repealing 10 legal acts in the field of business statistics and Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2020/1197 of 30 July 2020 laying down technical specifications and arrangements pursuant to Regulation (EU) 2019/2152. The scope of economic activities expanded by including all market-oriented activities from sectors K, P, Q, R, and S 96 of the Classification of economic activities (NACE.BG-2008), for which data should be provided to Eurostat.

In 2023, in the field of annual PRODCOM survey, the NSI provided the necessary reliable and internationally comparable statistical information based on the updated questionnaires, changes in the methodology and in the information technology system for collecting and validating the input PRODCOM data according to the new requirements of the Regulation (EU) № 2019/2152 of the European Parliament and of the Council. Preliminary annual PRODCOM data for 2022 at the levels of detail and technical format has been provided to Eurostat.

In 2023, the NSI provided data for completing questionnaires to the OECD, to other international organizations, for national statistical publications, under concluded contracts, agreements and requests for statistical information in the specified areas.

The NSI's experts took part in coordination procedures, consultations and online meetings organized by Eurostat in the following areas:

• Structural Business statistics;

• Statistics of foreign affiliates (FATS);

• Statistics on output and sales of industrial products (PRODCOM).

In 2023, the NSI started work on the project "Global value chains - International Sourcing Survey" in the implementation of a Grant agreement with the EC in accordance with the revised methodology and tools of the module included as a mandatory three-year survey in Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2022/918 of 13 June 2022 laying down technical specifications of data requirements for the topic Global Value Chains pursuant to Regulation (EU) 2019/2152 of the European Parliament and of the Council.

Short-term Business Statistics

In 2023, all regular surveys (sales in industry, construction, trade and services; activities of non-financial enterprises; producer prices in industry and services; producer prices for major repairs and improvements of dwellings and residential buildings; expenditure on acquisition of tangible fixed assets; permitted and started new construction of buildings) were carried out with high quality and on time, in accordance with national and European legislation. All short-term indicators were calculated in accordance with the requirements of the STS regulations, as the same were published at national level and provided to Eurostat.

During the year, the work on evaluation, improvement of the methodology, improvement of STS data quality and maintenance of comparability of time series continued. The samples were updated to ensure better representation and to reflect changes in the structure of non-financial enterprises. The metadata for all indicators on the Eurostat's and on

the NSI's website were updated.

For another year, the NSI received from the NRA within the agreed deadlines monthly information on the submitted VAT returns used to improve the quality and completeness of short-term statistical indicators in the field of trade and services.

The NSI continued work on adapting the national statistical production system to the new requirements of the Regulation (EU) 2019/2152 of the European Parliament and of the Council. The weights for the new base year (2021) needed to calculate the short-term business indicators were prepared and sent to Eurostat. From the beginning of 2024, all short-term indicators in the form of indices will be published under the new requirements for coverage and levels of aggregation recalculated with weights from 2021.

In 2023, the NSI's experts participated in the following activities organized by Eurostat:

•   Participation in studies on the quality and development of STS;

•   Participation in studies on the differences in industrial production between STS and SBS;

•   Two online meetings on the weights for 2021 base year in short-term business statistics;

•   Online meeting on metadata requirements for 2022;

•   Online meeting of a Working group on short-term business statistics.

Energy Statistics

All activities on conducting the monthly, semi-annual and annual surveys and data production in the field of energy statistics were performed with high quality and on time.

In 2023, the experts in the field of energy statistics took part in coordination procedures and consultations as regards: the upcoming seventh amendment to Regulation (EC) No. 1099/2008 of the European Parliament and of the Council on energy statistics; the proposal for a Council Regulation amending Regulation (EU) 2022/1369 on coordinated demand-reduction measures for gas and strengthening reporting and monitoring; numerous legislative documents within the WG 14 "Energy"; the National Development Program Bulgaria 2030; the National report on the state and protection of the environment in the Republic of Bulgaria.

The tools in the field of energy statistics was updated in accordance with the last amendment of the Regulation on the energy statistics - Commission Regulation (EU) 2022/132 of 28 January 2022.

The NSI participated in the testing of the new tools of Eurostat and the International Energy Agency for reporting the annual, monthly and semi-annual energy data and provided comments on the identified problems.

In 2023, in connection with the future monitoring of the Energy Union and the European Green Deal, the NSI continued to work on package № 2 "Further disaggregation of data on solid biofuels" of the project "Energy statistics: support to the Energy Union and further disaggregation of final energy consumption". The activity aims to develop a methodology and methods for collecting and evaluating detailed data on solid biofuels used for energy needs in accordance with the breakdown in Annex IX to Regulation (EU) 2018/1999 on the governance of the Energy Union and climate action.

In this thematic area, NSI experts joined the following working groups: "Energy statistics" and "Dimesa" of Eurostat, and WG14 "Energy" at the Ministry of energy.

The NSI took an active part in trainings and conferences organized by Eurostat: "Changes in energy statistics from 2024 onwards" and a series of trainings on the new energy questionnaires of Eurostat and the IEA, as well as in a Joint UNECE/IEA/Eurostat Webinar on Administrative Microdata for Climate Change, Energy and Environment Statistics.

Transport Statistics

In the field of transport statistics, the main priority in 2023 was to conduct all annual and short-term surveys included in the NSP. These were implemented with high quality and on time in accordance with national and European legislation.

The collection, processing and transmission of rail transport data to Eurostat continued pursuant to the requirements of Regulation (EU) 2016/2032 of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Regulation (EC) № 91/2003 on rail transport statistics, as regards the collection of data on goods, passengers and accidents.

In the field of transport statistics, the NSI with the assistance of the statistical bodies **Directorate General "Civil Aviation Administration"** and the **Executive Agency "Maritime Administration"** at the Ministry of Transport and Communications conducted surveys in the field of air transport and activities of inland waterway and maritime ports. The beneficial cooperation between the NSI and the two agencies has led to increasing the quality of the received data through more detailed verification.

Executive Agency "Maritime Administration" carried out the research included in the National Statistical Program for 2023 on the activity of inland waterway and maritime ports. The information submitted by port operators and port owners covers 100% of the activity of the inland waterway and maritime ports of the Republic of Bulgaria related to cargo handling and passenger service.

During the year, the Executive Agency "Maritime Administration" continued its work on improving the quality of data on vessels and cargoes, taking into account Eurostat recommendations and the methodological assistance of experts from the National Statistical Institute with regard to the classification of new types of goods.

The collection and submission of statistical information to Eurostat was carried out within the deadlines and in compliance with the specific provisions and reporting forms of Regulation (EU) No 974/2018 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 4 July 2018 on statistics of goods transport by inland waterways and Directive 2009/42/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 6 May 2009 on statistical returns in respect of carriage of goods and passengers by sea, and of Commission Regulation (EC) No 1304/2007 of 7 November 2007 amending Council Directive 95/64/EC, Council Regulation (EC) No 1172/98, Regulations (EC) No 91/2003 and (EC) No 1365/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council with respect to the establishment of NST 2007 as the unique classification for transported goods in certain transport modes.

During the reporting period, the cooperation between the National Institute of Statistics of Romania and the National Statistical Institute of Bulgaria continued in connection with the regular exchange of statistical information on the transit of goods by inland waterways used in the production of statistical data provided to Eurostat.

The NSI continued to provide assistance to the Managing authority of OP "Transport and Transport Infrastructure" 2014 - 2020 on the provision of information on indicators for OPTTI results within the competence of the NSI, in accordance with the preliminary general condition 7 "Statistical Systems" of the Partnership Agreement. The NSI also took part in the meetings of the Monitoring Committee of the "Transport Connectivity" Program 2021 - 2027.

Tourism Statistics

In 2023, the NSI completed on time all the activities related to conducting the statistical surveys in the field of tourism as well as the tasks of providing statistical

information on the development of tourism in the country regarding trips of Bulgarian residents in abroad and arrivals of visitors from abroad to Bulgaria, the activity of accommodation establishments, tourist trips and tourism-related expenditure of the population and tourism satellite accounts. All monthly and quarterly surveys carried out in accordance with the recommendations of the World Tourism Organization, the requirements of Regulation (EU) № 692/2011 of the European Parliament and of the Council on European tourism statistics, and Commission Regulation (EU) № 1051/2011 implementing Regulation (EU) № 692/2011 of the European Parliament and of the Council on European tourism statistics as regards the structure of quality reports and data transmission.

The NSI continued its participation in voluntary data reporting in connection with Eurostat's initiative to collect additional data on nights spent in accommodation establishments by Bulgarians and foreigners by country of citizenship by months.

The NSI's experts took part in an online Eurostat's workshop on tourism statistics.

Business Register

In 2023, the NSI continued to maintain and update the Register of statistical units as the main source for creating frameworks for statistical surveys in the NSI, as well as in terms of compilation of consistent and comparable business statistics.

The main priority in 2023 for the Business Register was aimed at implementing the vision of the European Statistical System regarding the European System of Interoperable Statistical Business Registers in implementation of Regulation (EU) № 2019/2152 of the European Parliament and of the Council.

During the year, the NSI continued to work on the development of a new Information system - IS "Statistical Business Register".

In 2023, the NSI implemented an update and upgrade of the IS "Enterprise groups" and an update and upgrade of the integration of the RSU information system with the IS "Foreign Trade" for obtaining statistical data.

In order to maintain statistical units and their characteristics, the Business Register received daily data from the administrative sources Trade Register and Register of NPLE (non-profit legal entities) and Bulstat Register, annually and monthly data on the number of insured persons from the Register of Insured Persons by the NSSI, and from the annual statistical surveys for 2022.

The Register of statistical units continued to provide a full range of active statistical units "enterprises", "local units" and "groups of enterprises", as well as to record data on significant "units by the type of activity" and to provide conditions for sampling by definition criteria for monthly and quarterly statistical surveys.

All the tasks of processing and providing data to Eurostat, the state institutions, under contracts, agreements and requests for providing information about the statistical units maintained in RSU, were performed qualitatively and on time.

The Register of statistical units is the main source of information for the preparation of data on family businesses and business demography. The information describes the life cycle of enterprises and presents data on the number of active enterprises, the number of newly born enterprises, the enterprise survival rates, the number of dead enterprises, as well as data on the change of their employment as of a certain moment.

The scope of RSU was studied in relation to the different types of units - legal and statistical and due mandatory characteristics. The NSI submitted completed questionnaires to Eurostat on the quality, metadata and development of RSU and questionnaires on metadata of business demography of enterprises and on registrations and bankruptcies.

NSI experts participated in online meetings, written consultations and activities with

experts from Member States related to the Large Cases Unit (LCU) and the European Profiling organized by Eurostat.

NSI experts took part in Eurostat's activities on profiling of multinational groups of enterprises as a profiler and partner country.

In 2023, the NSI participated in the following Eurostat working groups:

- "Business Demography" Working Group;
- "Business Registers and Statistical Units" Working Group;
- LCU Network Working Group.

In 2023, the NSI started to work on project "Global value chains and multinational enterprises in business statistics" in implementation of a Grant Agreement with the European Commission.

Statistics on foreign trade in goods

The main priority areas in the field of statistics on foreign trade in goods were: expanded use of administrative sources of information; providing timely and reliable statistical information and improving of data quality; adapting the national system for the production and dissemination of statistics on foreign trade in goods in accordance with the changed requirements of European legislation and users' needs of foreign trade data; participation in the Eurostat's work on the discussion of strategic issues concerning the future development of statistics on international trade in goods.

The NSI's experts worked on the implementation of activities under the project "Development of the Information system "Foreign Trade" in order to add new functionalities and migration of the platform".

The NSI took measures to make more complete use of the data collected by the Customs Agency from customs declarations. The NSI's employees continued to use the simplified customs declarations issued in other countries received at the Customs Agency under the Uniform Permit for Simplified Procedures.

In 2023, the NSI continued to work on improving the quality of primary data declared by traders. The NSI's experts made both direct contacts with the Intrastat operators and the National Revenue Agency. As a result, some inaccuracies in submitted Intrastat declarations were corrected. Methodological assistance was also provided to the respondents in declaring data in specific cases, which contributed to facilitating the business in fulfilling its monthly obligations to submit Intrastat declarations.

In fulfilment of its obligations, the NSI determined the thresholds for declaration and the thresholds for statistical value under the Intrastat system for 2024, as well as the types of data - subject of declaration.

In order to facilitate the users of statistical information when publishing the new monthly data, the NSI continued to prepare and publish two press releases per month - on trade with third countries and on trade within the EU. Dissemination of data on statistics on foreign trade in goods continued through the IS "Foreign Trade" which gives to users direct access to more detailed data than those published in press releases.

In response to the emerging users' needs in 2023, the NSI submitted to Eurostat additional data on business characteristics of enterprises and by invoicing currency that was developed through wider and more efficient use of available data without increasing the respondents' burden. Numerous responses to inquiries from various types of users of data on imports and exports of goods were also prepared. The obligations to the main users of data on foreign trade in goods - BNB, Ministry of economy and industy, MAF, Eurostat, UN and IMF on the production and provision of monthly detailed data and their updates - were

implemented in a timely manner.

In 2023, the NSI's experts contributed to the overall innovation activity in the field of statistics on foreign trade in goods at European level through their participation in Eurostat's steering, target and working groups. One of the key directions in joint work of the NSI, the NRA and the CA was the active participation in integration of the provisions on trade with third countries and the EU in the acts implementing the new Regulation on European business statistics. The experts from these three institutions participated in preparing the answers to a number of Eurostat's questionnaires and written consultations. The NSI's experts actively participated in the Eurostat's joint meetings of the Task Force on microdata exchange of statistics on foreign trade in goods and the Task Force on information technology at ESS.VIP, which ensure reliability and security of the microdata exchange for intracommunity exports between Member states.

The NSI, together with Eurostat, prepared quality reports on the provided data - aggregated and detailed monthly data on the export and import of goods as well as annual data on business characteristics of enterprises and by invoicing currency.

In 2023, the NSI successfuly completed the EC project "Quality improvement of intra-EU trade data in the context of the micro-data exchange" aimed at reducing asymmetries in data collected.

The National Revenue Agency continued its efforts to improve the quality of data declared by Intrastat operators. The "Intrastat" Directorate controls the quality and reliability of the information collected on intra-Community trade in goods. In this regard, it continued to compare data declared in the Intrastat system with the data available in other administrative sources: VAT Act and VIES. In order to improve the quality of collected data, the NRA deepened and expanded the activities for comparing the Intrastat data with the data available in the IS "Fiscal Control". Analyses and comparisons were made on a monthly basis on the main risk branches of goods with the data from the FC system. The "Intrastat" Directorate maintains and updates the register of taxpayers under the Intrastat system on the basis of the declared Intrastst and VAT data.

The employees of the "Intrastat" Directorate continued to work on improvement and development of the IS Intrastat. The system is to be developed in connection with increasing information security. In the field of data collection on intra-community trade in goods, the NRA accepted and validated over 81 thousand declarations (52 thousand declarations for intra-community imports and 29 thousand declarations for intra-community exports). The number of registered Intrastat operators in 2023 reached 10.4 thousand persons, of which 6.7 thousand persons for intra-community imports and 3.7 thousand persons for intra-community exports.

In 2023, an Ordinance was adopted amending and supplementing Ordinance No. H-4 of 2007 on the implementation of the Intrastat system. The Ordinance was promulgated in the Official Gazette on 02.05.2023.

In 2023, the "Analyses and Prognosis" Directorate continued the monthly publication of data on the sales of liquid fuels realized on the territory of the country. The published time series cover the period since January 2019 and refer to the sales of liquid fuels of different characteristics, which allows the preparation of multi-layered analyzes of the fuel market in the country. In accordance with the policy to increase data quality and ensure the best estimates at a given point in time by using later information and/or refining the objects - final distributors, the time series for the period January 2022 - December 2022 were revised at the beginning of 2023.

3.4. Statistics on agriculture, forestry and fisheries

In 2023, secondary legislation was adopted resulting from the entry into force of the Regulation on statistics on agricultural input and output. Implementing regulations were

published in the fields of statistics on crop production, livestock breeding, agricultural prices, nutrients and plant protection products.

During the year, NSI experts participated in discussion groups for the preparation of a handbook on economic accounts for forestry, which are intended to be a module of the regulation on environmental accounts.

In 2023, the "Agrostatistics" Department, Ministry of agriculture and food, conducted 19 statistical surveys in the field of statistics on crop production, livestock breeding, fruit and vegetable processing, land use and farm incomes.

In the field of crop statistics, at the beginning of 2023, the surveys' results on sown/planted and harvested areas, average yields and production of field crops, vegetables, vineyards and fruit species - harvest 2022 were published. Within these surveys, information was also collected on the use of seeds, the size of the areas of permanent plantations that have not started fruiting, the agrotechnical measures carried out, as well as on the realization of the production by directions, and others. The surveys for the harvest 2023 were prepared. Survey conducted on wheat and barley yields before the harvest 2023, as well as survey on the activities of fruit and vegetable processing enterprises in 2022.

The survey on land cover and land use in Bulgaria (BANSIK 2023) was conducted in June-August 2023. Data were obtained on the agricultural area, including the main crops at the level of six statistical regions (NUTS 2).

In the field of statistics on livestock breeding, the results from conducted as of November 1, 2022 survey on the number of farm animals in Bulgaria were published. The survey collects information on bovine animals, sheep and goats, and pigs by type and category, production and realization of milk and animals slaughtered. The survey as of November 1, 2023 was prepared. The surveys on poultry and beekeeping in Bulgaria in 2022 were carried out and the survey on beekeeping in 2023 was prepared.

Information on the activities of slaughterhouses, dairies and hatcheries was collected on a monthly (for 2023) and annual (for 2022) basis. As a result of surveys on the activity of red and white meat slaughterhouses for 2022, information was collected on the production of meat from certain species and categories of animals according to the EU legal base. The survey on the activity of milk processing enterprises in 2022 provided information on the processed milk, the milk products and on their sale (in kind and value).

Preparations for the integrated farm statistics survey in 2023 (IFS2023) were made in implementation of Regulation (EC) 2018/1091 of the European Parliament and of the Council on integrated farm statistics. The detailed requirements for the variables to be monitored during the year are detailed in Implementing Regulation (EU) 2021/2286. Questionnaires and instructions were developed, samples and lists of farms were prepared, as well as the necessary data entry software. In implementation of the Regulation, the survey on the plantations' structure with selected kinds of fruits (in 2023) was also prepared. It will provide information on areas, age structure and consistency of different types of plantations.

Data collection questionnaire for the reporting year 2022 for the Farm Accountancy Data Network was updated in 2023 as regards subsidies in implementation of Commission Regulation (EU) 2015/220. The established agricultural accounting information system (AIS) for data entry, control, validation and analysis of results at the national and regional level is being improved. The established farm accountancy data network for data entry, control, validation and result analysis at national and regional level was improved. The individual farm data from the selection plan for the reporting year 2022 were collected and entered into the RICA-1 system of the European Commission. Information on farms not applying accountancy was collected for reporting year 2023. The results for 2 241 farms for the reporting year 2021 were sent and are expected to be validated by the Directorate General "Agriculture and Rural Development" to the European Commission.

Together with the Executive agency on vine and wine, the experts from the Ministry of Agriculture and Food carried out the activities under the Agreement with Eurostat for the provision of grants for the project "Quality of the vineyard register - 2019_BG_QVR" which ended on September 30, 2023. The general goal of the project is to improve the quality of the vineyard register, to ensure accessibility to the data in the register, to improve the content and scope of the vineyard register, to improve the status of statistics on vineyards; to facilitate data collection; to improve the quality of data management in the register. A public procurement "Development and implementation of an information system for servicing the activities of maintaining the Vineyard Register by EAVW" was successfully implemented.

Data were sent to Eurostat at national level on the amount of active substance nitrogen and phosphorus in fertilizers used in agriculture. The MAF has a commitment to send to Eurostat, on a biennial basis, data on Gross Nutrient Balance (GNB) according to the Agreement on Statistical Data on Nutrient Balances, referring to gross nitrogen and phosphorus balance, biological nitrogen and phosphorus fixation, atmospheric nitrogen deposition, which are elements related to the local conditions of each country.

Representatives of the "Agrostatistics" department participated in the discussion of the progress on the actions taken by the bodies of statistics on the recommendations of the third Peer review for the Republic of Bulgaria within the framework of its membership in the European Statistical System (ESS) in 2022.

In compliance with Bulgaria's obligations arising from the legislation in force and agreements in the field of accounts and prices in agriculture and forestry in 2023, the NSI developed and sent to Eurostat data on:

• annual data on economic accounts for agriculture - second estimate of farm incomes for 2022, final data for 2022 and first estimate of farm incomes for 2023 pursuant to Regulation (EC) № 138/2004;

• annual data for the regional economic accounts for 2021 (NUTS1 and NUTS2);

• annual data for 2022 and quarterly and annual data (projection) for 2023 on prices and price indices of output and input in agriculture;

• annual data for 2022 on the average price of agricultural land and rent in agriculture at national and regional level NUTS1 and NUTS2;

• annual data for 2021 for the European Forest Accounts (EFA).

In 2023, annual data for the agricultural sector (preliminary and final data for 2022) and quarterly data for 2023 (including flash estimates) were developed in current and constant prices.

Data and press releases on the economic accounts for agriculture and the prices and indices in agriculture and forestry were prepared and published on the NSI's website and in the IS "Infostat", according to the Calendar presenting the results of the statistical surveys carried out in accordance with the National Statistical Programme for 2023.

According to the deadlines in the Editorial Plan for 2023, tables with data for publication in the printed and electronic editions of the NSI were prepared.

In 2023, in connection with the reporting of data on sustainable development indicators Agenda 2030, together with the "Agrostatistics" Department at the MAF, the NSI developed and sent to the FAO data on indicator 2.4.1 Proportion of agricultural area under productive and sustainable agriculture.

3.5. Multi-Domain Statistics

Business trends

In 2023, work continued on all statistical surveys in the field of business trends included in the National Statistical Programme. They carried out with the financial assistance of the European Commission under the "The Joint Harmonized EU Programme of Business and Consumer surveys" under the project "Business surveys and Consumer survey".

The monthly business surveys in industry, construction, retail trade and the service sector provided information on the economic situation in the country. Business surveys show managers' opinions about the current and future economic situation in the country. The information from them is extremely up-to-date as the data refer to the month in which the observations are carried out. The indicators from these surveys can be used as components of composite leading indicators for analysis and detection of turning points in the economic cycle.

The Consumer survey provided data on the trends in the development of public opinion on key economic processes and phenomena such as the general economic situation in the country, inflation, unemployment, savings, intentions with regard to major purchases on long-term use objects, and the purchase of a home or a car.

The NSI made a presentation on the work of in the field of business trends and consumer survey at a meeting with representatives of the OECD on the topic: "OECD Accession Review of the National Statistical System and Official Statistics of Bulgaria by the Committee on Statistics and Statistical Policy".

Indicators for monitoring national and European policies

In 2023, the NSI continued the work on providing statistical data necessary for reporting the result indicators under the OP for the programming period 2014 - 2020.

The information published in IS "Monitorstat" was periodically updated with the latest data. The indicators on national and international strategies were simultaneously updated. The procedure for upgrading the IS "Monitorstat" was launched in 2023.

Decree No. 52 of April 10, 2023 of the Council of Ministers established a National Coordination Mechanism for the monitoring and reporting of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs). Pursuant to the decree, an interdepartmental working group was established to coordinate the development and updating of a national set of indicators for monitoring and reporting on progress towards the UN SDGs. In the process of developing the National set of indicators, numerous consultations were held with the leading and partner institutions, and the NSI had a coordinating role. As a result of the working group activty, Decision No. 613 of September 11 of the Council of Ministers adopted the National set of indicators for monitoring and reporting on progress towards the UN Sustainable Development Goals. The NSI provided access to the set of indicators in a specialized section of its official website, and will update the data on the indicators every year.

Environmental statistics and accounts

Main priority in the field of environmental statistics and accounts is the improvement of the methodology and the provision of reliable information on the state, types of pressure and the main trends of the impact of the economy on the environment.

For implementation of statistical surveys in 2023 in the field of the environment, improvements were made to the IS "Environmental Statistics" aimed at facilitating work with the system.

The instructions to the survey reports are reviewed and updated, as necessary, to assist respondents and to improve data quality. Time series are constantly reviewed and updated in connection with methodology update and/or new legal requirements.

In 2023, the experts on environmental statistics participated in a number of coordination procedures and consultations at European and international level (for example, amending Regulation (EU) № 691/2011 on European environmental economic accounts,

consultations on the Classification of products by activity in the European Economic Community and the draft Regulation on provision of time series under the new version of NUTS, etc.). At national level, the NSI's experts participated in the consultations on the National report on the state and protection of the environment in the Republic of Bulgaria, National set of indicators for monitoring and reporting on progress towards the UN Sustainable Development Goals, and others.

In 2023, during the preparation of the national inventory for 2021, a new model was implemented for calculating air emissions in accordance with the requirements of the Guidelines for the Inventory of Emissions of Harmful Substances (EMEP/CORINAIR 2019). The NSI performed recalculation of emissions for some industrial activities in the entire time series 1990 - 2021 based on primary data analysis and recommendations of the international review team.

In order to improve the quality of the reported emissions data according to Regulation (EU) No. 691/2011 on European environmental economic accounts, a new calculation approach was introduced for the distribution of emissions by economic activities for the entire time series 2008 - 2021. For the first time, data on emissions from road transport by economic activities were reported for the entire time series 2008 - 2021.

In 2023, the NSI successfully completed work on the EC project "Establishing access to geospatial data through linking geocoded and statistical data". The specific and main objectives set in the project in relation to the European Green Deal and the upcoming changes to Regulation 691/2011 on European environmental economic accounts related to ecosystem accounts were achieved: identifying possible sources of reliable geospatial information at national level; improved communication with state institutions (Geodesy, Cartography and Cadastre Agency, MAF, Forestry Executive Agency, SEDA, ExEA, MEW); analysis of the interoperability and suitability of the received georeferenced data for statistical purposes; final preparation of geospatial data (maps) at national level and methodological report.

The NSI started to work on a new EC project "Development of guidelines for environmental statistics and accounts and pilot implementation for environmental goods and services sector data revision". The overall goal of the project is to improve the quality and comparability of environmental data at national and European level in the long term. It will be achieved, on the one hand, by the preparation of a single written document containing methodological and practical guidelines for environmental statistics and accounts, and on the other hand, by the preparation of revised data on environmental goods and services, in order to ensure consistency and quality of the data in the time series reported under Regulation No. 691/2011 on the European environmental economic accounts.

In 2023 the participation of NSI's experts continued in the following Eurostat's working groups: DIMESA, WG on environmental accounts, WG on monetary statistics and environmental accounts, WG on waste statistics, WG on water statistics.

The NSI also participated in the work of the Expert group on plastic waste statistics, Interdepartmental WG to coordinate the development and updating of a national set of indicators for monitoring and reporting on progress towards the UN SDGs, Interdepartmental WG on National Food Loss and Waste Reduction Programme (2019-2024), Interdepartmental WG to prepare National report on the state and protection of the environment in 2021, thematic WG for the development of OP "Environment" for the programming period 2021 - 2027, Interdepartmental WG 20 "Environment" of the Foreign Affairs Council.

The NSI participated in the Eurostat training course "Waste Statistics" not only as a trainee, but also as a trainer. The experience of the country in the field of waste statistics was presented. In the followed discussion, Bulgaria received positive feedback on its work and performance from both the organizers and the participants.

The NSI also took part in various international events: OECD/UNECE workshop on

the implementation of the system of environmental economic accounts; a joint UNECE, International Energy Agency and Eurostat webinar on administrative microdata for climate change, energy and environmental statistics; first meeting of stakeholders on an ongoing EC project "Data collection for future EU end-of-waste criteria of construction and demolition waste".

Housing statistics

In 2023, the processing and production of data on the housing fund continued including the newly commissioned residential buildings and demolished residential buildings. In order to facilitate the respondents and increase the quality of the collected information, the web-based application "Residential building questionnaire" was updated.

Regional statistics and geographic information systems

In 2023, the work continued on the preparation and dissemination of statistics by regional breakdown. The data published in the electronic publication "Regions, districts and municipalities in the Republic of Bulgaria" were presented at the lowest level in compliance with the methodologies of the surveys and the requirements for statistical confidentiality.

As part of the regional statistics, the NSI prepared and published the results from specialized statistical surveys "Disasters, accidents, incidents and crisis occurred", "Administrative-territorial and territorial division of the Republic of Bulgaria", and "Land use distribution of the Republic of Bulgaria" as the latter is based on spatial data from the current cadastral map of the country.

During the year, the activities continued on two EC projects in the field of regional statistics – "Data collection for city and subnational statistics" and "Improvement and re-development of demography, migration and population and housing census statistics".

In 2023, the NSI published for the first time the results of a pilot survey "Equality between women and men in management 2021". The survey summarized results on gender equality in decision-making processes in legislative, executive and judicial institutions and in other independent structures.

Science, technology and innovation

The statistical surveys on research and development (R&D) and innovations included in the NSP for 2023 were carried out on time and with the required quality. Processing and production of data on R&D and innovation indicators was carried out in accordance with Eurostat's methodological guidelines and the requirements of Commission Implementing Regulations (EU) No. 2020/1197 and (EU) No. 2022/1092.

The data produced from the regular statistical survey on R&D for 2022 were published on the NSI's website as well as in the IS "Infostat" and sent to Eurostat within deadlines and in the required technical format (SDMX). Five quality reports on the R&D data for 2021 were prepared and submitted to Eurostat.

At the request of the Ministry of education and science, the NSI provided statistical data on indicators for measuring gender equality in the field of scientific research, which were necessary for the preparation of the European Commission's report "She Figures 2024".

In connection with the accession of the Republic of Bulgaria to the OECD, the NSI developed and submitted a detailed self-assessment questionnaire regarding the state and potential of data and statistics in the field of scientific research and technology. For the first time, data on a certain set of indicators for the innovative activity of enterprises in 2020 were provided to the OECD.

In 2023, the NSI continued to provide statistical data on R&D and innovation by indicators for monitoring and evaluation of European and national policies, such as the National Development Programme "Bulgaria 2030", as well as result indicators under OP

"Innovation and Competitiveness 2014 - 2020" and "Science and Education for Smart Growth 2014 - 2020".

The NSI's experts participated in online meetings and written consultations with Eurostat on R&D statistics and innovation.

During the reporting period, the NSI experts continued to participate in the thematic working groups and monitoring committees of operational programs "Competitiveness and innovation in enterprises" 2021 – 2027 and „Research, Innovation and Digitalization for Intelligent Transformation" 2021 - 2027 as well as in Working group 16 "Education, mutual recognition of professional qualifications and scientific research" at the Ministry of education and sciences.

Information society

In the field of statistics on information society, in 2023 the NSI continued the work of conducting two annual statistical surveys on the ICT usage by individuals and in enterprises. In accordance with the need to provide data for monitoring of EU priority goals, key variables were updated and new indicators were included to measure the implementation of digital technologies in society and economy.

The statistical data on the ICT usage and e-commerce in enterprises were collected and provided to Eurostat in accordance with the requirements of the Regulation (EU) 2019/2152 of the European Parliament and of the Council on European business statistics and Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2022/1344 concerning the data for the reference year 2023. Methodological improvements were made as regards the methods of composition and optimization of the sample in order to form data for selected indicators by statistical regions.

 The statistical data on the ICT usage in households and by individuals were collected and provided to Eurostat in accordance with the requirements of Regulation (EU) 2019/1700 of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing a common framework for European statistics relating to persons and households and the Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2022/1399 concerning the data for reference year 2023.

In 2023, the NSI's experts participated in online meetings, coordination procedures and consultations with Eurostat on information society statistics.

In the past year, the experts in the field of information society statistics participated in the activities of the permanent working group of the Digital Decade Council. The involvement of experts in thematic group for the development of the Programme for Research, Innovation and Digitalization for Intelligent Transformation 2021 - 2027 continued.

3.6. Information and communication technologies, statistical infrastructure and other activities

Information and communication technologies

The main priority during the year was the increase of the capacity and back up of the information systems by using effective means for storing and restoring the information systems and the data from the statistical surveys. Reliable policies applied to database back up and back up of the information system components through specialized software in different locations. The NSI's priorities were connected with expanding the possibilities to use administrative sources and implement the SDMX standard for preparing and providing data from statistical surveys.

In 2023, users access to statistical data and their understanding facilitated by providing attractive and interactive images, more personalized services such as on-demand data and self-service analysis. Data exchange improved and the NSI access to administrative databases and registers ensured by developing and expanding partnership relationships with administrative data holders. Partnerships with public and private data holders and the

technology sector encouraged to facilitate access to data for statistical purposes, the integration of data from multiple sources and the use of modern technologies. Building capacity to manage and develop the spatial data infrastructure was prioritized.

Priorities for the NSI were also the digitization of services, the implementation of the smart data strategy, as well as the use of Machine learning in official statistics.

In 2023, a structured analytical database was built, which will allow the performance of multidimensional analyzes of the data from the "Population and housing census in the Republic of Bulgaria" and the generation of statistical reports. The prepared statistical outputs will be provided to a wide range of users including state and local government bodies, scientific, public and business organizations, Eurostat and other international organizations depending on their interest.

In 2023, the NSI provided data from the "Population and Housing census of the Republic of Bulgaria" to Eurostat and a link to Eurostat's CensusHub. The necessary software installations were made, three databases were created and database connections were configured. A methodology was created for loading the data into Censushub according to the requirements of Eurostat. According to this methodology, 40 hypercubes were configured, which were presented systematically in Censushub. The Grid data were loaded into Censushub.

The NSI successfully migrated to a new version of AIS "Document Flow", which provides the possibility of electronic document circulation, classification of documents and others. The integration of AIS "Document Flow" with the "Secure Electronic Delivery Service" of the Ministry of Electronic Governance was implemented.

In 2023, integration with the active directory of NSI was implemented for entry into IS "Infostat" and IS "Business Statistics".

IS "Business Statistics" was upgraded with new functionality enabling respondents and accounting firms to submit Annual activity report after the end of the official deadline.

In 2023, the NSI upgraded the IS "Monitorstat" to a tool for strategic planning, monitoring the implementation and reporting of all strategic documents at the central level.

In 2023, a new IS "Labor Market Statistics" was put into operation, which ensures the production (collection, processing and publication) of statistical information from the "Labor Force Survey".

A new platform for the "Statistics" magazine was implemented with the possibility of publishing and reviewing scientific articles and materials.

A new IS "Statistical Business Register" was developed.

In 2023, the NSI launched activities on the preparation of technical specifications for the construction of two new information systems – IS "Data Catalog" and IS "Single entry point".

The NSI developed web-scraping tools for its surveys and began actual data collection using these methods.

In 2023, the NSI began adaptation of information systems for the Eurozone preparation, recalculation of existing and calculation of new indicators required by the countries adopted the euro as their national currency.

In order to facilitate the respondents, the Support Center provided assistance on technical and/or methodological issues. In 2023, the scope of the Support Center was expanded with a campaign assisting respondents with technical issues about the IS "Structure of Earnings". A new campaign was configured for the Labour Force Survey.

In 2023, the NSI successfully continued to use Eurostat's single entry point for the

exchange of statistical data EDAMIS 4 (Electronic Dataflow Administration and Management Information System) which guarantees secure exchange of confidential data.

In order to maximize the protection of individual data during the exchange of microdata for intra-community trade, the NSI established connectivity with Eurostat and other ESS members through Eurostat's secure TESTA network.

The NSI maintained the National register of populated places in Bulgaria. A new National register of populated places was implemented successfully in 2023.

The NSI implemented a system for management and control of requests (NVision help desk). The system guarantees timely information, a knowledge base for emerging cases, their solutions and response time.

In 2023, the NSI continued to enrich the datasets on the new national open data portal https://data.egov.bg/. The resources will be available in JSON-stat format and will be updated automatically.

The IS "Infostat" continued to develop as one of the main channels for providing statistical information. The data from the "Population and housing census of the Republic of Bulgaria" were also provided through IS "Infostat". The possibility of quick and easy access to the constantly updated and enriched information in the system is one of its main advantages. During the year, the NSI's experts strove to meet users' expectations for accuracy and timeliness of the data provided.

The NSI's website is not only the main channel for free dissemination of official statistical data, but also provides useful and well-structured up-to-date information on the activities of the institute in order to increase the statistical culture of users concerning the statistical surveys conducted by the NSI and data use.

In the field of information technology, the development of information systems in the various fields of statistics and the establishment of secure channels for data exchange within the National Statistical System continued.

In 2023, an internal audit was carried out according to the Integrated Management System, which integrates ISO 27001:2013 and the Quality Management System (QMS) according to ISO 9001:2015.

In November 2023, an external supervisory audit ISO 27001:2013 and QMS according to ISO 9001:2015 was conducted.

Development of statistical information systems

In 2023, the NSI continued to develop and improve web-based applications for the needs of various statistical surveys: "Health care establishments and creches", "Short-term statistics on residential buildings and housing fund", "Income and living conditions statistics", "Housing price index", "Survey on prices of seeds and planting stock", "Survey of Bulgarian and foreign citizens entering and leaving Bulgaria", "Accommodation establishments", "Survey on tourist trips", "Consumer survey", "Industrial products in kind - by nomenclature PRODCOM.BG-samples", "Vocational Training of the employees in the enterprises", "Prices of veterinary medical products", "Prices of mineral fertilizers", "Prices of plant protection products", "Producer prices in agriculture", "Producer prices of organic agricultural products and live animals", "Prices of forages", "Producer prices in forestry", additional questionnaire for collecting and processing information to the "Household budget survey" - "Infra-annual data collection on living conditions" (IALC) and others. The development of web applications facilitated and accelerated the work on data entry and control and shortened the deadlines for providing the resulting statistical data. The applications provide both an easy and convenient way to enter data, ongoing control during data entry, as well as general control of all entered data. Convenient reports were developed in the applications in order to monitor the status of

the entered data, the number of respondents who replied, etc. The applications are used both by the NSI, the RSOs and SSD employees and by the respondents.

The NSI continued to develop and improve desktop applications: "Trade deflators", "Service deflators", "Household Budget survey", "Annual report of enterprises realizing forestry activity", "Agricultural land prices and rent", "Housing price indices and indicators", "Prices CIF/FOB", "Import and export price indices", "Catalog of goods", "Activity of insurance and reinsurance enterprises", "Survey on economic accounts for agriculture", "Annual report of agricultural holdings", "Libraries", "Museums", "Performing arts - theatres", "Radio programme activity", "Television programme activity", "Passenger bus transport", annual information for "Vocational training in vocational training centers, vocational gymnasiums and vocational colleges" and others.

During the past year, the work on development of analytical outputs and specific analyzes for different statistical surveys continued by using the statistical package SPSS Statistics Server and SAS, which are the main analytical platform in the NSI.

In 2023, the work on the actual data collection continued with the developed web scraping tools for the purposes of price surveys in the NSI.

In 2023, the NSI began development of a new web application "Household Budget Survey", and continued development of web application "Labour Force Survey", which will replace the desktop applications used so far.

The NSI performed integration of internally developed applications with the active directory. In connection with the introduction of the Euro, internally developed applications were adapted to work with it.

ICT infrastructure

In 2023, the main priority was the development of the information and technological infrastructure to achieve reliable operation of information systems and to ensure the continuity of services provided to respondents and users of statistical information.

The NSI maintains and develops modern data centers – main (Data Center) and recovery (Disaster Recovery Center) that meets the high requirements for storage and protection of data and information assets.

A process of development and modernization of data storage systems in the NSI is planned.

The NSI upgraded the continuity of the services provided in its regional structures.

The NSI carried out continuous monitoring and maintenance of the operability of the technical means and information systems that build the information infrastructure.

The NSI successfully carried out a migration of the network security systems and upgraded the resources of the virtual platforms.

One of the highlights of the activity was the administration of the operating systems, the antivirus protection tools and the updating of the software used in the NSI.

Methodology, statistical metadata, classifications and standards

In 2023, the National Statistical Institute continued to work on the four-year ESSnet project "Trusted Smart Statistics - Web Intelligence Network". The project is the result of the previous activities carried out in the period 2016 - 2020 in the course of the ESSnet on Big Data I and II projects aimed at multifunctional statistics based on a range of non-traditional data sources. The objective of the project is to contribute to the establishment of a Web Intelligence Network (WIN) in the ESS and beyond by using the services of Eurostat's Web Intelligence Hub (WIH) and to integrate them into national statistical production systems. The main activities in which the NSI is an active partner in this innovative project are, as follows:

to build WIN within the ESS and beyond by achieving competence related to WIH, targeted knowledge sharing, assistance to users and their active participation in the development of WIH; progress of WIH and implementation of the use cases: Online Job Advertisements (OJA) and Online Based Enterprise Characteristics (OBEC) in the statistical production stage; to explore the potential to extend WIH by using new data sources and use cases; to develop a methodology and quality assessment for the production of experimental statistics within WIH.

As a result of the project, the NSI plans to publish experimental, statistical indicators on job vacancies, characteristics of enterprises, the real estate market, prices of consumer goods and tourist services based on web data for Bulgaria.

For the first time, a template was developed to describe the statistical variables of the surveys included in the NSP. Their description began by main characteristics of the statistical variables.

One of the main tasks in 2023 was to keep the statistical classifications up to date and to provide methodological assistance to users. In 2023, the NSI developed a draft structure of the new version of the NACE Rev. 2.1 according to Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2023/137 of 10 October 2022 amending Regulation (EC) No 1893/2006 establishing the statistical classification of economic activities NACE Revision 2. The NSI continued to develop draft explanatory notes of the NACE Rev. 2.1 and corresponding tables between the NACE Rev. 2 and the NACE Rev. 2.1. The NSI participated in discussions on the structure of the new CPA 2.1 version.

In order to facilitate the users to use the classifications, the employees continuously prepared statements on respondents' inquiries, which are a tool for classifying statistical units for the correct interpretation of the Classification of Economic Activities, as well as they assisted statisticians in conducting statistical surveys and improved international comparability.

The NSI developed transition code tables for the purposes of statistical processing and the continuation of time series based on the changes occurred in the Combined Nomenclature 2024. The new version of the Nomenclature of Industrial Production - PRODPROM 2023, the list of Z Codes and the corresponding tables were developed for the purposes of the PRODCOM survey. For the purposes of foreign trade statistics and IS INTRASTAT to the NRA, the self-explanatory texts of the Combined Nomenclature 2024 were updated annually.

In 2023, the NSI continued to implement its obligations to the BNB as a data correspondent under the Special Data Dissemination Standard Plus (SDDS Plus) of the IMF: maintaining data files, preparing the advance release calendar, submitting the data and the calendar, and coordinating the annual metadata certification.

The NSI continued its participation in maintaining the National Classification of Occupations and Positions 2011 and in updating the list of job titles and corresponding tables.

In 2023, the NSI implemented new information system "Statistical classifications" and carried out training for internal users in the Head office and RSO.

A "List of Standard Statistical Indicators for 2023" was prepared.

4. RESOURCE PROVISION

Staff

The National Statistical Institute consists of a Head Office (HO) and six Regional Statistical Offices (RSO). The Regional Statistical Offices perform the functions and tasks of the NSI for production and dissemination of statistical information at regional level. The Regional Statistical Offices are as follows: The RSO - Severozapad, The RSO - Sever, The RSO - Severoiztok, The RSO - Yugoiztok, The RSO - Yug, The RSO – Yugozapad.

The structural units in the NSI's Head Office are organized into General administration and Specialized administration according to the Administration Act.

The total number of personnel within the NSI as of October 31, 2023 was 968, of which 321 employed at the Head office and 647 - at the RSOs. According to the Rules of Procedure of the NSI, the Head Office is organized into six directorates: "Business statistics", "Demographic and Social statistics", "Macroeconomic statistics", "Multi-Domain Statistics, Methodology and Registers", "Information systems and Infrastructure", "General administration" and structures directly subordinated to the President of the NSI: "Security of Information, Information and communication technologies and DM" Division, "Inspectorate", Finance Controller, "Internal Audit" Unit, "International Relations and Projects" Department and "Communications and Secretariat" Department. Five directorates are in the specialized administration and one directorate - in General administration.

Conducting competitions for vacant positions

From the beginning of January 2023 to the end of October 2023, 87 competitive procedures were launched for the appointment of employees to vacant positions in the NSI, of which 66 in the HO and 21 in the RSO. Fifty-one competitions in the NSI completed with the appointment of candidates.

The number of competitions in the HO increased dramatically compared to 2022 when 37 competitions were announced. This can be explained by employee turnover caused by the low level of wages in the NSI compared to other administrations.

Table 1. Competitions

(Number)

Structures	announced	terminated	terminated due to lack of candidates	without ranking	ranked without appointment	with appointment
HO	1	3	5	11	8	38
RSO	5	1	1	1	0	13
NSI	6	4	6	12	8	51

It is noteworthy that the unsuccessful procedures, in which there are no candidates or the ranked candidates refuse to enter the job, prevail in the HO compared to the RSOs. This fact could be explained to some extent by the lower levels of unemployment in Sofia compared to other cities. On the other hand, some of the announced positions require specific professional experience and knowledge that the applicants do not possess. Last but not least is the lower remuneration, which is offered for some of the positions, compared to the same in other administrations or in the private sector.

Employed by age and education at the NSI

The structure of total NSI's staff by age groups and by education is presented in Tables 2 and 3, total for the NSI, including for the Head Office and the RSO.

Table 2. Structure of the actually employed by age groups in the NSI

(Number)

Age category (years)						
Structures	up to 29	30 - 45	46 - 55	56 - 65	over 65	Total
HO	13	104	93	53	1	264
RSO	15	208	215	167	6	611
NSI	28	312	308	220	7	875

Employees aged 30-45 predominate in the NSI Head Office, and their number remains unchanged compared to the previous reporting period. In RSO, the number of employees from 46 to 55 years of age is the highest. Compared to 2022, there was an increase of 2 in them.

In the NSI, there is an increase in the share of workers over 65 compared to 2022 when there were 3 persons. This trend is more pronounced in the RSO where they increased from 3 to 6 persons. The number of young people up to 29 years old in the NSI compared to 2022 remains almost unchanged - from 27 to 28 employees. It should be noted that in the RSO there is a decrease of 2 employees of this age category compared to the previous reporting period. Unlike the RSO, the number of young people in the HO compared to 2022 has increased by 3 persons.

Generaly, the age structure of the employees in the NSI is a reflection of the demographic trend in the country. In Sofia, there is a slight increase in the number of employed up to 29 years of age, while in other cities their number decreases at the expense of employed over 65 years of age. Work in the state administration is not attractive enough for young people, which gives rise to the need to take special measures to attract them.

Table 3. Structure of actually employed in the NSI by education

(Number)

Education degree							
Structures	Doctor	Master	Bachelor	Professional bachelor	Secondary education	Primary education	Total
HO	11	215	26	3	9	0	264
RSO	2	392	113	10	94	0	611
NSI	13	607	139	13	103	0	875

The data shows that 87% of NSI's employees have a tertiary education, as more than half have a Master's degree. Bachelors come in second place - 139 employees. The number of employees with the educational-qualification degree "doctor" in the HO of the NSI decreased compared to 2022 when there were 13.

Compared to the previous reporting period, there is an increase in NSI employees with secondary education (in 2022 - 89). This trend is strongly expressed in RSO (81 in 2022).

Table 4. Training of NSI employees in Bulgarian universities

(Number)

Type of education	NSI	HO	RSO
Doctor	4	2	2
Master	10	3	7
Bachelor	7	1	6
Total	**21**	**6**	**15**

Table 4 summarizes the data for NSI employees who are currently continuing their education to acquire a higher educational qualification. Their total number has decreased compared to 2022 when there were 24.

In conclusion, it can be summarized that the profile of NSI employees by acquired education has changed within the last year. There is a decrease in the number of employees with a higher educational qualification such as "doctor" and "master" at the expense of employees with a "bachelor" degree and secondary education. The number of employees who continue their education to acquire a higher educational degree also decreases.

In 2023, two NSI experts took part in the trainings under the European Statistics

Training Program (ESTP) on the topic "Theory and Practice of Harmonized Indices of Consumer Prices (HICP)" (Helsinki, Finland) and "Waste Statistics" (Cologne, Germany). Another 12 experts took part in a total of 6 online courses and webinars.

In the field of energy statistics, NSI experts took an active part in training organized by Eurostat on the topic: "Changes in energy statistics from 2024 onwards", as well as in a series of trainings on working with the new energy questionnaires of Eurostat and the International Energy Agency.

In the field of environmental statistics and accounts, NSI experts took an active part in trainings organized by the Institute of Public Administration: Green Administration, Principles of Circular Economy; Legal data framework in the context of the European Data Strategy and OECD legal instruments.

Experts from the NSI took part in a Eurostat training course "Waste Statistics".

The following trainings were held during the year:

- Training in HO and RSO on the topic: "Security standards, quality of information and personal data protection";
- Training of NSI employees on documentation of the Integrated Management System according to ISO 9001 and ISO 27001;
- IPA-DK-10-Introduction to Cybersecurity. Base risk assessment in a work environment;
- Cyber Security: Trojan horse and Social engineering;
- Information and network security in support of public administration reforms;
- Cybersecurity policies and practices in organizations;
- Statistical literacy - easy access to quality data;
- H-11 "Organization of document flow in the public administration";
- Training on SPSS;
- Training on Exel;
- Training on LimeSurvey.

Budget

The implementation of the NSI's Budget 2023 is in compliance with the adopted Law on the State Budget of the Republic of Bulgaria for 2023 and current adjustments made (Annex 1). Planned revenues as of 31.10.2023 were implemented according to the specified plan - 38%. The implementation of the total expenditure for the same period amounts to 74%, including current costs (wages, salaries and other payments to staff and maintenance) - 82%.

The lack of sufficient funds in the "personnel expenditure" column in the NSI budget leads to the impossibility of negotiating a sufficient package of social benefits to be included in the collective labor agreement and in the trade union agreement that were concluded at the end of 2023. This makes social dialogue in the Institute difficult.

5. INTERNAL AUDIT AND ADMINISTRATIVE CONTROL

The Internal Audit Unit performs internal audit of all structures, programmes, activities and processes in the NSI, including the second-level spending units in the NSI and/or the administrators of resources of the European Union. In carrying out audit engagements for providing assurance and consulting, the IAU complies with the requirements of the Law on Internal Audit in the Public Sector, the International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing, the Code of Ethics of Internal Auditors, the Statute of Internal Audit and the approved by the Minister of finance methodology for internal audit in the public sector.

Pursuant to Art. 29, para. 3 and para. 4 of the Law on Internal Audit in the Public Sector and Art. 5, para. 1, item 1 of Ordinance No. 1/30.03.2017, an external assessment was carried

out to ensure the quality of the internal audit activity in NSI. A final report on the results of the external audit evaluation was issued and delivered on 25.10.2023. The external evaluator gave an assessment "Works in compliance" to the internal audit activity in the NSI. As a result of the performed inspections, 3 recommendations were formulated for improving the audit activity and a plan for implementation of the recommendations was prepared and approved. Recommendations have been implemented within the specified deadlines.

In the period December 2022 - January 2023, a risk assessment was made in all the NSI structures including the Regional statistical offices (RSO) - second level spending units to the president of the NSI (the audit universe of the NSI). All mandatory annexes and other necessary documents for drawing up the Strategic plan for the activities of the IAU covering the period January 2023 - January 2025 have been completed. In accordance with the Strategic plan, an Annual plan for the activities of the IAU was prepared, as well as a training plan for the internal auditors for 2023. The plans were presented to the president of the NSI within the specified period and approved.

In compliance with the requirements of Art. 40, para. 5 of the Law on Internal Audit in the Public Sector, an annual report and questionnaire on the activity of the IAU for 2022 were prepared, presented and sent electronically to the Minister of Finance through the web-based module "Annual reporting" within the specified time.

In compliance with the legal requirements, the head of the IAU carried out an inspection of the summary report and questionnaire on the status of the financial management and control systems (FMCS) in the NSI in 2022 and gave an opinion on the conformity of the information submitted in the report and questionnaire with the findings of the performed internal audits. The report and the questionnaire for the FMCS were sent within the specified deadline until 31.03.2023.

According to the Annual plan for the activities of the IAU for 2023, two audit engagements for providing assurance and consulting were carried out. The audit engagements for providing assurance cover the activities on planning, conducting and executing public procurement under the Public Procurement Act and the Rules for implementation of Public Procurement Act for the audited period 2022, as well as a review and assessment of the specialized activities of the "Annual Business Statistics" Department, "Business Statistics" Directorate for the audited period 2022 - 2023.

Within the public procurement audit, 13 recommendations were formulated and adopted, as six recommendations were implemented even at the end of the audit. Within the audit of the "Business Statistics" Directorate, three recommendations were formulated and they are yet to be implemented. Checks were carried out for the implementation of recommendations from previous audits.

The reporting of the activities of the "Internal Audit" unit in NSI for 2023 will be completed by 28.02.2024.

Audit engagements for providing consulting are also available - creation of an organization for the preparation, presentation and publication on the NSI intranet site of the risk registers for 2023 and the risk management reports in 2022 of all directorates and units directly subordinated to the President in the HO of the NSI; proposals with a report for the update of individual points of the Rules of Procedure of the NSI, as well as the preparation of a draft order to determine the organization, order and deadlines for the preparation of a summary report and a questionnaire on FMCS for 2022 and 2023 in the NSI.

In accordance with the international standards of professional practice in internal auditing, and approved training plan for 2023 of the Internal Audit Unit, the following three trainings took place: Planning of public procurement needs, Procurement schedule as well as implementation of public procurement legislation and practical examples, and Internal

assessments of internal audit quality. The online trainings were conducted by the Public Finance School.

The activity of **the Inspectorate** of the NSI under Art. 46 of the Administration Act in 2023 was related to realization of the goals laid down in the Strategic Plan for the activity of the Inspectorate of the NSI for the period 2021 - 2025 and the Annual Plan for the activity of the Inspectorate of the NSI in 2023. Throughout the year, the efforts of the Inspectorate were aimed at increasing the quality and expanding the scope of the administrative control over the activities of the general and specialized administration within the NSI structure.

In the implementation of the powers of the Inspectorate, the achievement of the following main objectives was of primary importance:

• To create optimal conditions for work of the structural units in order to implement the state policy in the field of statistics;

• To implement timely and effective measures to limit the corruption risk within the NSI system;

• To create an environment supporting the compliance with laws, by-laws and internal departmental acts, rules and procedures, with a view to prevent violations and acts of corruption in the functioning of the administration, and work improvement;

• To increase the training and professional qualification of inspectors as a condition for the objectivity and impartiality of control activity.

The realization of the goals was determined by the performance of the following main tasks: carrying out planned inspections for the implementation of administrative control of all structures, activities and processes in the units of the NSI system; carrying out unplanned inspections based on received reports or by order of the President of the NSI and proposing measures to prevent and eliminate violations; implementation of permanent control over individual structural units and processes for implementation and compliance with the requirements of the legislation in the performance of the functions assigned by the directorates of the general and specialized administration, as well as carrying out an independent and objective assessment of the activity of the structural units of NSI. Serious attention was paid to the observance of deadlines in the assignment, execution and completion of official tasks.

The work of the inspectors was aimed at increasing efficiency in planning and improving the organization, strict application of regulatory requirements and compliance with the factors on which the optimization of work depends. The employees of the NSI Inspectorate under Art. 46 of the Administration Act conducted a total of 5 trainings to increase their professional qualifications.

During the reporting period, the Inspectorate of the NSI under Art. 46 of the Administration Act carried out a total of 31 inspections, of which 17 planned (including 12 monthly inspections) and 14 unplanned (including 7 inspections based on received reports).

In implementation of the Annual Plan for the activities of the Inspectorate in 2023, the following five planned inspections were carried out: inspection and evaluation of the organization of the activity and compliance with the regulatory requirements when evaluating the implementation of the position by the employees of the HO and the RSOs of the NSI; verification of compliance with the requirements for the collection, reporting, storage and publication of the declarations under the Counter-Corruption and Unlawfully Acquired Assets Forfeiture Act submitted by the employees of the HO and the RSOs of the NSI; complex planned inspection of RSO – Yug; complex planned inspection of RSO - Yugozapad and complex planned inspection of RSO – Yugoiztok.

For the implementation of internal administrative control in 2023, the Inspectorate carried out 12 monthly inspections. Monthly reports containing the findings, analyses,

conclusions and recommendations of the administrative control were prepared and submitted for approval by the president of the NSI. The subject of the inspections consisted of: the implementation of the resolutions of the NSI's top management; contracts concluded and executed during the month; the number of issued and executed/unexecuted orders of the NSI's top management; the realized international working trips of NSI's employees; the prepared reports from participation in international working trips and tasks arising from them for the NSI. The implementation of the decisions of the President's Council was carried out with particular importance. The implementation and reporting of the tasks assigned to the NSI's employees through AIS "Document Flow" was controlled. In 2023, a monthly control of the implementation of the tasks set out in the NSP and the Editorial Plan for 2023 was carried out. The timely implementation of the conducted statistical surveys and publications from the Release calendar as well as the issued publications was monitored.

In 2023, the NSI's Inspectorate carried out permanent control for the implementation of the provisions of the Counter-Corruption and Unlawfully Acquired Assets Forfeiture Act and the Ordinance on the organization and procedure for inspection of conflict of interest declarations. In the legally determined deadlines, the information from the declarations sent by NSI's employees under Art. 35, para. 1, item 2 and item 4 of the Counter-Corruption and Unlawfully Acquired Assets Forfeiture Act was processed, stored and published in compliance with the provisions of the Law on Personal Data Protection.

Inspections of the declared facts in the submitted declarations under Art. 35, para. 1, item 1 and item 3 of the Counter-Corruption and Unlawfully Acquired Assets Forfeiture Act by the newly appointed employees in the HO and the RSOs of the NSI were periodically carried out to establish incompatibility according to the requirements of the relevant legal acts.

In line with the normative requirements of the newly adopted Counter-Corruption Act, the Inspectorate took actions to update the relevant internal rules, sample declarations and relevant orders.

In 2023, the Inspectorate carried out 7 unplanned inspections based on received reports and proposals related to the activities of the general and specialized administration. Reports with the results of the inspections were timely prepared and submitted for approval by the president of the NSI. After the clarification of each individual case, responses were sent to the whistleblowers within the statutory period.

The control activity of the NSI's Inspectorate was tailored both to the available personnel and to the unplanned tasks related to reports of admitted irregularities or by order of the President of the NSI. In fulfillment of the statutory requirements for the minimum number of inspectorates and in connection with the expansion of the activities related to the functioning and implementation of the powers of the Inspectorate, two competitive procedures held for the vacant positions. Generaly, these circumstances did not negatively affect the performance of assigned tasks and the implementation of the powers of the Inspectorate under Art. 46 of the Administration Act.

For the period from 01.01.2023 to 01.11.2023, a total of 1,287 dossiers with documents were recorded and checked in the register of the **Financial Controller**, and a total of 1,287 checklists for commitment and expenditure were issued.

The proclamation of the Financial Controller on the proposals for commitment or expenditure was implemented within the deadlines set by the President of the NSI and described in the Internal Rules on implementation of ex-ante control of legality in the NSI.

During the period, the Financial Controller often needed to request additional documents or information, as well as to make on the spot visit in order to optimize the control and to give an accurate and efficient statement in the checklist filled by him.

In the first half of 2023, the Financial Controller participated in the preparation of the summary questionnaire and the report on the status of the FMCS in the NSI in 2022.

In pursuance of the annual training plan for 2023, the Finance Controller participated in training "Implementation of public procurement legislation. Practicle examples" which held in the period 29-30.05.2023 at the Public Finance School to the Ministry of Finance. In September, the Finance Controller took part in training on the topic "Sustainable Finances" which was held in the period 19-20.09.2023 at the Institute of Public Administration. For the excellent results of the final tests and the successful completion of the trainings, the Financial Controller received certificates and provided them to the "Human Resources" Department, General Administration Directorate at the NSI's HO for storage and addition to the civil servant's dossier.

During the period of ex-ante control for legality, no illegal actions were detected in the Head Office of the NSI.

During the year, the **Data Protection Officer** carried out constant supervision for exact compliance with the legislation of the Republic of Bulgaria and the requirements of the law of the European Union in the field of personal data protection, to ensure the rights of data subjects, as well as the principle for statistical secrecy regulated in Regulation (EC) No. 223/2009 on European statistics and the Law on Statistics. When working on proposals for European legislation, the NSI's positions in the Working Party on Statistics of the Council of the EU were always prepared in accordance with the European and national law in the field of personal data protection and the recommendations of the European Data Protection Supervisor.

In 2023, the "Policy on personal data protection when using cloud services" was prepared and approved by the president of the NSI. It regulates the conditions under which the NSI, in its capacity as a personal data administrator, and in accordance with the requirements of the Regulation (EU) 2016/679, the Personal Data Protection Act of the Republic of Bulgaria and other Bulgarian regulations or international acts, processes personal data in a cloud environment. The policy aims to establish the NSI's mandatory contractual requirements to cloud service providers when personal data is processed in one way or another on behalf of the NSI in the provider's cloud environment.

Appendix 1. Information on the NSI budget for 2023

Indicators (in BGN)	Law on State Budget of the Republic of Bulgaria for 2023	Specified plan for the year as of 31.10.2023	Report as of 31.10.2023	Implementation of the plan/ report (%) as of 31.10.2023
1	2	3	4	5
I. REVENUES - TOTAL	**950 000**	**950 000**	361 562	**38**
Own revenues	950 000	950 000	361 562	38
Non-tax revenues	950 000	950 000	361 562	38
Property revenues and incomes	950 000	950 000	436 823	46
- Net revenues from sales of services, goods and production	850 000	850 000	344 914	41
- Rental property revenues	100 000	100 000	91909	92
State fees				
Fines, sanctions and penalties			2 796	
Other revenues Revenues from the sale of non-financial assets			6 799	

VAT paid			-84 856	
II. EXPENDITURES - TOTAL	**30 812 600**	**30 864 620**	**22 780 166**	**74**
Total expenditure	30 812 600	30 864 620	22 780 166	74
Current expenditure	27 328 600	27 330 620	22 603 757	82
Personnel	23 687 100	23 687 100	19 552 414	82
Salaries and remunerations to the personnel under the Labour Code and the Civil Service Act	16 982 200	16 982 200	13 827 720	81
Salaries and remunerations to the personnel under the Labour Code	2 135 500	2 135 500	1 621 032	76
Salaries and remunerations to the personnel under the Civil Service Act	14 846 700	14 846 700	12 206 688	82
Other salaries and payments to the personnel	1 468 000	1 468 000	1 381 749	94
Mandatory social security contributions from employers	5 236 900	5 236 900	4 342 945	83
Social insurance contributions from employers for the State Social Insurance (SSI)	3 157 000	3 157 000	2 631 907	83
Health insurance contributions from employers	1 304 500	1 304 500	1 073 982	82
Contributions to additional compulsory insurance from employers	775 400	775 400	637 056	82
Maintenance	3 478 500	3 480 520	2 833 204	81
Taxes paid, charges and administrative sanctions	115 000	115 000	168 128	146
Expenditure for membership contributions and participation in non-profit organizations and activities	48 000	48 000	50 011	104
Capital expenditure	3 484 000	3 534 000	176 409	0. 5
Fundamental repair of tangible fixed assets	500 000	450 000	30 099	0. 6
Acquisition of tangible fixed assets	413 000	1 182 000	54 508	0. 5
Acquisition of intangible fixed assets	2 571 000	1 902 000	91 802	0. 5
NATURAL INDICATORS				
Staff positions - total	968	968	875	
Average annual full-time positions - total	968	968	880	
Staff positions	968	968	875	
III. TRANSFERS	**29 862 600**	**29 914 620**	**22 477 741**	**75**
III. A. TRANSFERS (SUBSIDIES, CONTRIBUTIONS) BETWEEN CENTRAL/STATE BUDGET AND OTHER BUDGETS				
	30 362 600	**30 414 620**	**16 392 288**	**54**
Transfers (grants/contributions) from the central budget (Net)	30 362 600	30 414 620	16 386 404	54
- Transfers (subsidies) from the central budget (+)				

III. B. TRANSFERS BETWEEN BUDGET ACCOUNTS AND EXTRABUDGETARY FUNDS/ACCOUNTS				
- Transfers received (+)			385	100
- Transfers granted (-)				
- Transfer from MLSP under programmes of temporary employment (+/-)			5 499	100
III. C. TRANSFERS BETWEEN BUDGETS AND ACCOUNTS FOR EU FUNDS	-500 000	-500 000	**-234 882**	46
III. D. TRANSFERS FOR ASSUMED INSURANCE CONTRIBUTIONS AND TAXES			6 320 335	
IV. BALANCING ITEM (+/-) (I - II + III)			**59 137**	
V. FINANCING OPERATIONS			**59 137**	

Appendix 2. Organizational chart of the NSI (as of September 19, 2023)

Right-side column (top):
- National Statistical Council
- Council to the President
- Person responsible for network and information security
- Information security manager
- Quality manager
- Information security coordinator
- Quality coordinator
- Regional coordinators of the IMS

President

Deputy President		Deputy President		Deputy President	Secretary General	Structures directly subordinated to the President
Business Statistics Directorate	Demographic and Social Statistics Directorate	Multi-Domain Statistics, Methodology and Registers Directorate	Information Systems and Infrastructure Directorate	Macroeconomic Statistics Directorate	General Administration Directorate	Regional Statistical Offices
Annual Business Statistics Department	Statistics on Population and Housing fund Department	Regional Statistics and Geographical Information Department	Information Systems and Application Software Department	Non-financial National and Regional Accounts Department	Legal Activities Department	Security of information, Information and Communication Technologies and DM
Short-term Business Statistics and Transport Statistics Department	Health and Justice Statistics Department	Indicators and Monitoring of Strategic Documents and Initiatives Department	Database Management Department	Financial National Accounts Department	Human Resources Department	Inspectorate
Statistics on Labour costs, Research and Development, Innovation and Information Society Department	Education and Culture Statistics Department	Relations with Users and e-Services Department	Information and Communication Infrastructure Department	SUT and Institutional National Accounts Department	Financial Accounting Activities Department	Finance Controller
Statistics on foreign trade in goods Department	Statistics on Living Conditions Department	Publications, Library and Digital Products Department		Consumer Prices, Housing prices and PPP Department	Property Management and Maintenance Department	Internal Audit Unit
Statistics on Tourism and Business surveys Department		Planning and Quality of Statistical Surveys Department		Environmental and Energy accounts Department		International Relations and Projects Department
Business Registers Department				Accounts and prices in Agriculture and Forestry Department		Communications and Secretariat Department