

Dear friends of the statistical community,

I regret to inform you that I have been forced to resign my position as Director General of Statistics Norway from 12 November. The Minister of Finance, representing the right wing progressive party, has declared that she no longer has confidence in me as Director General. With such a statement it has been impossible for me to continue my tasks in Statistics Norway (SSB). The grounds of her mistrust are difficult to comprehend, and her handling of the case is currently under scrutiny by the Committee of Control and Constitution in the Norwegian Parliament.

The legal status of SSB is somewhat unclear in the current law. On the one hand the law specifies that SSB is independent in all matters relating to statistics, analysis and research. In administrative matters, on the other hand, SSB may be instructed by the ministry. In the time I have served as the Director General I have not been instructed by the ministry, but the ministry has sent what it describes as «signals» and voiced opinions on matters regarding both immigration issues and the reorganization of SSB.

From my perspective, the actual reason why I no longer have the minister's backing is related to immigration statistics and analysis. The ministry has on several occasions expressed their dissatisfaction with SSB and myself arguing that we need to be careful not to lose the minister's trust and support. These signals have been related to SSB not producing statistics on crime and immigration background (SSB produces statistics on crime and citizenship), pressure to publish a report on the projected costs of immigration, which as in my professional opinion is seriously biased and of inferior quality, and for transferring one of the key researchers making these projections to a statistics department.

The official reason for losing the minister's trust is that the ministry is dissatisfied with the transfer of 25 of a total of 75 researchers from the research department to the statistical departments. The ministry argue that this transfer potentially disrupts the deliveries of model projections and interferes with the on-going work on the new statistical act. The commission proposing a new act has been asked to review whether research should be legally binding, not how to organize research in SSB. In my view these decisions are under my discretion and there have been none proven failures of deliveries to the ministry.

When I resigned I chose to speak out in defense of an independent SSB arguing that SSB in the future should not be dependent and restricted by the minister's trust. As there will be a proposal of a new statistical law within the next year, this is a chance for the Norwegian parliament to have an opinion on the matter of independence which in my view is too weak with the current law.

I have very much enjoyed taking part in the statistical community and will sincerely miss you all and the important work you do. I will continue my stride to stand up for an independent national statistical institution and hope that the future will bring more independence also to Statistics Norway.

Yours sincerely

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