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From: Mr Enrico GIOVANNINI, Chair of ESGAB
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To: Mr Zdravko MARIĆ, President of the ECOFIN Council
Subject: ESGAB Annual Report 2019 - Eleventh annual report by the European Statistical Governance Advisory Board to the European Parliament and the Council on the implementation of the European Statistics Code of Practice by Eurostat and the European Statistical System as a whole

Delegations will find attached the 2019 Annual Report by European Statistical Governance Advisory Body (ESGAB).

Encl.: IM 01437 2020



European
Statistical
Governance
Advisory
Board

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E-MAIL

Rome 7 February 2020
ESGAB/2020/06

Mr Zdravko Marić
Minister of Finance
President of the ECOFIN Council
Council of the European Union
Rue de la Loi 175
B-1048 BRUSSELS

Dear Mr Minister,

The European Statistical Governance Advisory Board (ESGAB) provides an independent overview of the European Statistical System (ESS) on the implementation of the European Statistics Code of Practice with an ultimate aim to enhance quality and trustworthiness of European statistics for evidence-based policy making.

ESGAB's eleventh annual report to the European Parliament and Council on the implementation of the European Statistics Code of Practice by Eurostat and the ESS is now finalised. I would like to count on your assistance in ensuring political support where needed for the implementation of the Board's recommendations.

Yours sincerely,

Enrico Giovannini
Chair of ESGAB



ESGAB Secretariat
Eurostat – BECH Building
L-2721 Luxembourg
Telephone: (+352) 4301 32378
E-Mail: estat-esgab@ec.europa.eu
<http://ec.europa.eu/esgab>



ESGAB ANNUAL REPORT 2019

Eleventh annual report by the
**European Statistical
Governance Advisory Board**
to the European Parliament
and the Council
on the implementation
of the European Statistics
Code of Practice by Eurostat and
the European Statistical System
as a whole



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EUROPEAN STATISTICAL GOVERNANCE ADVISORY BOARD (ESGAB)



First row, from left to right:
Enrico Giovannini (Chair),
Kai Carstensen,
Bart De Moor

Second row:
Mireille Elbaum,
Frances Ruane,
Algirdas Šemeta



ESGAB was established by the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union in 2008 to provide an independent overview of the European Statistical System (ESS) with particular regard to the implementation of the European Statistics Code of Practice (CoP). ESGAB's aim is to enhance professional independence, integrity and accountability (three key elements of the CoP) in the ESS, and the quality of European statistics.

Its tasks include preparing an annual report for the Parliament and the Council on the implementation of the CoP insofar as it relates to the European Commission (Eurostat), as well as undertaking an assessment of the

implementation in the ESS as a whole, and advising the Commission (Eurostat) on appropriate measures to: facilitate the implementation of the CoP, communicate it to users and data providers, update it, and to address questions relating to user confidence in European statistics, where considered necessary.

Eurostat participates as an observer at ESGAB meetings and the Commission covers ESGAB's administration and meeting expenses. ESGAB members receive no remuneration. ESGAB therefore has no operating budget.

For further details see:
<https://ec.europa.eu/esgab/>

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

After the in-depth analysis of the future challenges of the European Statistical System (ESS) carried out with the 2018 report, this 2019 ESGAB annual report explores the issue of governance in the ESS by examining two important functions that play a central role in ensuring full implementation of the European Statistics Code of Practice (CoP): the supervision of national statistical systems (NSSs) and the involvement of users in the work of national statistical institutes (NSIs) and other national authorities (ONAs).

In particular, Section 1.1 of the report discusses the way in which ESGAB-like governance functions are carried out in EU Member States to ensure compliance with the CoP, while Section 1.2 presents an overview of the national

user councils (NUCs), bodies that focus on helping the NSSs respond to requests from the broad community of users of statistics.

This report benefited from the results of the first seminar ever organised by ESGAB, which brought together representatives of the NSIs of the EU Member States and the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) states (Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland), as well as representatives of ESGAB-like governance bodies in France, Greece, Italy, Malta and Switzerland. It also benefited from a survey carried out by the European Statistical Advisory Committee (ESAC) on NUCs, opening the way to further collaboration between these advisory bodies.

Section 1 closes with a section on the challenges for the 2021 population and housing census, a major statistical exercise for the whole of the ESS that takes place every 10 years. In line with the fast-changing pace of today's world, the census procedure is also going through a process of great transformation. ESGAB analyses these new challenges and explores the ways in which Eurostat and the ESS could respond to them.

Section 2 of the report focuses on the progress made by Eurostat and the ESS as a whole as regards the implementation of previous ESGAB recommendations, and by Member States on the implementation of the improvement actions emanating from the 2013-2015 round of peer reviews. As usual, some recommendations to improve the compliance of the ESS with the CoP are presented.

2019 RECOMMENDATIONS

2019/1 The mission of all bodies in charge of overseeing the functioning of national statistical systems should be made explicit in national legislation, so that their roles are strengthened and their actions facilitated by their being recognised as key interlocutors within the national statistical institute (NSI)–government relationship.

2019/2 Due to the importance of an appropriate governance structure to prevent problems and fully implement the Code of Practice (CoP), governance issues should feature prominently in the next round of peer reviews, not least in the context of the communication strategy accompanying the peer-review procedure.

2019/3 The round of peer reviews to be launched in 2020 should produce systematic evidence on how the governance within each Member State achieves effective implementation of and compliance with the CoP.

2019/4 Due to the importance of an effective dialogue with users to implement Principle 11 of the CoP (Relevance) ⁽¹⁾, based on appropriate ways of connecting with different categories of users, the European Statistical System (ESS) should discuss how to strengthen such dialogue at both European and national levels.

⁽¹⁾ See Annex 2

2019/5 Eurostat, in cooperation with the European Statistical Advisory Committee (ESAC), should prepare an overview of national user councils (NUCs) and promote the establishment of these bodies in states where they do not currently exist or the extension of their scope, as necessary.

2019/6 In view of the increasing risks of third-party dissemination of non-validated or 'fake' information, the European Statistical Governance Advisory Board (ESGAB) recommends that Eurostat and the NSIs design appropriate actions of communication and outreach to citizens to highlight the trustworthiness of official statistics.

2019/7 As an effective implementation of census guidelines at national level is also particularly important to enhance trust in official statistics, ESGAB recommends that Eurostat and the NSIs pay special attention to the governance of the 2021 population and housing census. In particular, NSIs should, with Eurostat support, strengthen their coordination role in relation to other national authorities (ONAs) and local authorities throughout the whole process.

2019/8 Given the growing use of administrative sources in census operations, the ESS should ensure the clarity and consistency of the definitions used in the next round of the population and housing census with those used in the past and with the statistical concepts used worldwide, with particular attention to those concerning social topics (e.g. employment and unemployment) and migration flows.

2019/9 ESGAB recommends that a comprehensive strategy of communication and dialogue with users in relation to the 2021 population and housing census be developed at national and European level.

2019/10 The members of the ESS should begin preparations for the 2031 population and housing census as soon as possible, taking into account the lessons learned from the 2021 round. In this perspective, the possibility of developing a continuous population census within the EU should be explored, in light of the growing mobility of people within Europe and the expected trends in international migration.

2019/11 ESGAB recommends that, when preparing the final report on the 2013-2015 peer-review exercise at the end of 2020, Eurostat present an in-depth analysis of the whole exercise and in particular of the implementation of improvement actions, with categorisation of the different actions, risks identified and successes achieved.

2019/12 ESGAB calls on Eurostat, in collaboration with NSIs and potentially with other directorates-general of the Commission, to be proactive in ensuring progress with the implementation of those peer-review recommendations whose implementation depends on actions to be pursued at governmental level.

2019/13 As one of the outcomes of the next round of peer reviews, Eurostat should produce a mapping and an assessment of the different risks of non-compliance with each of the principles of the CoP.

2019/14 ESGAB recommends full transparency of the peer-review process, encouraging Member States and Eurostat to promote awareness of the methodology and to associate with representatives of users at different stages of the process.

INTRODUCTION

The 2019 annual report is being published at a special moment for European institutions. A new European Parliament took office after the European elections and a new Commission has also been nominated, and has started its work. Several members of the Commission are new, including the commissioner in charge of economic affairs, whose responsibilities also include the activities of Eurostat. Some 80 % of the Members of the European Parliament are new, including the chair of the Committee on Economic Affairs, to whom ESGAB presents its annual report.

In this new context, and taking into account the 5-year work programme of the new President of the Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, it is likely that the demand for European statistics will continue to grow significantly in the years ahead. Especially important in this respect is the strong focus on the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development ⁽²⁾ by the new president, who put each and every vice-president and commissioner in charge of implementing the 2030 Agenda and achieving the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with their 169 targets, in their own field of competence. This will put the ESS under pressure, given the still-limited number of indicators available for the 169 targets, notwithstanding the efforts already made since 2015 by Eurostat and the NSIs.

The start of the new Commission is also an important opportunity to improve the current working arrangements between Eurostat and the

commissioner in charge of statistics, taking into account recommendations made by ESGAB in 2018 after the comprehensive assessment carried out by ESGAB on the implementation of the 2012 Commission decision on Eurostat. Moreover, as the commissioner in charge of statistics is also responsible for the redesign of the European semester ⁽³⁾ around the 2030 Agenda and the coordination of its implementation across the whole Commission, it is likely, and welcomed, that Eurostat will be asked to strengthen its coordination role within the Commission and vis-à-vis some Europe-wide agencies, to provide high-quality statistical information on all aspects of the 2030 agenda.

In addition, the ESS is working to launch a new round of peer reviews, with the aim of ensuring full implementation of the CoP at national level and helping the ESS as a whole to further improve by identifying future-oriented recommendations. The guidelines for the new round of peer reviews were recently agreed by the European Statistical System Committee (ESSC), also taking into account ESGAB recommendations. In the coming months, the detailed methodology for the peer reviews will be operationalised to allow the launching of the new round in 2020 for Eurostat and in 2021 for each of the NSSs. Especially important will be the extension of the peer reviews to the most

⁽²⁾ https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1&Lang=E

⁽³⁾ The European semester is a cycle of economic and fiscal policy coordination within the EU. It is part of the European Union's economic governance framework. Its focus is on the 6-month period from the beginning of each year, hence its name — the "semester". During the European semester the Member States align their budgetary and economic policies with the objectives and rules agreed at EU level. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/european-semester/#>

important bodies (ministries, public research institutes, etc.) that contribute to the production of European statistics, the ONAs.

Given the abovementioned context, and building on the content of the 2018 annual report ⁽⁴⁾, ESGAB's 2019 annual report covers four main issues, all relevant for the implementation of the CoP, especially from the ESS governance point of view. They are as follows.

- The way in which ESGAB-like governance functions are carried out at national level, in order to ensure the implementation of the CoP by the NSSs.
- The engagement of stakeholders and users in the functioning of NSSs, especially in the context of the fast-changing evolution of economic, social and environmental phenomena.
- The challenges and the opportunities arising from the forthcoming census round.
- A review of the implementation of previous ESGAB recommendations.

In preparing its annual reports, ESGAB collects information from a number of different sources within the ESS, as well as from reports prepared by Eurostat on various topics. ESGAB also organises dialogues with heads of NSIs and representatives from national ESGAB-like bodies. These processes provide a rich source of information on issues falling within the mandate of ESGAB. Moreover, in the context of the internal review of ESGAB activities, ESGAB and Eurostat

agreed some actions to improve the flow of information, in order to make ESGAB's work more effective and improve the quality of its annual reports.

As data quality is one of the key points of the CoP, ESGAB also follows very closely the activities of the ESS concerning the so-called data revolution (use of big data, the role of private data owners and providers, etc.) and the measurement of new phenomena, as well as the improvement of statistics concerning globalisation and the digitalisation of economies and societies, among other issues. ESGAB welcomes the commitments made on these topics by the ESSC over the last 2 years (captured in the *Bucharest Memorandum on Official Statistics in a Datafied Society [Trusted Smart Statistics]* ⁽⁵⁾ and the *Bratislava Conclusions – The statistical implications of economic globalisation* ⁽⁶⁾) and plans to review the implementation of the envisaged actions at the occasion of future reports.

⁽⁴⁾ In its 2018 annual report, ESGAB carried out a comprehensive analysis of the main challenges and opportunities facing the ESS in the years to come. In particular, the report addressed the strategic priorities for the ESS beyond 2020, the importance of stakeholders' engagement, the changing landscape for European statistics due to political developments, as well as the preparation of a new round of peer reviews on the implementation of the CoP. The report also included a reference to ESGAB's opinion on the implementation of the 'commitment on confidence' made by the Commission in 2012 concerning the professional independence of Eurostat and its relationship with other Commission services.

⁽⁵⁾ <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/7330775/7339482/The+Bucharest+Memorandum+on+Trusted+Smart+Statistics+FINAL.pdf/59a1a348-a97c-4803-be45-6140af08e4d7>

⁽⁶⁾ <https://www.dgins2019.sk/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/11112019-DGINS-2019-Bratislava-Conclusions.pdf>

1. CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTING THE CODE OF PRACTICE BY THE EUROPEAN STATISTICAL SYSTEM

In this section, ESGAB takes a closer look at how the principles of the CoP are implemented by Member States, and more specifically how ESGAB-like governance functions are carried out in order to ensure compliance with the CoP.

The section also examines the role played by users in the functioning of NSSs. Users' interests are represented at European level by ESAC and at individual state level (in 23 states) by NUCs. While their functions and set-up differ across Member States, their mission is the same: helping the NSSs respond more efficiently to the growing requirements from the users of statistics.

ESGAB also underlines the importance of having clear and transparent procedures for appointing, dismissing and extending the appointment terms of the heads of NSIs, in order to safeguard effectively their professional independence at national level. ESGAB will continue to monitor this issue and will analyse it in future reports.

1.1. ENSURING IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CODE OF PRACTICE BY NATIONAL STATISTICAL SYSTEMS

The ESS is a complex system and its governance requires continuous adaptation to new challenges

that take into account the central role that statistics play in the functioning of the European Union, as well as in each Member State. In previous annual reports, ESGAB has pointed to the benefits that having ESGAB-like bodies (i.e. bodies with the responsibility of overseeing the governance of NSSs) in EU Member States might bring to assuring good governance of NSIs in a changing world.

ESGAB has explored further the issue of governance at Member State level during 2019, and organised a seminar ^(?) to discuss the governance of NSSs in the EU and, more specifically, the variety of ways ESGAB-like governance functions are undertaken to ensure compliance with the CoP. ESGAB, from the outset, noted that there are at least two specific groups of states: (i) those with formal ESGAB-like bodies which are responsible for ensuring adherence to the CoP and other governance aspects in their NSSs and (ii) those operating within a range of different institutional frameworks and methods designed to support governance of their statistical systems, but with no formal oversight body.

^(?) The 19 June seminar on 'How European countries use ESGAB-like functions to support the implementation of the European Statistics Code of Practice' brought together representatives of NSIs of the EU Member States and of the four EFTA states (Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland), as well as representatives of ESGAB-like bodies in France, Greece, Italy, Malta and Switzerland.

In relation to states with ESGAB-like bodies, ESGAB notes the following.

- The mission statements and fields of competences of the different governance bodies, as well as their relationships with the NSIs in their respective states, differ widely, with each being framed more or less explicitly by legislative provisions. This gives rise to potential grey areas affecting the ability of ESGAB-like bodies to fulfil the whole range of their oversight functions in relation to the implementation of the CoP.
- These governance bodies are equipped with different sets of tools to deliver on their governance objectives, which are used to greater or lesser extents and with different degrees of effectiveness. These tools include: compliance checks, assessment of statistics and producers, systemic reviews, case studies, answers to requests and complaints, and opinions on legislative proposals or even on appointments of heads of NSIs.
- These ESGAB-like bodies tend to meet quite infrequently during any given year and can draw on only limited funding to support their work. Both the quantity and quality of their work rely heavily on their capacity to secure the relevant documents and information from the NSIs. They also depend on indirect information from diverse sources (e.g. researchers, civil society organisations) on risks in relation to professional independence and transparency in the production and dissemination of statistics. Professional independence and transparency in the production and dissemination of statistics remain key priorities.
- The role of these ESGAB-like bodies is multifaceted and all their dimensions have to combine to ensure that they contribute effectively to the governance of the statistical system. The specific roles undertaken include the following: (i) 'watchdog', i.e. checking

compliance of producers with the key principles of the CoP, (ii) 'mediator and adviser', i.e. facilitating concrete solutions when problems are identified, (iii) 'advocate', i.e. helping and supporting NSIs in their dialogue with national governments and (iv) 'deterrent', i.e. being able to speak publicly about a potential breach. Building trust between the watching bodies (the monitoring bodies) and the watched (the bodies being monitored) could also contribute to the success and effectiveness of the process.

- ESGAB-like bodies are presently paying attention to two main concerns: (i) the regulation of the participation of ONAs and local authorities in the official statistical system, which implies facilitating access to their data and checking data quality and (ii) the risks of inappropriate use when results are published. In the near future, these concerns about data quality and inappropriate use might grow considerably because of the appearance of 'third-party' providers, with increasing risks of dissemination of non-validated or even false or fake information.

In relation to states that do not have ESGAB-like bodies, ESGAB notes the following.

- The enforcement of the principles of the CoP may take different forms and can be, more or less explicitly, monitored through different institutional frameworks. These ESGAB-like governance functions may, for example, be regulated by specific legislative provisions, be embedded in other entities (such as ESAC-like bodies⁽⁸⁾ or overseeing statistical councils) or sometimes be performed through the internal organisation of the NSI.
- In such states, oversight of the implementation of the CoP by ONAs is typically achieved by means of bilateral agreements between NSIs

⁽⁸⁾ In most states there are advisory bodies, like ESAC, which provide comments and feedback to the NSIs on the development of official statistics from a user and producer perspective.

and ONAs, by the establishment of specific guidelines issued to all producers of official statistics or with quality commitments set by the NSIs that are to be signed off by the ONAs.

- In some states, any decision to create an independent oversight body (ESGAB-like body) could be seen as indicating a lack of trust in the NSI, which is legally in charge of statistical coordination and is directly responsible for ensuring compliance with the CoP, including professional independence, throughout the statistical system. Consequently, institutional proposals at national levels should take into account existing arrangements.
- These states often have consultative boards or councils, comprising outside individuals/ third-party experts, that provide valuable assistance to the heads of NSIs in those governance duties. When examining statistical programmes and outputs, these boards or councils may comment publicly and provide advice in relation to the effective quality and outcomes of this coordination, and so contribute to the transparency of the system.
- When such consultative bodies exist, they are particularly helpful where they discuss their reflections with suppliers as well as users of statistical products, such as the press and the research community. It is indeed important that, even when there is no official oversight, outside experts speak out, when needed, in favour and support of the professional independence and ethics of official statistics. In such cases, ESAC-like functions and ESGAB-like functions are often exercised jointly.

Good governance and the enforcement of the principles of the CoP are essential for the functioning of the ESS. While ESGAB views ESGAB-like bodies as an appropriate means to achieve this goal, it acknowledges that ESGAB-like governance functions can, in principle, be executed in different ways reflecting different

national traditions and institutional structures. In any case, it would be important that both NSIs and ONAs be covered by these considerations.

ESGAB recommends that actual governance settings be analysed closely in the next round of peer reviews and adjusted if necessary.

1.2. INVOLVING USERS IN THE FUNCTIONING OF NATIONAL STATISTICAL SYSTEMS

In its Recommendation 2018/2, ESGAB states that Eurostat and the NSIs should put in place comprehensive strategies for relations with users, giving special attention to researchers (eventually establishing a centralised service responsible for contact with users, a mechanism for taking user feedback into account, etc.). Regular assessment of user engagement should be undertaken to guarantee that the tools used provide effective responses to users' expectations and requests.

Eurostat collected information on ESAC-like bodies in the Member States and EFTA states in the context of the round of peer reviews in 2015. This information was updated in 2019 by the NSIs, further to a request by the chair of ESAC. The committee has kindly shared that information with ESGAB.

According to the information collected from the NSIs in 2015 and 2019, 23 ESS states have an NUC. While the respective set-up, tasks, powers, length of term and frequency of meetings vary from one state to another, they all have an advisory role to the NSS and are established by national statistical laws.

Further to these 23, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden specified that they do not have a single national statistical council. Instead, they have established several user groups related to different user categories; in effect, in those

states there are several NUCs, active in different statistical fields.

The Finnish Advisory Board, according to Statistics Finland, could be considered to support user interests. Norway also advised that the new act on official statistics (approved in June 2019) contains provisions for establishing a council for Statistics Norway consisting of user representatives.

Although Bulgaria, Croatia, Malta and the United Kingdom did not provide information about their respective user councils, similar bodies seem to exist there. However, the Maltese NSI refers on its website only to the Malta Statistics Authority, which, to our understanding, executes ESGAB-like governance functions but not NUC functions. Information on the Statistics User Forum in the United Kingdom is published on the website of the Royal Statistics Society, according to which the forum receives organisational and administrative support from the Office for National Statistics.

The composition of the NUCs and their mandate is very state specific. In addition to the representatives of ministries, members of a NUC can include representatives of national central banks, local administrations, academic and research institutions and trade unions (in Poland, Romania, and Slovenia) and media (in Lithuania). Similar to Norway, Estonia reported having user representatives associated with the NUC.

In several instances, the NUC's function is performed in working groups or subcommittees: Germany, France, Italy and the Netherlands reported such arrangements.

In a majority of states, the members of the NUC are appointed for a mandate of between 3 and 5 years' duration, either by the head of the NSI or by a member of the government (in some states, the NUC reports to the government). The NUC members in Czechia have a mandate of unlimited duration and are appointed by the head of the statistical office.

The number of members of NUCs depends on those bodies' composition as well as on the tasks that the NUC is required to undertake. However, in most states the number lies in the range of 10 to 20 members, with a couple of states reporting a membership of over 40 people.

In addition, the set-up of NUCs is rather heterogeneous. While in some states their composition reflects a narrow concept of users of statistics, in other states the composition is wider, encompassing not only users *sensu stricto* but also data providers and other statistics producers.

The tasks that NUCs perform at national level are also varied, even if they all focus on helping the NSSs respond to the requirements of a variety of users of statistics. The NUC may participate in the preparation of national annual statistical work programmes, contribute to proposing and designing statistical surveys, or, in some cases, work on specific topics in order to highlight possible solutions to address the needs of users. They may also organise seminars or broader consultations on cross-cutting questions, such as the use of big data. By helping to enhance statistical transparency and data protection, they may also, as mentioned in Section 1.1, play a role in supporting public recognition of the professional independence and ethics of official statistics.

The NUCs' contribution to fostering dialogue between data providers and data users is, considering Principle 11 of the CoP (Relevance), a key element in the governance of the NSS, on which it would be useful to have more detailed information in the future. For this reason, ESGAB will maintain a focus on this important issue. It will cooperate with Eurostat and ESAC to assess the current situation and analyse the precise roles performed by NUCs at national level, and to suggest potential improvements regarding the implementation of Principle 11 of the CoP.

It is important to underline that an enhanced structured dialogue with institutional users should

also take place. Such dialogue could focus on the following elements: identification of new and changing needs at an early stage; analysing the use of European statistics; setting up solutions so that existing statistics better fulfil user needs; and encouraging a more active user dialogue at national level for the sake of European statistics. The next steps and the topics to be addressed in meetings with users could be drawn up in a checklist to guide future user dialogues.

1.3. CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES ARISING FROM THE NEXT CENSUS ROUND

The population and housing census is a major statistical exercise that forms a central pillar of official statistics in most states and at European level. A traditionally enumerated census is time consuming and expensive — probably the most resource-intensive and publicly visible activity undertaken by an NSI. As well as providing data of unparalleled richness, the census has been viewed as the gold standard against which other, more frequent statistical activities are checked, updated and calibrated. As such, it is vital that the census be reliable and that users have confidence in its results.

In many states the census is going through a process of great change. Statistics users are demanding more frequent and more timely data, with a focus on greater geographical detail. In parallel, there is pressure on NSIs to reduce the costs of the census and to address growing difficulties in contacting certain population groups, such as the young or those who are very mobile. To respond to these pressures, there is a widespread increase in the use of administrative data sources, with most EU NSIs either having already adopted administrative sources or else making concrete plans for their future use.

These changes pose new challenges for NSIs which, while not necessarily greater or lesser than those related to a traditional census, will require different or complementary approaches. Certain risks remain to be addressed — both for the 2021 census programme and for future censuses. For example, some statistical concepts and variables used for census statistics are more challenging to measure when statistics are based on administrative data.

Some of the challenges may be related to very sensitive topics for social actors and decision-makers, such as the identification of migrant populations. Therefore, there is a need for:

- on the one hand, strong control and coordination by NSIs at national level to ensure quality and comparability;
- on the other hand, widespread informing and consultation of a variety of users, including at local level, to ensure complete transparency in the implementation of the census and its results.

There are significant differences between states in terms of the administrative data sources that are available, due to widely differing legal and organisational structures. Furthermore, some states have adopted specific solutions in order to meet the needs expressed by users at national or local level, which is important in gaining widespread support for such a major exercise and official statistics in general. Any solution to implement the census in the best conditions must recognise and take into account these differences. Consequently, developments and technical solutions need to be relevant to the different national situations. A flexible framework for coordination is needed to support NSIs as they confront common and state-specific problems.

The objective of the ESS is to achieve availability of high-quality and comparable census results across EU Member States. Therefore, there is a clear coordination role for Eurostat in areas

such as: promoting the exchange of information and good practice, preparing methodological guidelines and supporting ongoing national developments.

The need to support NSIs in addressing these challenges has been understood for several years and is reflected in the actions of Eurostat and other organisations, such as the UN.

There is a strong and effective process of exchanging good practice between NSIs, in particular through international expert meetings such as those organised by Eurostat and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE). Practical experience can be shared, which helps to ensure that the census will continue to produce reliable and comparable data after a move to using administrative sources. Important steps include:

- a clear identification and assessment of potential administrative sources;
- the development of structures for ongoing communication and coordination with data-source owners who are likely to be outside of the direct control of the NSI;
- a precise and transparent monitoring of the operations;
- a continuous process of consultation and informing of stakeholders and users, at both national and local level.

International guidelines have also been developed and updated to take into account the increased use of administrative data sources. The census recommendations of the Conference of European Statisticians have been updated for the 2021 census round to give more information on the use of administrative and combined data sources. Specific guidelines on the use of administrative data sources have also been produced by the UNECE, working together with Eurostat and a group of NSIs. A further handbook on quality issues relating to the use of administrative sources for censuses is currently being prepared.

These guidelines are designed to be practical and relevant both to those NSIs adopting a fully administrative-source-based census, as well as to those seeking to combine administrative data with data from other sources.

The development and testing of methods to use administrative data for the census have received financial support, in the form of Eurostat grants given to many NSIs ⁽⁹⁾. Eurostat has also supported the development of new technical guidelines for administrative sourced statistics ⁽¹⁰⁾.

The effective implementation of the census guidelines during census operations is of high importance in the particular context of a move to using new administrative sources. Eurostat will also continue to encourage the piloting of new data sources and methods.

The reflection on post-2021 census programmes should pay particular attention to the possible consequences of changes in sources and working methods on some definitions of key concepts, such as migration or population itself. These potential consequences should give rise to a large process of information-sharing and consultation with users at both European and national levels, especially regarding the clarity of these concepts and categories as well as the consistency of definitions used in the census and other official statistics.

ESGAB welcomes the increased use of administrative sources for census purposes, following appropriate assessment, and taking into account their relevance in different national situations. It emphasises the need for a strong control and coordination role to be given to NSIs

⁽⁹⁾ This support has been given under the ESS Vision 2020 ADMIN (administrative data sources) project and as part of the work to develop the 2021 and post-2021 EU census.

⁽¹⁰⁾ For example, the ADMIN project included outputs and support actions that have been relevant to the census, such as the *Quality Guidelines for Multisource Social Statistics* and the *Quality Guidelines for Frames for Social Statistics*.

regarding the move to developing and using those administrative sources.

ESGAB underlines that the effective design of the governance of the census, as well as the effective implementation of sound common census guidelines at national level, are important to ensure the ongoing availability of high-quality and comparable census results that are a central component of official statistics.

ESGAB also calls for a large process of information-sharing and consultation with users at different levels (European, national and local) to ensure complete transparency in the implementation of the new census methodologies as well as clarity and consistency of the different concepts used in official statistics.

1.4. ESGAB 2019 RECOMMENDATIONS

2019/1 The mission of all bodies in charge of overseeing the functioning of national statistical systems should be made explicit in national legislation, so that their roles are strengthened and their actions facilitated by their being recognised as key interlocutors within the national statistical institute (NSI)–government relationship.

2019/2 Due to the importance of an appropriate governance structure to prevent problems and fully implement the Code of Practice (CoP), governance issues should feature prominently in the next round of peer reviews, not least in the context of the communication strategy accompanying the peer-review procedure.

2019/3 The round of peer reviews to be launched in 2020 should produce systematic evidence on how the governance within each Member State achieves effective implementation of and compliance with the CoP.

2019/4 Due to the importance of an effective dialogue with users to implement Principle 11 of the CoP (Relevance), based on appropriate ways of connecting with different categories of users, the European Statistical System (ESS) should discuss how to strengthen such a dialogue at both European and national levels.

2019/5 Eurostat, in cooperation with the European Statistical Advisory Council (ESAC), should prepare an overview of national user councils and promote the establishment of these bodies in states where they do not currently exist or the extension of their scope, as necessary.

2019/6 In view of the increasing risks of third-party dissemination of non-validated or 'fake' information, the European Statistical

Governance Advisory Board (ESGAB) recommends that Eurostat and the NSIs design appropriate actions of communication and outreach to citizens to highlight the trustworthiness of official statistics.

2019/7 As an effective implementation of census guidelines at national level is also particularly important to enhance trust in official statistics, ESGAB recommends that Eurostat and the NSIs pay special attention to the governance of the 2021 population and housing census. In particular, NSIs should, with Eurostat support, strengthen their coordination role in relation to other national authorities (ONAs) and local authorities throughout the whole process.

2019/8 Given the growing use of administrative sources in census operations, the ESS should ensure the clarity and consistency of the definitions used in the next round of the population and housing census with those used in the past and with the statistical concepts used worldwide, with particular attention to those concerning social topics (e.g. employment and unemployment) and migration flows.

2019/9 ESGAB recommends that a comprehensive strategy of communication and dialogue with users in relation to the 2021 population and housing census be developed at national and European levels.

2019/10 The members of the ESS should begin preparations for the 2031 population and housing census as soon as possible, taking into account the lessons learned from the 2021 round. In this perspective, the possibility of developing a continuous population census within the EU should be explored, in light of the growing mobility of people within Europe and the expected trends in international migration.

2. OVERVIEW OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CODE OF PRACTICE

In today's world, statistical information may be only one click away. In order to fight the flux of data stemming from unreliable sources, the ESS must rely on its competitive advantages, such as the quality of the statistics it produces. The CoP is the foundation of the ESS common quality framework and sets the standard for developing, producing and disseminating European statistics.

Therefore, each year, ESGAB monitors the implementation of the CoP by the Commission (Eurostat) and the ESS as a whole, and issues recommendations for improvement actions. Moreover, the periodic peer-review exercise represents another important appraisal mechanism, bringing into the spotlight the commitment of the NSIs to adhering to the CoP.

This section presents the improvement actions taken by both Eurostat and the NSIs in response to previous ESGAB recommendations and provides further recommendations to Eurostat and/or to the ESS as a whole.

2.1. IMPLEMENTATION OF IMPROVEMENT ACTIONS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS ESGAB RECOMMENDATIONS

In its 2018 annual report, ESGAB issued 14 recommendations covering challenges faced by the ESS and the implementation of the CoP. As complete information on how Member States are implementing all or relevant parts of the ESGAB recommendations is not available, Eurostat has informed ESGAB that it has taken several actions to raise Member States' awareness of those recommendations.

ESGAB notes Eurostat's efforts to assist Member States and reminds the latter that some of its recommendations are addressed to NSIs and some to national governments, which may require different implementation strategies. Therefore, ESGAB will maintain its practice of having dialogues with heads of NSIs to gather more information in this respect.

A — COORDINATION AND COOPERATION**Improving governance of the European Statistical System**

ESGAB Recommendation 2018/8 urged Eurostat and the NSIs to reflect on how to improve the current ESS governance. A first step in this direction was a seminar organised by ESGAB itself, which brought together NSIs and ESGAB-like bodies to discuss both the functioning of the NSSs where ESGAB-like bodies exist and the pros and cons of establishing such bodies where they do not exist. ESGAB further elaborated on its position on this matter in Section 1.1 of this report, issuing recommendations 2019/1, 2019/2 and 2019/3.

In its 2018 recommendations, ESGAB had also stated the importance of continuing to cooperate closely with the United Kingdom to maintain statistical comparability. In 2020, ESGAB will monitor the institutional developments in this respect and will ask Eurostat to report back if necessary.

Coordination role of national statistical institutes

ESGAB Recommendation 2017/8 stipulated that the coordination role of NSIs should include national statistics. In April 2018, the Resource Directors' Group members had an exchange of views regarding NSIs' coordination of national statistics and highlighted good practices that could be shared with other Member States. The conclusion was that the NSIs are fulfilling the recommendation as far as possible within their respective mandates and resource constraints.

ESGAB takes note of this conclusion and looks forward to seeing further improvements.

B — COMMITMENT TO QUALITY**Prominence of and reference to the Code of Practice**

In previous reports, ESGAB recommended (see recommendations 2017/2 and 2018/11) that the CoP should be widely promoted as a mark of quality and that Eurostat and the NSIs should consider referring to it in all press releases. Eurostat concurs with this recommendation and will examine the way of referring to the CoP in press releases while maintaining user interest in the data and methodological notes presented in those press releases.

ESGAB welcomes this approach and reiterates that mentioning the CoP, which sets the standards and professional values required for the development, production and dissemination of these statistics, will bring a mark of quality that will separate official statistics from the rest.

In addition, ESGAB welcomes the fact that, in line with its Recommendation 2017/1, the CoP is prominently available and easily accessible to the public on the 'Quality' page of Eurostat's website.

Data from private-sector organisations

ESGAB Recommendation 2018/6 stipulated that Eurostat and the NSIs should engage with the private sector by establishing partnerships to enhance cooperation and collaboration and also reduce the burden on respondents by making use of new data sources.

In order to implement this recommendation, Eurostat proposed several actions that will be integrated into the multiannual action plan implementing the provisions on European statistics included in the proposal for the single

market programme 2021-2027 ^[11]. Those proposals include:

- developing business models for selected economic domains;
- establishing arrangements with large private data holders that ensure stable access to data;
- creating datasets that combine private data sources available at European level with national data sources.

In the context of establishing a quality framework for big data, as stipulated by ESGAB Recommendation 2017/4, Eurostat has worked on developing methodology and practices for dealing with privately held data and has produced a report on data-quality aspects of big data ^[12]. In addition, some methods and practices to deal with privately held data were included in the ESS quality assurance framework.

ESGAB takes note of the developments and will follow closely the implementation of these plans in the future.

Increasing data quality

ESGAB Recommendation 2018/7 advised that Eurostat and the NSIs should develop minimum standards on data quality to be followed by entities operating in the European Union, such as companies and institutions not belonging to the ESS which produce statistical data and indicators.

The ESS has proposed several actions, based on the CoP, which will establish clear quality indicators and methodology for using new data sources and privately held data. These actions will be integrated in the multiannual action plan implementing the provisions on European

statistics included in the proposal for the single market programme 2021-2027.

At the same time, Eurostat developed a reference quality framework for other statistics produced by the directorates-general of the European Commission, based on the CoP and the ESS quality assurance framework. In this work, Eurostat also took into account the quality frameworks already in place in some of the directorates-general. The framework aims to provide guidance that can be supplemented by specific guidelines of the directorates-general corresponding to their specific needs. In this way, a satisfactory standard of quality is applied to those statistics used for policy documents, impact assessments, evaluations and other documents.

ESGAB takes note of the progress. However, these measures do not fully address ESGAB's recommendation to issue minimum standards on data quality to be followed by entities operating in the European Union.

C — STATISTICAL CONFIDENTIALITY AND DATA PROTECTION

Privacy and data security

ESGAB Recommendation 2017/3 urged the ESS to consider the specific requirements of statistical work in the transposition of the general data protection regulation (GDPR) into national legislation. Therefore, Eurostat discussed the GDPR and its implications for statistics with representatives of NSIs in different forums (for example, the informal workshop at the level of heads of NSIs in February 2018) and set up a collaborative forum for exchange of best practices.

In line with ESGAB Recommendation 2017/5, requiring that the public be informed about the privacy and data security policies, Eurostat published on its website a document describing

^[11] https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_18_4049

^[12] https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/efis/mwikis/essnetbigdata/images/5/56/WP8_Deliverable_8.2_Quality_aspects.pdf

the system of internal controls, roles and obligations of Eurostat staff regarding security. The principles published on the Eurostat website ⁽¹³⁾ had been discussed with NSIs in order to align common practices among Member States.

ESGAB Recommendation 2018/13 reiterated that the NSIs should clearly inform the public about privacy and data security policies and publish them on the website. During 2018 Eurostat had been engaged in discussing and establishing its new security policy, which is now accessible to the general public via its website.

As part of the activities to implement this recommendation, the European Data Protection Supervisor participated in the February 2019 meeting of the ESSC for an extensive exchange of views. Furthermore, a workshop was organised in Malaga, Spain, in September 2019 in the context of the exercise for IT security certification of national statistical authorities in preparation for the exchange of confidential microdata under the framework regulation integrating business statistics. The topic of the workshop was 'GDPR and the microdata exchange' and participants included national security officers, as well as national data protection officers. One of the outcomes of the discussions was a decision to put in place a mechanism that Eurostat and Member States will follow in the event of a security incident that involves leaked personal information.

The Commission, under the responsibility of the Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers, will submit a report on the evaluation and review of the GDPR to the European Parliament and to the Council by 25 May 2020.

ESGAB notes the fact that Eurostat has developed its data security policy and encourages

⁽¹³⁾ <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/research-methodology/statistical-confidentiality>

all ESS members to do the same and to exchange best practices. ESGAB also asks Eurostat to report back on the follow-up actions in this respect.

D — RELEVANCE

Creating strategies for relations with users

ESGAB Recommendation 2018/2 stipulated that Eurostat and the NSIs should put in place comprehensive strategies for relations with users, giving special attention to researchers, and should undertake regular assessment of user engagement. Eurostat should also prepare an overview of NUCs.

In order to carry out this recommendation, the European Statistics User Forum has been set up as a key part of the ESS website to allow for a structured dialogue with, and the incorporation of feedback from, statistics users. The European Statistics User Forum is the sole point of contact for all user feedback concerning Eurostat experimental statistics products. In addition, several threads were launched to stimulate discussions on various technical topics. However, to date, its use has been limited. Eurostat is planning to evaluate the European Statistics User Forum in order to decide on possible future activities that could be included.

At the same time, Eurostat is currently running a project to investigate how to help various types of researchers promote our data and its use in policy and public debate. Following a workshop with researchers with different profiles, an outreach strategy will be drafted and piloted.

An ESS Partnership Group Task Force on Priority-Setting in the ESS is currently working on a new prioritisation mechanism for the European statistics programme 2021-27. This mechanism will build upon the following elements: a multiannual planning system, strengthened user dialogue and reviews of

statistical domains. These elements were presented in more detail to the ESSC in October 2019. In the future, the dialogue with institutional users will no longer be a separate instrument for priority-setting. Rather, the dialogue will be an integral part of the planning and monitoring processes with the focus on the identification of new/changed needs at an early stage, in particular proactively involving Commission directorates-general as well as national authorities.

Regarding NUCs, an overview is provided at the beginning of this report. For more information on this topic, please see Section 1.2.

ESGAB takes note of these developments, especially the establishment of the European Statistics User Forum, but emphasises that user engagement can take many forms and if this approach is not delivering on the desired objective, other approaches need to be assessed to meet these needs.

ESGAB also takes note of the information collected by Eurostat and ESAC on NUCs, and hopes that more detailed information on this important topic will be available in the future.

E — COHERENCE AND COMPARABILITY

Improving the comparability of key economic and social indicators

ESGAB Recommendation 2018/1 stated that Eurostat and the NSIs should improve the comparability of key economic and social indicators in the context of globalisation and digitalisation.

In order to comply with this recommendation, Eurostat has established several actions to address related globalisation and digitalisation issues. Regarding globalisation, these include an early warning system — to pick up on major multinational enterprise (MNE) restructuring

events — and a gross national income MNE pilot exercise to examine the recording of selected existing MNE groups. Eurostat also reported important improvement actions on the statistical infrastructure, including on profiling the activities of enterprise groups, improvements to business registers and support for states to develop large case units.

The statistical implications of economic globalisation were also discussed in the 2019 Conference of the Directors-General of the National Statistical Institutes (DGINS), which took place in Bratislava in October 2019. The DGINS agreed on the need to clarify and further enhance methodological frameworks and their practical implementation, especially where differences cause significant inconsistencies across statistics.

The DGINS also acknowledged the importance of establishing communication with users and with MNEs, in order to listen to their needs and expectations and to communicate the statistical impacts of economic globalisation in an understandable and effective way, while at the same time meeting the accepted standards of confidentiality.

The issues related to communication will be discussed at a workshop for heads of NSIs to be held in March 2020, in Croatia.

Regarding digitalisation, Eurostat is closely cooperating with international work to develop a digital economy satellite account. In addition, efforts are being made to improve communication of these issues to users.

Issues linked to big data were also the subject of the 2018 Conference of the DGINS, which took place in Bucharest in October 2018. In the Bucharest memorandum on trusted smart statistics, the DGINS agreed that the variety of new data sources, computational paradigms and tools required amendments to the statistical

business architecture, processes, production models, IT infrastructures, methodological and quality frameworks, as well as the corresponding governance structures.

They also recognised the importance of developing and adopting privacy-by-design approaches. In addition, they encouraged the creation of dedicated smart statistics communities to ensure that knowledge and skills are shared, and that achievements and further developments are implemented in a sustainable way. They agreed on the need to engage in strategic partnerships with key stakeholders (such as citizens, data protection authorities, central banks, industry, private data holders, relevant interest groups, standardisation bodies and the scientific and academic community) and underlined the need for European and international coordination.

ESGAB takes note of the actions undertaken by Eurostat and the ESS and will keep monitoring these developments in the future, by examining the progress made by the ESS in those fields in its next reports.

Cooperation with other national authorities

Recommendations 2017/6 and 2017/7 referred to granting, by legislation, functional independence for ONAs and ensuring the impartiality of ONAs' statistical publications. These recommendations are still ongoing, as Eurostat provides continuous support to the NSIs regarding the identification of ONAs and will monitor the compliance with all aspects of the CoP, including impartiality, of selected ONAs in the next round of peer reviews.

ESGAB Recommendation 2018/12 advised that NSIs should pursue their cooperation with ONAs and enhance their coordinating role within the NSSs and in the production of national statistics.

ESGAB welcomes the inclusion of this issue as a prominent element of the next round of peer

reviews and will analyse the information provided in that context when it becomes available.

F — GENERAL

Developing a communication strategy for the peer-review process

ESGAB Recommendation 2018/5 advised Eurostat and the NSIs to define a communication strategy for the whole peer-review process.

Eurostat agrees that good communication is paramount and, consequently, the ESS Task Force on Peer Reviews is working on communication issues, including communication before, during and after the peer review in a given state and, if relevant, at ESS level. A communication strategy will be drafted, with the following objectives: promoting the value of European statistics and raising awareness among certain target groups; demonstrating the commitment of the ESS to the principles of the CoP; demonstrating the importance of peer reviews in maintaining the quality, trustworthiness and usefulness of official statistics in Europe.

Moreover, as there is a need for a more strategic and systematic communication with users, a special Task Force on Strategic Communication was created in autumn 2019.

ESGAB welcomes these developments and looks forward to hearing about their outcomes.

Analysis of improvement actions following the peer-review recommendations

ESGAB Recommendation 2018/14 asked Eurostat to produce an in-depth analysis of improvement actions arising from peer-review recommendations, to allow for a meaningful assessment of the implementation of improvement actions.

In line with this recommendation, the 2020 monitoring report on the implementation of the improvement actions from the second round of peer reviews will contain a qualitative analysis on the actions implemented / not implemented. Eurostat added that the classification of actions into those needed for compliance and those aimed at making improvements is already part of the monitoring exercise.

ESGAB welcomes that in 2020 Eurostat will provide a detailed qualitative analysis on the improvement actions.

The revised Code of Practice in the peer-review exercise

ESGAB Recommendation 2017/9 asked that the implementation of the CoP as amended in 2017 be assessed in a third peer-review exercise by 2020.

ESGAB welcomes that the revised CoP together with the updated quality assurance framework indeed constituted the basis for the preparation of the methodology of the third round of peer reviews, scheduled for 2020-2022.

Cost of European statistics

ESGAB Recommendation 2017/10 advised Eurostat to work with NSIs to develop a more harmonised approach to the method of calculating the cost of European statistics by main categories of statistics.

Work on the underlying guiding principles continued during 2018, and an enhanced methodology was applied during the third phase of the cost analysis of European statistics by products in cooperation with the NSIs.

ESGAB takes note of this achievement and underlines that this process needs to be a continuous joint effort aimed at ensuring a

harmonised approach to the calculation of costs of statistics compiled in the ESS.

Commitments on confidence in statistics

ESGAB Recommendation 2017/11 asked Member States to adopt and publish commitments on confidence in statistics. Member States have reported back to Eurostat on the published commitments or, where appropriate, progress reports and Eurostat prepared a first report to the Council and the European Parliament. A second report is due in 2020.

ESGAB Recommendation 2018/9 advised the Commission and the ESS to agree on a minimum set of issues to be covered by the commitments on confidence in statistics and promote the delivery of stand-alone commitments by national governments. Eurostat monitors Member States' commitments or progress reports, as the case may be, as stipulated by Article 11(4) of Regulation 223/2009 and the delivery of stand-alone commitments will be covered in the Commission's reports to the European Parliament and to the Council, based on the same article. The next report will be delivered on 9 June 2020.

Eurostat underlined that Regulation 223/2009 refers to the scope and the form of the commitment in terms that are in line with the subsidiarity and proportionality principles. Recital 17 of Regulation 2015/759 amending Regulation 223/2009 provides further guidance on the contents of the commitments ('The Commitment, which should be updated as necessary, could include national high-quality assurance frameworks, including self-assessments, improvement actions and monitoring mechanisms') but without prescribing a minimum set of issues.

As the commitment on confidence should represent, in addition to the provisions of the national statistical legislation, a political

commitment by the governments in power to ensure that statistical activities are carried out in line with the CoP, ESGAB reiterates its preference for stand-alone commitments and encourages the European Commission and the ESS to promote the delivery of stand-alone commitments by national governments. ESGAB also underlines the importance of providing minimum standards to be covered by the commitments on confidence in statistics.

Moreover, ESGAB Recommendation 2018/10 stated that NSIs should ensure that national commitments on confidence are directly accessible from the homepage of the respective website or that the homepage makes a clear reference to the specific legislation.

According to Eurostat, the implementation of this recommendation is currently ongoing and it will be achieved during 2020, in the context of the annual report on peer-review improvement actions.

Improving the statistical literacy of European citizens

ESGAB Recommendation 2018/4 was that Eurostat and the NSIs step up their efforts to improve the statistical literacy of European citizens and to educate professional users (especially the media) in the correct use of statistics.

In order to comply with this recommendation, a variety of activities related to statistical literacy have been launched. They include: games, e-learning materials, the European Statistics Competition and engaging with the media (by means of a series of workshops) to prepare an outreach strategy for data journalists. The report on recommendations for outreach to data journalists will be published before November 2020.

Since 2017, Eurostat has, in close collaboration with the NSI of Spain, launched and coordinated the European Statistics Competition. For each annual competition cycle a large number of ESS members collaborate on identifying the topics, as well reaching out and engaging with education ministries, schools and teachers. Due to the success of the 2018 and 2019/20 editions, further editions are planned.

Eurostat plans to establish an e-learning corner on its website. This will comprise a set of e-learning tools, as a result of a collaboration between Eurostat and the NSI of Germany. It will also comprise links to statistical literacy tools, such as 'statistics for beginners'.

ESGAB takes note of these important developments and looks forward to hearing about their outcomes.

Identifying new skills needed in the European Statistical System

ESGAB Recommendation 2018/3 stipulated that Eurostat and the NSIs should work with experts in academia and the private sector to identify the new skills emerging and needed in the various fields of the ESS, and should make appropriate resources available to retrain current staff members in these key skills.

Eurostat carries out an annual consultation of NSIs on learning needs/skills in the context of establishing the European statistical training programme (ESTP). The 2019 catalogue already addressed new skills by offering a range of courses devoted to new production methods using multisource statistics, big data, model-based and algorithm-based estimation techniques, as well as data visualisation and communication skills.

Similarly, the 2020 catalogue will cover a range of subjects aimed at addressing the new skills needed and innovative learning methods, such as

webinars, in addition to the traditional classroom training sessions which continue to be important for exchange of best practices and networking among NSI staff.

ESGAB also recommended that Eurostat and NSIs should make appropriate resources available to retrain current staff members in these key skills.

In order to ensure that the training offer is constantly developed and adapted to changes in the work environment and that it addresses skills needed in the future, the annual programme's preparatory process involves receiving feedback from Eurostat units on new and current training needs resulting from developments in their statistical or methodological domains.

In parallel, a consultation asking about learning needs has been launched directly in Member States among the ESTP national contact points. Part of each course is an assessment relying on direct feedback by the participants, yielding generally high satisfaction rates. Concrete examples are ESTP courses such as 'Administrative data and censuses, moving from traditional censuses towards register-based and combined censuses', 'Writing statistical texts with an impact for different audiences' or 'The use of Python in official statistics'.

ESGAB takes note of the progress and looks forward to hearing about these measures' outcomes.

2.2. IMPLEMENTATION OF IMPROVEMENT ACTIONS ARISING FROM PEER-REVIEW RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The main objectives of the 2013-2015 peer reviews were to improve the efficiency and credibility of the ESS and strengthen its capacity to produce European statistics, as well as to provide reassurance to stakeholders about both the quality of European statistics and the trustworthiness of the system. This round of peer reviews focused on all 15 principles of the CoP and the coordinating role of the NSIs within their NSSs, following an audit-like methodology.

The independent peer reviewers also looked into the level of integration within the ESS and assessed a number of ONAs responsible for producing European statistics. The peer reviewers made 707 recommendations, which resulted in 910 improvement actions by the NSIs. ESGAB welcomes the fact that only 9 % of all recommendations issued by the peer-review teams concern non-compliance with the CoP, and the vast majority refer to improving compliance.

ESGAB notes the fact that 12 NSIs had a maximum of five actions open at the end of 2018, which confirms their commitment to achieving progress in this respect. It is also gratifying to observe that, at the end of 2017, two NSIs had completed all their improvement actions. However, no further NSIs reported completion of all actions in 2018.

ESGAB takes note of Eurostat's recommendation that NSIs re-examine the status of the 33 actions marked as 'continuous': if they were sustainably embedded in internal processes, they should be assessed as 'completed' as this would be more logical and potentially reduce the monitoring burden on the NSIs. However, ESGAB also believes that it would be important to monitor

implementation of those processes and therefore asks the ESS to pay attention to that point.

Progress with the implementation of improvement actions by national statistical institutes

The NSIs are fully responsible for the implementation of the improvement actions and they ensure the appropriateness, completeness and proper documentation of the actions.

In 2018, the NSIs completed 86 actions, in addition to the 530 improvement actions completed in 2016 and 2017 (which resulted in a total of 616 actions completed out of 910). However, three actions had not yet started at the end of 2018 when the monitoring was closed, which could be an issue given that all improvement actions should have been completed by end of 2019. It is also a matter of concern that 86 actions are delayed and 52 depend on further action to be taken by authorities outside of the NSIs.

The improvement actions completed in 2018 by various NSIs can be summarised by thematic area, as follows.

- **Governance and legal aspects; cooperation.** Examples include: putting in place clear provisions for the appointment and dismissal of the heads of the NSIs; monitoring and reporting of statistical activities.
- **Adequacy of resources and cost-effectiveness.** The actions targeted boosting staff motivation and improving cost-effectiveness.
- **Quality and methodology.** NSIs focused, among other things, on creating or reinforcing quality units or carrying out quality audits.
- **Burden reduction and administrative data.** Examples include: increased use of web for

surveys and written agreements on access to administrative data concluded with ONAs.

- **Impartiality and dissemination.** The actions aimed at improving the website and users' access to microdata.

ESGAB encourages the NSIs to pay particular attention to the remaining actions that depend on authorities outside the NSIs as well as delayed actions, and to advance with their completion.

The actions that depend on authorities outside the NSIs are usually the ones concerning proposals for new, or amendments to existing, legislation where the NSI is awaiting a reply from the competent political body, or issues regarding human or financial resources. In some cases, the NSI did not succeed in completing some of them for over 3 years. This issue had been flagged by ESGAB in its 2017 and 2018 reports, but the situation does not seem to have improved. ESGAB strongly supports NSI efforts towards the implementation of those actions and reiterates its request to national political authorities to ensure further progress in this respect.

Moreover, ESGAB advises that in the next peer-review exercise improvement actions be ranked according to their importance. In this way, it would be easier to analyse the progress of the implementation process.

ESGAB recognises the continued good progress made by the NSIs in the implementation of the improvement actions and the importance of persevering with their efforts in the future, especially taking into account that all improvement actions should have been completed by the end of 2019 before the new round of peer reviews starts in 2020.

2.3. ESGAB 2019 PEER-REVIEW RECOMMENDATIONS

2019/11 ESGAB recommends that, when preparing the final report on the 2013-2015 peer-review exercise at the end of 2020, Eurostat present an in-depth analysis of the whole exercise and in particular of the implementation of improvement actions, with categorisation of the different actions, risks identified and successes achieved.

2019/12 ESGAB calls on Eurostat, in collaboration with NSIs and potentially with other directorates-general of the Commission, to be proactive in ensuring progress with the implementation of those peer-review recommendations whose implementation depends on actions to be pursued at governmental level.

2019/13 As one of the outcomes of the next round of peer reviews, Eurostat should produce a mapping and an assessment of the different risks of non-compliance with each of the principles of the CoP.

2019/14 ESGAB recommends full transparency of the peer-review process, encouraging Member States and Eurostat to promote awareness of the methodology and to associate representatives of users at different stages of the process.

Annex 1: Principles of the European Statistics Code of Practice (as revised in 2017) ^[14]

Principle 1

Professional independence

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

Principle 1bis

Coordination and cooperation

NSIs and Eurostat ensure the coordination of all activities for the development, production and dissemination of European statistics at the level of the national statistical system and the ESS, respectively. Statistical authorities actively cooperate within the partnership of the ESS, so as to ensure the development, production and dissemination of European statistics.

Principle 2

Mandate for data collection and access to data

Statistical authorities have a clear legal mandate to collect and access information from multiple data sources for European statistical purposes. Administrations, enterprises and households,

and the public at large may be compelled by law to allow access to or deliver data for European statistical purposes at the request of statistical authorities.

Principle 3

Adequacy of resources

The resources available to statistical authorities are sufficient to meet European statistics requirements.

Principle 4

Commitment to quality

Statistical authorities are committed to quality. They systematically and regularly identify strengths and weaknesses to continuously improve process and output quality.

Principle 5

Statistical confidentiality and data protection

The privacy of data providers, the confidentiality of the information they provide, its use only for statistical purposes and the security of the data are absolutely guaranteed.

^[14] <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-catalogues/-/KS-02-18-142>

Principle 6

Impartiality and objectivity

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

Principle 7

Sound methodology

Sound methodology underpins quality statistics. This requires adequate tools, procedures and expertise.

Principle 8

Appropriate statistical procedures

Appropriate statistical procedures, implemented throughout the statistical processes, underpin quality statistics.

Principle 9

Non-excessive burden on respondents

The response burden is proportionate to the needs of the users and is not excessive for respondents. The statistical authorities monitor the response burden and set targets for its reduction over time.

Principle 10

Cost effectiveness

Resources are used effectively.

Principle 11

Relevance

European statistics meet the needs of users.

Principle 12

Accuracy and reliability

European statistics accurately and reliably portray reality.

Principle 13

Timeliness and punctuality

European statistics are released in a timely and punctual manner.

Principle 14

Coherence and comparability

European statistics are consistent internally, over time and comparable between regions and countries; it is possible to combine and make joint use of related data from different data sources.

Principle 15

Accessibility and clarity

European statistics are presented in a clear and understandable form, released in a suitable and convenient manner, available and accessible on an impartial basis with supporting metadata and guidance.

Annex 2: Glossary

About the European Statistical Governance Advisory Board (ESGAB)

ESGAB provides an independent overview of the implementation of the CoP. It seeks to enhance the professional independence, integrity and accountability of the ESS, key elements of the CoP and the quality of European statistics.

Its tasks include the preparation of an annual report for the Parliament and the Council on the implementation of the CoP by Eurostat and the ESS as a whole. ESGAB also advises the Commission (Eurostat) on appropriate measures to facilitate implementation.

All of ESGAB's reports are available on its homepage (<https://ec.europa.eu/esgab/>).

European Statistical System (ESS)

The ESS ⁽¹⁵⁾ is a partnership between the European Union's statistical authority, i.e. the Commission (Eurostat), and the NSIs and ONAs responsible in each Member State for the development, production and dissemination of European statistics.

European Statistics Code of Practice (CoP)

The European statistics CoP ⁽¹⁶⁾ sets the standards for developing, producing and disseminating European statistics. It builds on a common definition of quality in statistics used in the ESS. The CoP is a self-regulatory instrument containing 15 principles which

address the institutional environment in which national and EU statistical authorities operate, and the production and dissemination of European statistics. Its implementation is supported by a set of indicators of good practice for each principle.

The CoP was adopted by the Statistical Programme Committee in 2005; it was revised by the ESSC in 2011 and again in 2017.

Peer reviews

Peer reviews ⁽¹⁷⁾ are part of the ESS strategy to implement the European statistics CoP. The objective is to enhance the integrity, independence and accountability of ESS statistical authorities.

The first round of peer reviews was carried out from 2006 to 2008, followed by a second round from 2013 to 2015. Both rounds covered all EU Member States and EFTA states. ESGAB carried out a peer review of Eurostat in 2014 using the methodology developed for the NSI peer reviews, with some adaptations to reflect Eurostat's specific role in the ESS.

⁽¹⁵⁾ <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/european-statistical-system/overview>

⁽¹⁶⁾ <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/quality/european-statistics-code-of-practice>

⁽¹⁷⁾ <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/quality/peer-reviews>

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