



EUROPEAN
STATISTICAL
SYSTEM

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European Statistical System Peer Reviews

Third round: 2021-2023

**Annex on the harmonisation of results of the
peer reviews**

Introduction: need for greater harmonisation of the peer review results

When analysing the lessons learnt from the second round of European Statistical System (ESS) peer reviews, the modest level of harmonisation of the peer review results (mainly referring to the recommendations contained in the peer review reports) was one of the most prominent issues. The efforts deployed in the second round of ESS peer reviews to achieve a better harmonisation of the peer review recommendations were manifold. They included the use of standardised documents like standard self-assessment questionnaires, a report template, a standard agenda for the peer review visit as well as the engagement of an additional expert tasked to review systematically all peer review reports and to provide some guidance and proposals for future reports. However, these efforts did not result in the desired level of harmonisation of the results.

In the many discussions leading to the development and endorsement of the methodology for the third round of the ESS peer reviews it was stated repeatedly that a greater harmonisation of the recommendations issued for the national statistical authorities after each peer review should be targeted and additional measures should be taken. This need was expressed also in view of the fact that more harmonised recommendations across the ESS would lead to a better acceptance of the peer review reports and the recommendations contained therein and may even have the potential to trigger the definition of common improvement actions for the ESS.

Measures to achieve an increased harmonisation

In order to address the declared need for an increased harmonisation of the peer review results, measures need to be taken at all stages of the peer review process – before the peer review visit starts, during the peer review visit and to a lesser extent after the peer review visit.

These are:

I. Development of standards to be applied in the peer review process:

1. Standard documentation available before the peer review
 - a standard self-assessment questionnaire to be filled in by each national statistical authority participating in the peer review,
 - a standard list of evidence documents to be provided together with each self-assessment questionnaire,
 - a template for the agenda of the peer review visit,
 - a template for a peer review report with a standard structure;
2. Standards for application in the implementation phase of the peer review
 - training of peer review experts on common concepts and the methodology, including guidance for developing and formulating recommendations for the national statistical authorities,
 - intermediate workshops for peer review experts and chairs of the peer review expert teams to learn from experience;
3. Reviewing peer review reports after the peer review visit aiming at harmonisation in the use of language and of formats and at checking the report to be in line with the standard structure.

II. *Observers from Eurostat in a selected number of peer review visits:*

The role of an observer from Eurostat is established to separate the function of the Eurostat expert being an integral part of the peer review expert team and the function of an observer from Eurostat.

The observer monitors the peer review process in general and supports the process of identifying and formulating recommendations for improvement. In this way, the observer facilitates that the results of the peer reviews are increasingly harmonised across the countries.

The role of an observer is taken by colleagues from Eurostat with a very thorough knowledge of the peer review methodology and familiarity with the process, namely:

1) the Director of Directorate B: Standards; Dissemination; Cooperation in the European Statistical System

2) the Head of the Eurostat Task Force on Peer Reviews and Quality and possibly, if needed

3) another person from the Eurostat Task Force on Peer Reviews and Quality.

These Eurostat colleagues possess the necessary knowledge and capacity to facilitate the work of the peer review expert teams and to support them in their harmonisation efforts.

The Eurostat observer finally, inspires the team so that peer review reports reflect the country context rather than the context of the experts being part of the peer review expert team.

Implementation arrangements

The Eurostat observers will follow and monitor a selected number of peer reviews by participating in the peer review visit. The decision on which peer review visit to accompany by an observer from Eurostat is taken by Eurostat. A condition for an observer to participate in the peer review visit is that the reviewed NSI in principle agrees with the participation of the observer. Criteria for the decision to send an observer to a peer review visit are:

- each peer review expert team should be accompanied by an observer from Eurostat at least once,
- need to address potential issues in the implementation of the peer reviews impacting harmonisation of the approach,
- putting more emphasis on the country context, and
- others (defined during the implementation of the peer reviews).

The reviewed country and the peer review expert team will be informed in due time, at least 4 weeks before the peer review visit takes place, if an observer will participate in the peer review visit. No further arrangements need to be done by the reviewed country, except that the number of participants from the side of the peer review expert team increases from four to five.

The Eurostat observer will have the following tasks during the peer review visit:

- to observe the implementation and application of the methodology for the third round of ESS peer reviews;
- to support the peer review expert team in the peer review process in view of an increased harmonisation of the approach and results;

- to facilitate the work of the peer review expert team when the team develops recommendations in the course of the peer review visit, on the basis of his/her knowledge of the peer review process, already implemented peer review visits and produced reports;
- to propose formulations for recommendations or grouping in broad issues during the daily de-briefing meetings of the peer review expert team;
- to collect ideas for lessons learnt from the process and reports;
- to collect ideas and topics for discussion at the workshops planned for the chairs and the peer review experts and thus to ensure that harmonisation is on the agenda of the peer review expert teams throughout the peer review process;
- to coordinate a network of chairs and peer review experts to pass on harmonisation ideas/guidance;
- to be an entry point for questions from peer review experts and chairs;
- to identify weaknesses/shortcomings in the process and methodology and take them back to the peer review expert workshops, the ESS Task Force on Peer Reviews and the ESSC if changes in the methodology are needed;
- to collect suggestions and ideas for a potential revision of the European statistics Code of Practice from discussions during the peer review visits.

Eurostat will report on the findings of the observers and on possibly identified changes to the methodology documents, if necessary, as well as on other observations on the peer review process to the ESS Task Force on peer reviews and subsequently to the ESSC. Eurostat will further use the collected information to inform the peer review expert teams and chairs accordingly, in particular during the workshops planned in 2022 and 2023.

The Eurostat observer will **not**:

- interfere in the work of the peer review expert team;
- raise ideas and proposals in the final meeting with the senior management of the reviewed NSI, when the peer review expert team presents the recommendations;
- ask questions or raise issues in the meetings held by the peer review expert team with the NSI and other stakeholders of the process.