

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Executive summary

This year's European Statistical Governance Advisory Board (ESGAB) annual report analyses the way the European Statistical System (ESS) has responded when faced with one of the greatest challenges of its existence: the COVID-19 crisis.

As described in Chapter 1 of the report, the ESS's response has been extremely positive: notwithstanding the huge operational and methodological issues addressed, the continuity of key indicators has been ensured and new surveys have been launched to gain a better understanding of the behaviours of individuals, communities, companies and public and private institutions in response to the crisis. The report underlines the challenges the ESS will have to face in order to consolidate these actions and to respond to the new questions raised by the crisis. These challenges concern the timeliness and comparability of key economic and social indicators, which may need deeper revisions and further interpretation. They also concern the new data and indicators needed for an adequate assessment of the effects of the crisis in the gender, intergenerational, social and health dimensions.

Chapter 2 of the report analyses the following four actions undertaken by the European Commission, which will have significant impacts on the future of the ESS.

— **A European data strategy.** This reflects the EU's aspiration to be a global leader in a digital world where data are a key asset. The approach adopted is the development of an EU-wide strategy for data to harness the benefits of the digital world. This involves the creation of data sets, digital connectivity, processing and storage of data, increased computing power and strong cybersecurity.

— **The European Green Deal.** This is the new strategy to make the EU climate neutral and protect the environment. It aims to transform the EU into a fair, inclusive and prosperous society, with a modern, resource-efficient and competitive economy where there are no net emissions of greenhouse gases by 2050 and where economic growth is decoupled from resource use. The European Green Deal also aims to protect, conserve and enhance the EU's natural capital and protect the public from environment-related risks and impacts.

— **The new European semester and the preparation of the recovery and resilience plans.** The new focus of the European semester aims to support an economic agenda that will transform the EU into a sustainable economy, helping the EU and its Member States to achieve the United Nations' sustainable development goals (SDGs), to which they are committed. Moreover, the agreed strategy will take into account the crisis resulting from the COVID-19 outbreak and incorporate the national recovery and resilience plans, which need to focus strongly on both reforms and investments supporting the green transition, the digital transition and increased fairness.

— **Resilience as a new compass for EU policies.** The Commission presented its strategy to integrate strategic foresight into EU policymaking, to introduce resilience as a new guiding principle for EU policymaking.

The report describes the most important consequences of all these policy initiatives for the ESS in the years to come, not only in terms of the need to produce additional statistics and indicators, but also in terms of the need to ensure strong coordination of national statistical systems, as several statistics are and will continue to be produced by national statistical institutes (NSIs) along with other national authorities (ONAs, i.e. other entities, apart from the NSIs, designated by Member States as responsible for the production of official statistics).

Finally, Chapter 3 describes how the ESS is approaching its third round of peer reviews on compliance with the European statistics code of practice (CoP), with the objective of strengthening the ESS's alignment with its own common quality principles. The chapter highlights the new features of the peer-review process, which incorporate most of the ESGAB proposals described in the 2019 report, and discusses the actions undertaken by the ESS in response to previous ESGAB recommendations.

ESGAB 2020 Recommendations

2020/1. ESGAB recommends that the ESS consolidate the solutions found during the pandemic period to develop new statistical and data sources in order to ensure the continuity of statistical production and address the new questions raised by the crisis. The ESS should also continue to communicate in a coordinated manner on all measures taken to tackle the challenges arising from the COVID-19 crisis.

2020/2. ESGAB recommends that the ESS deepen and extend the efforts made to ensure the timeliness and comparability of key economic and social indicators, recognising a possible need for deeper revisions and further interpretation at a later stage.

2020/3. ESGAB recommends that the ESS develop additional statistics and indicators to allow for a better assessment of the impact of COVID-19 on economic, social and environmental phenomena, especially concerning economic prospects and the inequalities in the gender, intergenerational, social and health dimensions that have been highlighted by the crisis.

2020/4. ESGAB recommends that the ESS develop a coordinated approach to retain and strengthen trust in official statistics, at the national and EU levels, by implementing a transparent and proactive approach to communication with all types of users, on both methodological and emerging issues. In this regard, a survey on the public's trust in official statistics should be launched, using Eurobarometer, as done in the past.

2020/5. ESGAB recommends that the European Statistical System Committee (ESSC) be involved, possibly in a leadership role, in the discussions on the creation of a legislative framework for the governance of common European data spaces to avoid duplication and any potential confusion in relation to implementation that could undermine European statistics, and to ensure wide recognition of the value of public data.

2020/6. ESGAB recommends that the Commission propose a significant investment in digital infrastructure for statistical purposes, as well as in digital skills and general data literacy in the EU.

2020/7. ESGAB recommends that Eurostat and the NSIs develop a medium-term statistical action plan to develop the data sets and indicators needed to underpin the European Green Deal and the other policy initiatives agreed by the EU for the next 5 years. The action plan could be supported by a special financing heading in the NextGenerationEU initiative, at both the EU and the national level.

2020/8. ESGAB recommends that, as data relevant for some policy areas are produced by ONAs, the ESSC strengthen the coordination of the whole ESS, to ensure full respect for, and adherence to, the CoP by all data producers.

2020/9. As some data needed to assess the impact of the European Green Deal on economic, social and environmental phenomena may require the extensive use of models, ESGAB recommends that the ESS develop standards on how to develop model-based statistics and indicators and communicate them to users.

2020/10. ESGAB recommends that during the upcoming round of peer reviews the ESS pay special attention to the composition of the peer-review expert teams to ensure both a high level of statistical and managerial skills and full impartiality.

2020/11. ESGAB recommends that during the upcoming round of peer reviews the ESS place a strong emphasis on the compliance by ONAs with the CoP, along with the way in which national legislation and actual practices deal with the coordination and functioning of the national statistical systems, including the role of users.

2020/12. ESGAB recommends that during the upcoming round of peer reviews, when assessing compliance with indicators 1.2 and 1.8 of Principle 1 of the CoP, the ESS pay attention not only to the legal framework for the appointment and dismissal of the heads of NSIs, but also to the actual procedures and practices, and identify any related risks.

2020/13. ESGAB recommends that Eurostat, in cooperation with ESGAB, improve the system for monitoring the appointment and dismissal of the heads of NSIs, including through an early warning mechanism, a detailed specification of the reasons for every appointment or dismissal and a procedure for response by the appropriate body (the Commission, Eurostat, ESGAB, etc.) should doubts arise