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Evidence based decision making demands high quality data: statistics are worth investing in

In its 2015 report the European Statistical Governance Advisory Board (ESGAB) urges governments to ensure that the necessary resources are made available to meet current statistical demands and, most importantly, to allow investment in future developments. Martti Hetemäki, ESGAB Chair, says that "*The European Union is fairly unique in the degree to which its policies are based on statistics. The quality of European statistics needs to be ensured through compliance with high professional standards in all Member States*".

EU and national policies increasingly rely on statistical indicators to monitor quantitative targets. Reliable, impartial and high quality official statistics are thus an essential element of EU and Member States' infrastructure that need continuous investment. It is vital that decision makers adequately resource Eurostat and the national statistical institutes so that they can accomplish their mission of producing high quality statistics. More transparency about costs to produce statistics would alleviate a "free rider problem" i.e. a situation where public goods are under-provided because the good can be consumed by paying little or nothing towards the cost. Eurostat and the national statistical producers benefiting from state budget to fund public goods must be able to demonstrate the costs of their statistical outputs and services, notably by adopting effective cost-accounting systems.

The European Statistical System (ESS) has to maintain a high quality of statistics while adapting to fast-moving changes in society. The ESS is facing an ongoing data revolution which poses challenges for official statistics. The ESS must lead efforts to explore new opportunities and adapt its quality frameworks. Furthermore, in some countries the process of regionalisation implies the transfer of responsibilities to regional and local authorities. National statistical institutes in such countries must be equipped with a strong leadership role and effective coordination powers to be able to uphold the principles of the European Statistics Code of Practice.

The credibility of evidence based decision making is built on trust in the objectivity and integrity of official statistics. Thus, users' perception of the quality of statistics is of paramount importance in the EU Member States. In this context, ESGAB urges the Greek Government to actively build and maintain a climate of trust in the Hellenic Statistical System. Keeping ELSTAT on the path of professional independence is crucially important to prevent events from early 2000 and 2009 from reoccurring.

Finally, part of the report is devoted to monitoring Eurostat's progress on improvement actions stemming from last year's peer review recommendations; Eurostat is found to be on track with the improvement plan. However, ESGAB maintains its position on recommendations subject to a diverging¹ view as regards the recruitment and dismissal of Eurostat's Director General and senior management.

¹ Please see report section 3.1

Further information

The 2015 report with a short executive summary is available on ESGAB's homepage (<http://ec.europa.eu/esgab/>).

Contact for media assistance

To arrange an interview with the ESGAB Chair, Mr Martti Hetemäki, please contact the ESGAB Secretariat: Heli Lehtimäki (estat-esgab@ec.europa.eu), tel. +352 4301-36484.

About ESGAB

ESGAB² provides an independent overview of the implementation of the Code of Practice. It seeks to enhance the professional independence, integrity and accountability of the European Statistical System, key elements of the Code, and the quality of European statistics. ESGAB has seven members. Its tasks include the preparation of an annual report to the European Parliament and the Council on the implementation of the Code by Eurostat and the European Statistical System as a whole. ESGAB also advises the Commission (Eurostat) on appropriate measures to facilitate implementation.

European Statistics Code of Practice (the Code)

The European Statistics Code of Practice³ sets the standards for developing, producing and disseminating European statistics. It builds on a common definition of quality in statistics used in the European Statistical System (ESS, composed of national statistical authorities and Eurostat). The Code 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 **European Statistical System**⁴ (ESS) is a partnership between the European Union's statistical authority, i.e. the Commission (Eurostat), and the national statistical institutes (NSIs) and other national authorities (ONAs) responsible in each Member State for the development, production and dissemination of European statistics.

Peer reviews

Peer reviews⁵ are part of the European Statistical System strategy to implement the Code of Practice. The objective is to enhance the integrity, independence and accountability of ESS statistical authorities. A first round of peer reviews was carried out in 2006-2008; a second round launched in December 2013 is still ongoing. Both rounds cover all EU Member States and EFTA countries. European Statistical Governance Advisory Board (ESGAB) carried out a peer review of Eurostat by the using the methodology developed for the NSI peer reviews with some adaptations reflecting Eurostat's specificities.

² <http://ec.europa.eu/esgab>.

³ <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/quality/european-statistics-code-of-practice>.

⁴ <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/european-statistical-system/overview>.

⁵ <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/quality/peer-reviews>.