



EUROPEAN
STATISTICAL
SYSTEM

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European Statistical System Peer Reviews

Third round: 2021-2023

**Guide for the National Statistical Institutes and
Other National Authorities participating in the
peer review**

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Table of Contents

1	Introduction	1
2	Background to the European Statistical System peer reviews	1
3	Framework for the ESS peer reviews	2
3.1	The objectives of the peer reviews	2
3.2	The scope of the peer reviews	2
3.3	The approach	3
4	The involvement of Other National Authorities (ONAs)	4
5	Costs	5
6	Language	6
7	Communication	6
8	Training	8
9	Roles and responsibilities	8
9.1	The NSI	8
9.2	The ONAs	9
9.3	The peer review experts	10
9.4	The contractors	11
10	Tools for the self-assessment phase and peer review visit	13
11	Assessment criteria	15
12	The peer review process and timeline	16
13	Preparation of the peer review	22
13.1	Organisational aspects	22
13.2	Logistics	26
13.3	Internal preparation	26
13.4	Documentation	27
14	Peer review visit	28
15	Debriefing	30
16	Peer review report and recommendations	31
17	Improvement actions	32
List of annexes:		33
	Annex I: Information and core documents to be provided by the NSIs/ONAs	33
	Annex II: Template for the agenda of the peer review visit	33
	Annex III: Structure for the peer review report	33
	Annex IV: Procedure for defining improvement actions	33
	Annex V: Questions by interlocutor	33
	Annex VI: Formulation of issues and recommendations	33

1 Introduction

The third round of European Statistical System (ESS) peer reviews will be carried out from 2021 to mid-2023 in the Member States of the European Union and of the European Free Trade Area. It aims at improving quality and trust in European Statistics by assessing the compliance of the ESS with the principles of the European Statistics Code of Practice (ES CoP). It will cover the ESS statistical authorities (Eurostat, the National Statistical Institutes (NSIs) and the selected Other National Authorities (ONAs)) developing, producing and disseminating European Statistics. The peer reviews will be followed by a period of annual monitoring of the implementation of the improvement actions developed to address the recommendations provided in the peer review reports.

This Guide together with its annexes aims to facilitate the work of the NSIs and ONAs in terms of preparing, executing and following up on the peer review. Some of the information is mentioned in several chapters, so they can also be studied as stand-alone chapters. This documentation is complemented by a series of workshops. The intention is to ensure that the peer review visits as well as the reports and recommendations are carried out in a standardised and harmonised way, not to compare countries, but to ensure equal treatment in order to present an objective and coherent picture across the ESS.

It should be noted that the peer review methodology and the corresponding guides were developed in close collaboration between Eurostat and the NSIs of EU Member States and EFTA countries and agreed by all actors.

2 Background to the European Statistical System peer reviews

It is recognised that quality is one of the ESS comparative advantages in a world experiencing a growing trend of instant information and new challenges such as the situation created by the impact of Covid-19. The ES CoP is the cornerstone of the ESS common quality framework, and ESS statistical authorities have committed themselves to adhere to the ES CoP. The importance of compliance with the ES CoP was further underlined by the adoption of the Quality Declaration by the European Statistical System Committee (ESSC) in September 2016.

In this context, it is crucial for the ESS to be equipped with an ES CoP review mechanism, the peer reviews, supporting with credible evidence this self-commitment to adhere to the ES CoP. The objective of this review mechanism is to enhance the integrity, professional independence and accountability of the ESS statistical authorities. The first round of peer reviews was carried out in 2006-2008, followed by a second round in 2013-2015. Both rounds covered Eurostat and the statistical authorities of all EU Member States and EFTA countries. The European Statistical Governance Advisory Board (ESGAB) carried out the peer review of Eurostat in 2014, using the methodology developed for National Statistical System peer reviews, with some light adaptations reflecting Eurostat's specific characteristics.

After the revision of the ES CoP in 2016-2017 and its adoption by the ESS Committee in November 2017, the compliance/alignment of the NSIs, ONAs and Eurostat with the principles of this revised ES CoP need to be re-assessed. The ESS has therefore decided to carry out a third round of peer reviews along similar lines to the previous rounds according to the objectives listed below.

3 Framework for the ESS peer reviews

3.1 The objectives of the peer reviews

The third round of peer reviews has the following two objectives:

- To review the compliance/alignment of the ESS with the ES CoP, in order to demonstrate to the ESS and to external stakeholders that the ESS is a system based on the principles of the ES CoP;
- To help NSIs, ONAs and Eurostat in their further improvement and development by indicating future-oriented recommendations; at the same time they should stimulate government authorities to support the implementation of these recommendations.

Both objectives target internal and external (to the ESS) stakeholders; they have therefore an internal and external dimension. The internal dimension covers the review of compliance/alignment with the ES CoP, progress achieved since the second round of peer reviews and improvements inside the NSIs, ONAs, Eurostat and the ESS/National Statistical System (NSS), i.e. something that is inherent to the ESS, and can be achieved by the ESS itself. The external dimension covers in the broadest sense all external stakeholders' active involvement in the implementation of the peer review recommendations and the related improvement actions. It is thus, more difficult to achieve as it reaches beyond the authority of the NSIs and Eurostat to mainly government bodies. However, the external dimension is considered particularly important as public trust in official statistics needs to be strengthened and the statistics demonstrated to be dependable. Therefore, an extensive communication campaign will highlight and promote the usefulness and necessity of the external dimension.

3.2 The scope of the peer reviews

Since the last round of peer reviews, the ES CoP has been reviewed and extended. This is reflected in the peer review, both in the Self-Assessment Questionnaires (SAQ) and in the visit itself.

Therefore, the third round of ESS peer reviews:

- Covers all 16 Principles of the ES CoP;

- Differentiates the focus/emphasis of assessing the principles between the self-assessment phase and the peer review visit, depending on the institutional set-up and specific situation of each NSS. While in the self-assessment phase all principles are assessed as they are equally important, the peer review expert team has the possibility to decide, for each country, on which principles it will focus during the visit. The criteria for the basis of this decision can be found under Chapter 13 of this *Guide* and under Chapter 9.1: Collection and analysis of information of the “*Guide for peer review experts*”.

The principle on Professional Independence and the principle on Coordination and cooperation as well as principles including elements of modernisation (principles 2, 4, 7, 8, 15) will be assessed for every member of the ESS (see more detail in annex II Template for the agenda of the peer review visit);

- Identifies advancement and progress of the NSIs/ONAs/Eurostat in complying/aligning with the principles of the ES CoP, compared to the second round of peer reviews;
- Covers Eurostat, the NSIs and selected ONAs in all EU Member States and EFTA countries;
- Ensures that the NSIs in their coordination role in the NSS decide which ONAs are selected for participation in the peer review. The NSIs will send the list of participating ONAs to Eurostat with an explanatory note outlining the procedure and reasons for these ONAs to be part of the peer review.
- Endeavors to identify elements/recommendations to be addressed to the ESS in general that will contribute to an enhanced partnership in the ESS;
- Does not aim to assess the quality of specific statistical products, because other mechanisms exist to assess compliance with the applicable legislation for every statistical product (e.g. Gross National Income).

It should be noted that the ESS Quality Assurance Framework (ESS QAF) has been updated to reflect the changes in the ES CoP and, although it will not be used as a benchmark, it can provide useful guidance/will be a reference document for the third round of ESS peer reviews.

3.3 The approach

A combination of an audit-like and a peer reviewing approach is used when assessing the countries in order to benefit from the positive aspects of both approaches.

The following elements from an audit-like approach are applied:

- Involvement of external experts to guarantee the credibility and objectivity of the peer reviews;
- The provision of documents as evidence for statements;
- The ownership of the recommendations by the peer review expert team;
- The right for the NSIs to express diverging views on the recommendations for improvement as formulated by the peer review expert team; diverging views will be published together with the peer review report;

- The responsibility of the NSI to formulate (in cooperation with ONAs and other stakeholders) the improvement actions to address the recommendations in the peer review report.

The following elements of a peer review approach are used:

- Common agreement within the ESS on the methodology of the peer reviews, including the objectives, scope and implementation arrangements;
- Participation of experts from the NSIs (peers) in the peer review expert teams, including from among the senior management of the NSIs;
- Peer learning through the involvement of experts from the NSIs and potentially the ONAs;
- Focus of the peer review report on broad issues identified by the peer review experts for each NSI and participating ONAs rather than on principles – this is aimed at showing the bigger picture behind the individual principles/indicators, demonstrating how they relate to each other in practice and rendering the reports more strategic;
- Focus on improvements as an objective of the reviews.

4 The involvement of Other National Authorities (ONAs)

The ONAs are an integral part of the ESS and as such they are to be considered as authorities that comply with the ES CoP. The ONAs should follow national guidelines to be issued if necessary by heads of NSIs, in exercising their coordination role of the NSS, with regard to the development, production and dissemination of European Statistics. Furthermore, their ‘statistical heads’ should enjoy a similar level of professional independence as heads of NSIs in terms of procedures applicable to their recruitment, transfer and dismissal. Lastly, ONAs have the responsibility for the quality assurance of statistics produced by them and are entitled to transmit results directly to Eurostat.

In previous rounds, the participation of ONAs in the peer reviews was considered extremely beneficial. On the one hand, it helps forge closer cooperation within the NSSs and, on the other hand, it helps raise the participating ONAs’ awareness of the ES CoP and of the ONAs’ important role in the production of European Statistics.

Therefore, a review of ONAs is also foreseen in this round of peer reviews. Participating in the peer review can bring many benefits to the ONAs such as a more structured and efficient coordination by the NSI and a greater integration into the NSS. The peer review provides an opportunity for ONAs to express their views and concerns both when completing the SAQ and when participating in the peer review visit. In the case where the recommendations are addressed to the ONAs, this should translate into improved and modernised/upgraded/enhanced statistics, i.e. an improvement in the quality.

However, due to the limited duration and resources of the peer reviews, it may not be possible to review all ONAs. The final selection of the participating ONAs is the responsibility of the NSI. It is also the NSIs' responsibility to decide on the number and character of the selection criteria as well as on the decision method. Each NSI should select between three to six ONAs to take part in the peer review, but the final number of participating ONAs is subject to the national set-up and discretion, and can be below three or above six, if duly explained and justified.

Five to six months before the peer review visit, the NSI should send an explanatory note to Eurostat to notify which ONAs will participate in the peer review and to provide an explanation for this choice.

For the participating ONAs it is important to stress that during this round of peer reviews, their presence is envisaged to be more active and they should be included in all stages of the process (preparation, peer review visit, peer review report, identifying improvement actions) and supported by the NSIs.

A separate, shorter SAQ has been developed for the ONAs. The SAQ for ONAs remains at the level of the principles of the ES CoP; there are no questions appertaining to the indicators except for principle 1bis. As well as the completed SAQ, ONAs will be requested to provide certain core documents (see Annex I).

However, if deemed useful/appropriate by the NSI, the ONAs could be required to fill in the longer SAQ initially designed for the NSIs. In fact, this is a third version of the SAQ which has been adapted to ONAs needs: the questions concerning principle 1bis having been modified to correspond to the ONAs. This version of the SAQ will not be published on Eurostat's website and is only available on demand from Eurostat. It should be noted that if a country decides to have the modified version of the NSI SAQ completed by the ONAs, the number of ONAs should be limited so as to keep the workload for the peer review experts at a manageable level.

The specific responsibilities of the ONAs in the peer review are defined in Chapter 9.2.

Furthermore, the ONAs may have recommendations addressed to them by the peer review experts. In this case, the ONAs should work together with the NSIs to formulate corresponding improvement actions and to participate in the subsequent implementation and monitoring of these actions. However, the final decision regarding the improvement actions belongs to the NSIs in their role as the coordinator of the NSS.

5 Costs

The NSI/ONAs will bear their own costs incurred as part of the peer review.

6 Language

The language of the peer review (both for the SAQs and the peer review visit itself) is English. The NSI and ONAs must ensure that all those participating in the peer review have the necessary level of knowledge of English. If this is not the case, interpreters must be foreseen for the peer review visit. Documentary evidence or a summary of the content of requested documents must be provided in English.

7 Communication

Continuous and targeted internal and external communication concerning the objectives of the peer reviews, the process itself and subsequent results is key to ensuring that the recommendations are accepted by the NSI/Eurostat, the ONAs and the relevant government authorities and that support by the governmental authorities is provided for the implementation of the recommendations where necessary.

Through the service of a specialised contractor, Eurostat ensures the organisation of a professional external communication campaign, including a communication strategy and communication material. However, the internal country communication remains under the responsibility of the individual NSIs.

It is therefore recommended that the NSIs nominate a communication officer. The communication officer could be part of the national coordination desk or be the same person as the national peer review coordinator or any other person. It is the responsibility of the NSI to decide on the most suitable set-up for such a function and to define the collaboration with all national stakeholders depending on the specifics of the national set up. The tasks and responsibilities of the communication officer are subject to the national set-up but include the participation in the workshop for the communication officers organised by the specialised contractor and could potentially include adapting communication material to the national set up, their distribution to stakeholders and actively running the communication campaign on the peer review in the country.

It should be noted that the external communication should not only cover the peer review process itself, but also needs to take a broader perspective and:

- Promote the value of European statistics, as evidenced by the ESS response to data needs related to COVID-19, and raise awareness among certain target groups;
- Demonstrate the commitment of the ESS to the principles of the ES CoP;
- Demonstrate the importance of peer reviews in maintaining the quality, trustworthiness and usefulness of European statistics.

The role of the NSIs in external communication is essential for targeting the right audience with the right message at the right moment. These elements were taken into account when developing the communication strategy and the external communication material.

The internal communication to be organised by the NSI targets staff inside the NSI and the ONAs. In preparing for the peer review, the already ongoing communication on the ES CoP should be reinforced by an active promotion campaign inside the NSI and vis-à-vis ONAs to provide a better understanding of the ES CoP, its importance and impact on their daily work. This could be done by organising internal workshops, presentations, publishing articles on the intranet, creating a specific section on the Intranet for the peer review, etc. The benefits of the peer review and how it can help to bring about (sometimes long-awaited) improvements should also be highlighted, especially to junior staff.

Communication should continue throughout the entire peer review process. Filling in the SAQ, gathering of the relevant documentation and organisation of the peer review visit should be a collective exercise to involve as many staff as possible and feasible and to inform them about the process. Junior staff should be informed in particular about the purpose of the peer review to prepare it for the specific meeting with the peer review expert team. This continuous communication on the peer review process will also serve the declared purpose of the peer review to encourage internal reflection and improvements.

After the finalisation of the peer review report, staff should be informed about the report through presentations and the Intranet and be – to the extent possible – involved in / informed about the design and discussions on the improvement actions.

A specific communication approach has to be applied to the participating ONAs to prepare them for their involvement in the peer review and, after the finalisation of the peer review report, provide them with feedback on the peer review results and follow-up.

However, communication is not a one-way channel (from the NSI to the ONAs) and the peer review provides an opportunity to the ONAs to air their views and concerns, which may be different from those of the NSI, and equally important.



Hints and tips:

For internal communication within the NSI:

- Schedule informative sessions and seminars with a specific focus on new and junior staff.

For communication within the country, the NSI could:

- Discuss with the corresponding collegiate bodies (e.g. council or committee of producers) on the peer review.
- Remind the ONAs of the details of the process via specific communication and encourage them to cooperate.
- Organise a specific meeting with each ONA who will fill in the SAQ to explain the benefits.

8 Training

Three specific training sessions are foreseen for the NSIs:

- A 2-day workshop for the communication officers of the NSIs on communicating the value of European statistics linked to peer reviews – to take place in early 2021;
- A 2-day workshop for the national peer review coordinators on the methodology, completing the SAQs, preparing the peer review visit etc. – to take place in early 2021;
- A 2-day lessons learned workshop for peer review experts and all national peer review coordinators at the end of the whole peer review process with the aim to identify and document the lessons learned and provide recommendations for the methodology and implementation aspects of any future peer reviews in the ESS – to take place in 2023/2024.

9 Roles and responsibilities

9.1 The NSI

The peer review targets the NSS. However, it is the NSI, as the coordinating authority within the NSS, which is ultimately responsible for the process. This responsibility includes:

- Appointment of a national peer review coordinator to manage relations with the ONAs, Eurostat, the peer review experts, the contractor and any other stakeholders. If deemed necessary, the national peer review coordinator has the mandate to represent the NSI in contacts with all stakeholders at all peer review phases. The national peer review coordinator may be supported by a national coordination desk;
- Selection of the ONAs to complete the SAQ and to participate in the peer review visit and request for nomination of a local coordinator in the selected ONAs;
- For meetings with stakeholders, decision on the appropriate level of representation and number of people to be invited;

- Ensuring the appropriate representation and involvement of the ONAs and other stakeholders in the process;
- Transmission of SAQ, guidelines and other templates to the selected ONAs;
- Completion of the SAQ for NSI and collecting the corresponding documentation;
- Coordination of the work on filling-in the SAQs (both from the NSI and ONAs) and the provision of the necessary documentation; transmission of SAQs and necessary documentation to the contractor with the Eurostat Task Force on peer reviews and quality (TF.PRQ) in copy;
- Organisation of venue and logistics for the peer review visit;
- Preparation of the agenda for the peer review visit and coordination with all stakeholders;
- Revision of the draft final report (checking for factual errors, indicating diverging views) and consultation of ONAs when necessary;
- Organisation translation/interpretation facilities if needed;
- Drafting improvement actions for the NSI and taking ownership of their implementation;
- Coordination in setting up the improvement actions for ONAs and in the monitoring phase;
- Follow up the implementation and report on identified measures for the NSIs and ONAs.



Hints and tips:

- NSIs to organise seminars/workshops for the ONAs.
- NSIs could use the peer review as an opportunity to communicate on the ES CoP with all ONAs.
- Support of ONAs when filling in the SAQ can lead to important discussions.

9.2 The ONAs

For the ONAs, the peer review provides an opportunity for the assessment of their compliance with the ES CoP. It will also allow a frank discussion to air their views and opinions on the cooperation between themselves and the NSI, to indicate areas of concern and to set out their ideas for improvement.

An essential pre-condition before the start of the peer review is the nomination of a local coordinator by the ONA – this should be the Statistical Head of the ONA, if appointed as such. The coordinator will coordinate the work inside the ONA and be the contact point for the ONA, cooperating closely with the national peer review coordinator. However, it is the NSI in its coordination role of the NSS who will lead the peer review at national level and communicate directly with both contractors and Eurostat.

The responsibilities of the ONAs include:

- Appointment of a local coordinator/contact point;

- Collaboration with the NSI in the preparation for the peer review process;
- Identification of participants who will be involved in peer review (both in the completion of SAQ and the visit);
- Filling in of the SAQ for ONAs and provision of the necessary evidence and documentation requested;
- Provision of the documentation requested by the peer review expert team during the visit;
- Active participation in the dedicated sessions in the peer review visit;
- Participation in the discussions on the recommendations;
- Provision of comments on the peer review report;
- Commitment to the effort to develop the improvement actions that may be required;
- Involvement in the elaboration of the improvement actions if they concern the ONA;
- Implementation of formulated improvement actions if they concern the ONA;
- Being in touch with the national peer review coordinator (or national coordination desk) during the whole peer review process;
- Follow up of the improvement actions under the coordination of the NSI (annual monitoring).

9.3 The peer review experts

The peer review expert teams consists of four experts, including at least one external (to the ESS) expert and one expert from Eurostat. The composition of the peer review expert teams provides for a balanced combination of competencies, knowledge and skills. The following requirements need to be met by the combined experience, knowledge and skills of the four experts constituting one peer review expert team:

- Senior management experience in an NSI/ONA;
- Knowledge about the set-up and functioning of an NSS;
- Knowledge of strategic developments in statistics at national/EU/international levels;
- Knowledge about recent developments in the ESS;
- Expertise in statistics and modernization activities;
- Active involvement in ESS related activities.

Taking into account the above-mentioned requirements, the composition of a peer review expert team looks as follows:

- One (current or recent) senior manager from an NSI, who is the chair of the peer review expert team and will ensure that the knowledge about the NSS and ESS is represented in the peer review expert team;

- One external (to the ESS) expert, whose presence ensures the credibility and independence of the peer review process but who will need to possess some of the knowledge mentioned above and be acquainted with the functioning of the ESS;
- One expert from an NSI or ONA (or another external expert depending on the experience and knowledge), meeting some of the requirements mentioned above;
- One expert from Eurostat, meeting some of the requirements mentioned above, who is an equal member of the peer review expert team. The Eurostat expert also assumes certain facilitation tasks such as supporting the harmonisation of the recommendations and accompanying the peer review process in the given country.

In order to identify the experts from the NSIs, Eurostat contacts the NSIs with a request to propose possible peer review experts from their organisation (and beyond, if appropriate). As well as having the necessary knowledge and experience, the candidates should be made aware of the tasks and workload associated with this role. Also, it is essential that the nominated candidates are aware that they will work in an independent and impartial manner.

External experts are also proposed by the contractor responsible for the organisation of the peer reviews (see more information on the contractor's role and tasks in chapter 9.4).

The final decision on the selected peer review experts will be made by Eurostat.

The chair of the peer review expert team will be the main contact point with the NSI and as such will liaise with the national peer review coordinators in the NSIs and the central coordination desk set up by the contractor on all aspects of the peer review.

For information purposes, Eurostat announces the names and CVs of the peer review expert team members to the national peer review coordinator before the peer review visit, while the chair of the peer review expert team will inform the NSI about the roles and responsibilities of the team members.

For more information on the role of the peer review experts, consult the *"Guide for Peer Review Experts (Chapter 7)"*.

9.4 The contractors

Eurostat is assisted by two contractors in the execution of the peer reviews: the first contractor is responsible for all organisational aspects of the peer reviews including the organisation of training workshops on the methodology; a second contractor with expertise in communication, is responsible for developing and supporting the implementation of the overall communication strategy on the peer reviews and the value of European Statistics. In addition, this contractor is responsible for the development of the generic communication material as well as for the organisation of a workshop with the communication officers of the NSIs to discuss the campaign materials to be used at the national level. It further supports the communication activities in each EU Member State and EFTA country before, during and after the peer review.

Both contractors work under the close supervision of Eurostat.

Contractor for the organisation of the peer reviews

The contractor charged with the overall organisation of the peer reviews has set up a central coordination desk in order to facilitate the communication between the contractor and the NSIs. The NSIs nominate a national peer review coordinator, who may be supported by a national coordination desk in each country. The central coordination desk is the contact point for, and cooperates closely with, the national peer review coordinator and the peer review expert teams in preparing and managing the peer reviews. Establishing a good working relationship between these entities is important for the success of the peer reviews. See Chapter 13.1.i for more details on the work of the central coordination desk.

This contractor ensures that the peer review reports have a harmonised and consistent style (English proof-reading, same terminology, structure and coordinated content) and that they read well.

The contractor is responsible for the logistics of the training workshops and the travel and subsistence arrangements of all missions.

Contractor for communication activities

The contractor for communication is responsible for supporting the development of a communication strategy and the corresponding generic communication material. It also supports communication activities of the NSIs, if requested and necessary.

Furthermore, the NSIs nominate a communication officer to support the communication activities throughout the peer review process. It should be noted that a workshop for the communication officers of the NSIs is organised in January 2021 by the contractor specialised in communication. The workshop informs about the peer review process and related communication activities, as well as about communicating the value of European Statistics.



Hints and tips:

- In order to ensure an optimal information flow, the central coordination desk should establish some rules on communication among all the actors in the process. For emergency matters, e.g. missed flights during the travel of the experts, etc., provide contact information to the contractor.
- The central coordination desk should establish a forum where peer review experts can post questions for a FAQ site and exchange experience.
- The NSI is advised to set up a functional mailbox for the purpose of the peer review in order to ease communication.

10 Tools for the self-assessment phase and peer review visit

The following documents provide the fundamental tools for implementing the third round of ESS peer reviews:

- [Regulation \(EC\) No 223/2009 of the European Parliament and of the Council on European statistics](#), revised by Regulation (EC) No 759/2015.
- The [ES CoP](#), which forms the baseline against which the NSIs and the ONAs are to be assessed.
- [The ESS Quality Assurance Framework V2.0 \(QAF\)](#): It should be noted that the ESS QAF has been extended and modified to correspond to the revised ES CoP of November 2017. The ESS QAF can help respondents to reply to the questionnaire by providing suggestions for methods and tools. The ESS QAF will be used as a reference document but not as a benchmark.

In order to ensure a greater degree of commonality and comparability in the peer reviews, the following standard tools for the peer reviews were developed/are available:

- A self-assessment questionnaire (SAQ) for the NSIs: To be compiled by the NSIs as the first phase of the peer review. The SAQ follows the structure of the ES CoP. It is sub-divided into 16 principles and their corresponding indicators against which their implementation can be reviewed.
- A self-assessment questionnaire (SAQ) for the ONAs: Due to the specific nature of the ONAs, the SAQ only includes questions on the principles of the ES CoP and not on the level of the indicators (except for the indicators concerning principle 1bis).

For both SAQs, respondents are requested to assess how they have implemented/are implementing the ES CoP through answering questions and indicating documentation/evidence.

Both SAQs are organised in three main sections, one for each area of the ES CoP: Institutional Environment, Statistical Processes and Statistical Output, while the SAQ for the NSIs also contains some additional questions on the impact of Covid-19, not related to any of the sections.

- **SAQ for NSIs:** Within each section, sub-sections correspond to each of the 16 principles and include the relative indicators. The questionnaire is built in the following way:
 - Standard questions on indicators in each principle:
 - For each indicator in each principle of the ES CoP, there are two standard questions: one on how the indicator is implemented and another one on what is the self-appraisal of the degree of implementation of the indicator.
 - Additional questions on the level of the principle:
 - For a number of principles, there are additional questions, which look for forward-looking/innovative practices for the entire principle, for a broader view on the principle and for inspirations for a possible revision of the ES CoP. Answers to these questions will not be considered to assess compliance with the ES CoP.
 - SWOT questions on the level of the principle:

- For each principle, there are four questions on the strengths and weaknesses (internal factors), as well as threats/challenges and opportunities (external factors), covering the entire principle.
 - Summarising questions on the level of the ES CoP area:
 - For each of the three areas, there are reviewing and summarising questions on the progress made by the statistical authorities in the last 5 years in the given area as well as existing and possible future action plans, and proposals for enhancing the ESS partnership in the area.
 - Questions on the impact of Covid-19
 - At the very end of the questionnaire, some questions are added in relation to the Covid-19 situation. The answers will serve to identify lessons learnt, innovative practices in responding to the crisis and new statistical output with a view to integrate some of these into regular production. The questions are not related to any specific principle of the ES CoP and therefore, optional because they will not be used to assess compliance with the ES CoP.
- **SAQ for ONAs:** The questionnaire is lighter than the SAQ for the NSI and built in the following way.
 - Standard questions on each principle:
 - For each principle, there are two questions: one on how the principle is implemented, based on the indicators listed and another one on what is the self-appraisal of the degree of implementation of the principle.
 - Questions on the strengths and weaknesses on the level of the ES CoP area
 - For each area, there are reviewing and summarising questions on the strengths and weaknesses of the ONA. In this context, strengths are to be understood as areas in which the ONA excels, as compared to its peer statistical authorities, to the general practices, etc., while weaknesses are those that hinder the ONA from performing at its optimum level.
 - Questions on future plans at the level of the ES CoP area
 - For each of the three areas there are questions on existing and possible future action plans in the given area.
 - Questions on indicator level for Principle 1bis
 - For principle 1bis on Coordination and cooperation, respondents are invited to share their views and experiences as well as their assessment on how the coordination and cooperation aspects are implemented in the NSS and the ESS from the perspective of the ONA – based on the analysis of the respective indicators of the ES CoP.

More detailed information about how to fill in the SAQs is provided in the SAQs themselves.

- Information and core documents to be provided by the NSIs/ONAs (see Annex I).
- The [Guide for the Peer Review Experts](#).
- A [Glossary of Terms](#) can be found on the Eurostat website.
- A [dedicated page](#) on the Eurostat website with all publicly available information, including a FAQ which will be regularly updated.

In order to avoid duplication of work and hence reduce the burden on the NSIs, reports on other monitoring activities, such as the monitoring of the implementation of the improvement actions from the previous round of the peer review, Commitments on Confidence in Statistics and ESGAB's monitoring activities, will be provided to the peer review experts and taken into account.



Hints and tips:

- In order to improve the comprehension by the peer review experts on the practices available in the NSI/Eurostat/ONA, when possible, the NSI will try to use the same terminology as in the ESS QAF.
- When filling in the SAQ questionnaires, the NSI will bear in mind that from what is reported the peer review expert team will have to formulate an idea on the compliance with the indicators and identify possible weaknesses. NSI should try to be as clear and focused as possible.
- NSI will save and send the filled in SAQs in pdf format.

11 Assessment criteria

At a generic level, the assessment of compliance of the NSI with the ES CoP takes account of:

- The SAQs provided by NSIs/ONAs;
- The core documents provided;
- The correspondence and discussions with the representatives of NSIs/ONAs and other internal and/or external persons during the peer review visit;
- The peer review experts' observations in relation to compliance with the requirements of the ES CoP.

Certain aspects will be considered by the peer review experts both when assessing the SAQs and during the peer review visit. Knowledge of these elements could help when completing the SAQs and for the preparation of the visit.

For the SAQs:

- How complete and robust is the implementation of the given principle/indicator in the NSI/ONAs, and the NSS as such?

During the peer review visit:

- Peer review experts will be looking to clarify any inconsistencies, vague or missing information in the answers to the SAQs;
- Evidence should be organised and made available to peer review experts;
- The peer review experts will pay special attention to the new elements of the ES CoP (principles and indicators).



Hints and tips:

- Information on the NSS (laws, policy documents, other supporting documents, general information...) should be easily available on the NSI/ONA website.

12 The peer review process and timeline

The peer reviews will take place under the responsibility of Eurostat. Two contractors assist Eurostat in its tasks: one contractor is responsible for the organisation of the peer reviews, especially the logistics linked to the peer review visits; a second contractor is responsible for communication aspects.

Eurostat's main contact point for all aspects of the peer reviews is the Task Force on Peer Reviews and Quality (TF.PRQ). A functional mailbox has been created for this purpose: ESTAT-2020-ESS-PEER-REVIEWS@ec.europa.eu.

A *central coordination desk* will be set up by the contractor, engaged by Eurostat, to manage the logistics of the peer reviews. The *national peer review coordinator* will be nominated by the NSIs as the central contact point for all matters relating to the peer review. More explanations on the role and responsibilities of the contractor, the central and national coordination desks can be found in Chapter 13.1: Organisational aspects.

The peer review process is based on the analysis of the information collected by the peer review experts through the SAQs (completed by both the NSI and the participating ONAs), the core documentation, any additional information and documentation, and the peer review visit. The peer review experts will summarise the results of their analysis in a peer review report. After agreement of the findings between Eurostat and the NSI, the report will be published on the websites of both Eurostat and the NSI.

The timeline below indicates the latest date/period at which the event should happen. However, it is advised to start as early as possible with the planning and preparation of the peer review and to finalise the peer review report as soon as possible. Such a quick finalisation and publication of the peer review report will be of

benefit for the NSI itself but will also be useful for the effectiveness of the communication campaign that will accompany the peer reviews.

The timeline is set out as follows¹ (a graphic description including the timeline for one individual peer review can be found in *Figure 1*):

- June 2020: Via a formal letter, Eurostat contacts the ESS NSIs asking for their preferred dates of the peer review visit in the period April 2021-April 2023;
- July 2020: Eurostat prepares a timeline for the peer review visits to each country, based on the information collected in June 2020 and adjusts the overall time schedule for the peer reviews;
- July/August/September 2020: Start of the selection procedure for the nomination of peer review experts by the NSIs, by Eurostat and the contractor tasked with the implementation of the peer reviews;
- September/October 2020:
 - Eurostat publishes methodology, SAQs, Guides and Annexes on its website;
 - Via a formal letter from DG to DG, Eurostat informs all ESS NSIs of the formal launch of the third round of peer reviews, about the availability of the methodology, both SAQs (NSI and ONA), the guides for peer review experts and NSIs/participating ONAs and their annexes on the Eurostat website and asks the NSIs to start the procedure to select the participating ONAs; Eurostat asks the NSIs to nominate a national peer review coordinator and a contact person for all communication activities (communication officer);
- October/November 2020:
 - Via a formal letter, Eurostat sends both SAQs for NSIs and ONAs as well as the two guides and their annexes to all the appointed national peer review coordinators in the NSIs;
 - Eurostat provides the national peer review coordinators with the contact details in Eurostat (functional mailbox) and concerning the contractors (under contract with Eurostat) and its central coordination desk;
 - Compilation of the list of peer review experts based on proposals from the NSIs, Eurostat and the contractor; selection of experts by Eurostat for the peer review expert teams;
- November 2020: The central coordination desk – in consultation with Eurostat - fixes 2-3 possible dates for the peer review visit in each country according to the planning provided by the NSIs;
- November/December 2020:

¹ It should be noted that this is the current planning. However, adjustments may be needed due to the evolvement of the situation around the Covid-19 pandemic.

- Based on a global visit programme set up by Eurostat in cooperation with the NSIs and the contractor, there is an agreement between Eurostat, the central coordination desk and the national peer review coordinators on the individual weeks of the respective peer review visits;
- Via a formal letter, Eurostat informs the national peer review coordinator of the precise date of the peer review visit, announces the names of the peer review experts for the peer review in the given country, including the name of the chair, and sends the CVs of the experts;
- January 2021: One training workshop for peer review experts and one training workshop for the national peer review coordinators;
- January 2021: Workshop on the communication campaign for NSIs' communication officers;
- 6-7 months before the peer review visit: Via a formal letter to the individual NSI, Eurostat confirms the specific date of the peer review visit and informs about the need to send the filled-in SAQs (NSI and ONAs), the core documents and other supporting documentation; Eurostat also requests to be informed about the selection (and its justification) of the ONAs based on the pre-defined criteria; all the information will be requested for the deadlines indicated below;
- 5-6 months before the peer review visit: The NSI selects the ONAs for the peer review (for completion of SAQ and participation in the peer review visit) and sends the information on the selected ONAs as well as an explanatory note on the selection procedure and results to Eurostat;
- 3 months before the peer review visit: The national peer review coordinator submits to the central coordination desk the completed SAQs (both from the NSI and participating ONAs) with all necessary documents (background documents and evidence for statements/answers in the SAQ), with the Eurostat TF.PRQ in copy;
- 10 weeks before the peer review visit: The chair of the peer review expert team will hold a video/telephone conference with the peer review experts to discuss the roles of each expert in the visit, the answers to the SAQs and potential issues to be raised during the visit (so as to be included in the agenda);
- 9 weeks before the peer review visit: The chair of the peer review expert team will propose elements for the draft agenda (related to the content of the agenda, not to the people to be invited) to the national peer review coordinator (which principles will be assessed, which issues need to be discussed, how much time needs to be devoted to them, etc.) and informs the national peer review coordinator about the roles of the peer review experts in the team;
- 8 weeks before peer review visit:
 - The chair of the peer review expert team and the national peer review coordinator agree on general agenda items and how much time needs to be devoted to them and also on the duration of the visit (4 to 5 days);
 - The chair of the peer review expert team will inform the national peer review coordinator of any internal documentation (not publicly available) that is additionally required to be provided

by the NSI/ONAs. If a summary is requested in English, the NSI/ONA has one month to provide this;

- 2-3 weeks before the peer review visit: the detailed agenda is finalised by the NSI, i.e. all stakeholders have been invited and confirmed their presence, and is sent to the chair of the peer review expert team, with the Eurostat TF.PRQ in copy;
- Peer review visit takes place: duration 4 to 5 days;
- 1 week after the peer review visit: the chair of the peer review expert team sends the list of recommendations, as presented during the last day of the peer review visit, to the NSI and the Eurostat TF.PRQ (copy to the central coordination desk);
- 4 weeks after peer review visit: the chair of the of the peer review expert team sends the draft report to the central coordination desk for formatting and language checking; within two days, the central coordination desk sends the draft report to the national peer review coordinator and to Eurostat TF.PRQ (for information purposes);
- 8 weeks after the peer review visit: the NSI/ONAs check the report for factual correctness and send their comments, including setting out diverging views on recommendations, directly to the Eurostat TF.PRQ at the latest after 4 weeks from the receipt of the draft report from the central coordination desk;
- 10 weeks after the peer review visit: Eurostat has 2 weeks as from the receipt of the draft report from the NSI to comment and further harmonise recommendations and to send the revised version of the report to the central coordination desk. The central coordination desk then forwards this document to the peer review expert team;
- 11 weeks after the peer review visit: the peer review expert team has 1 week to integrate all comments;
- 2 working days for final formatting and language checking by the contractor who then sends the final version to the NSI and Eurostat TF.PRQ;
- 13 weeks after the peer review visit: Eurostat and the NSI have 2 weeks to finally approve the report; publication on both websites (Eurostat and NSI);
- 21 weeks after the peer review visit: the NSI has 8 weeks to develop improvement actions (in cooperation with ONAs);
- 23 weeks after the peer review visit: Eurostat has 2 weeks to comment on the proposed improvement actions and to indicate amendments to NSI if necessary;
- 26 weeks after the peer review visit: Eurostat and the NSI have 3 weeks to come to an agreement on the improvement actions; publication of the improvement actions alongside the report on both websites (Eurostat and NSI).

It should be noted that the total duration from the start of the peer review visit to the publication of the report is 13 weeks.



Hints and tips:

- The national peer review coordinator to keep the peer review expert team informed on all contacts between the NSI, contractor and Eurostat.
- The central coordination desk to provide the peer review expert team and NSI with the exact dates of the road map set out above.
- The central coordination desk to provide some short written information on the peer review expert team (e.g. short summary of professional experience) before the visit; the national peer review coordinator to make sure that all meeting participants receive the information package, possibly adjusted to national context, if necessary. This would save some time at the meetings (lengthy introduction speeches are not needed for each meeting) and allow for more in-depth discussions.
- The NSI to inform the involved ONA coordinators on the whole timetable of the activities.

Figure 1: Timeline for Peer Reviews

	ESTAT	NSI	ONA	Contractor	PR Team
June 2020: ESTAT contacts NSIs on a preferred date for the peer review visit	X	X			
July 2020: Eurostat prepares timeline of peer review visits to adjust the overall schedule for decision	X				
July/August/September 2020: start of the selection procedure for experts	X	X		X	
September/October 2020: ESTAT publishes SAQs+Guides, informs NSIs about start of PR process, asks NSIs to nominate national peer review coordinator +communication responsible, asks NSIs to prepare ONA selection	X	X			
October/November 2020: ESTAT sends SAQs and guides with annexes to national peer review coordinator, provides contact information	X	X			
October/November 2020: selection of experts, teams and chairs	X				
November 2020: Contractor + ESTAT fix 2-3 dates for PR visit in each country	X			X	
November/December 2020: ESTAT+Contractor+PR expert teams agree on individual weeks of PR visits, ESTAT informs national peer review coordinator about date, identity and details of PR team	X	X		X	X
January 2021: Workshops for PR expert teams+ national peer review coordinators	X	X		X	X
January 2021: Workshop on communication campaign for NSI communication officers	X	X		X	
6-7 months before PR visit: ESTAT confirms to NSI specific date of visit, requests to send SAQs, core documents, ONA selection (+justification)	X	X			
5-6 months before PR visit: NSI sends information about participating ONAs+justification to ESTAT	X	X			
3 months before PR visit: National peer review coordinator submits completed SAQs (both NSI and ONAs) +supporting documents to contractor (central coordination desk), with Eurostat in copy		X		X	
10 weeks before PR visit: Chair of PR expert team holds video/telephone conference with team members to discuss roles, answers to SAQs, potential issues					X
9 weeks before: Chair of PR expert team proposes elements of draft agenda to national coordinator+informs about roles in PR expert team		X			X
8 weeks before PR visit: Chair of PR expert team+national peer review coordinator agree on general agenda items+duration of visit		X			X
2-3 weeks before PR visit: Finalised detailed agenda sent by NSI to Chair of PR expert team+ESTAT; all stakeholders invited+confirmed presence	X	X			X
PR Visit (4-5 days)	X	X	X		X
1 week after PR visit: Chair of PR expert team sends list of recommendations to NSI+ESTAT	X	X			X
4 weeks after PR visit: Chair of PR expert team sends draft report to contractor for checking; within 2 days, contractor sends draft report to national peer review coordinator and ESTAT for information	X	X		X	X
8 weeks after PR visit: NSI/ONAs to comment/check factual correctness/set diverging views and send response to ESTAT	X	X	X		
10 weeks after PR visit: ESTAT to comment/harmonise recommendations; revised version sent to contractor who forwards to PR expert team	X			X	X
11 weeks after PR visit: PR expert team to integrate comments, 2 days for final checking by contractor, send to NSI and ESTAT	X	X		X	X
13 weeks after PR visit: final approval by ESTAT/NSI; publication of report on respective websites	X	X			
21 weeks after PR visit: NSI to develop improvement actions (in cooperation with ONAs) and send them to ESTAT	X	X	X		
23 weeks after PR visit: ESTAT to comment on improvement actions, indicate amendments if necessary to NSIs	X	X			
26 weeks after PR visit: ESTAT+NSI to agree on improvement actions, publication alongside reports on respective websites	X	X			

13 Preparation of the peer review

Preparation is a key phase of the peer review process from the perspective of the NSIs and the other actors involved. The preparatory phase is essential to managing the organisational aspects, the logistics and the relations between all the actors involved in the process.

It should be noted that there will be a differentiation in the focus/emphasis of assessing the principles between the self-assessment phase and the peer review visit, depending on the institutional set-up and specific situation in each country. While in the self-assessment phase all principles are assessed as they are equally important, the peer review expert team should have the possibility to decide, for each country, on which principles it will focus during the visit. The basis for the decision will be the following criteria:

- Potentially problematic areas identified in the SAQ;
- Areas identified in the second round of peer reviews as being in need of improvement;
- Improvement actions from the second round of peer reviews experiencing difficulties in implementation.

However, the principle on Professional Independence, the principle on Coordination and cooperation as well as the principles including elements of modernisation (principles 2, 4, 7, 8, 15) will be assessed during the visit for all NSIs and, if appropriate, the ONAs.

13.1 Organisational aspects

i. Central coordination desk (set-up by the contractor)

As previously mentioned, Eurostat is assisted by two contractors in the execution of the peer reviews: the main contractor is charged with all organisational aspects of the peer reviews including the organisation of training workshops on the methodology; a second contractor with expertise in communication, is charged with developing and supporting the implementation of the communication strategy. Both contractors work under the close supervision of Eurostat.

The contractor responsible for the overall organisation of the peer reviews, sets up a central coordination desk in order to facilitate the communication between the contractor and the NSIs. The NSIs set up a corresponding national coordination desk (which may be the national peer review coordinator) in each country. The central coordination desk is the contact point for, and cooperates closely with, the national coordination desks and the peer review expert teams in preparing and managing the peer reviews. Establishing a good working relationship between these entities is important for the success of the peer reviews.

The responsibilities of the central coordination desk include:

- Working to shape and manage the programme of peer reviews, including identifying together with Eurostat suitable peer review expert teams to conduct each peer review, and the chair of each team;

- Organising together with Eurostat two training workshops, one for peer review experts and one for the national peer review coordinators including all the logistics and preparing some presentations;
- Organising together with Eurostat three mid-term workshops with the peer review experts, one workshop with the chairs and one ex-post workshop for both the peer review experts and the national peer review coordinators;
- Creating, organising, maintaining and updating an online interest group to coordinate the supply of documentation;
- Contractually engaging the peer review experts;
- Distributing to the peer review experts the documentation - completed questionnaires and core documents submitted by the NSIs;
- Setting up the fixed timetable for the visits based on preferences submitted to Eurostat by the NSIs (avoiding, as far as possible, other European commitments such as EU Council Presidency, ESSC meetings, DGs informal workshops and other meetings of Director Generals (such as ESS Partnership Group) , and Excessive Deficit Procedure visits/dialogues as well as other meetings of international organizations, e.g. European Statistical Forum, United Nations Statistical Commission, United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Conference of European Statisticians (UNECE CES), Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development Committee on Statistics and Statistical Policy (OECD CSSP);
- Preparing the agenda of the peer review visits together with the chair of the peer review expert team and the NSIs;
- Making travel and other logistical arrangements for the peer review expert team.

The contractor ensures that the peer review reports have a harmonised and consistent style (English proof-reading, same terminology, structure and coordinated content) and that they read well.

The contractor is responsible for the logistics of the training workshops and the travel and subsistence arrangements of all missions.



Hints and tips:

- In order to ensure an optimal information flow, the contractor to establish some rules on communication among all the actors in the process. For emergency matters, e.g. missed flights during the travel of the experts, etc., the contractor to establish a hotline.
- The central coordination desk should establish a forum where peer review experts can post questions for a FAQ site and exchange experiences.

ii. National coordination desk

In order to facilitate relations with the peer review experts and to co-ordinate the visit at national level, each NSI is advised to set up a national coordination desk, headed by a national peer review coordinator with the necessary expertise to steer the process and supporting the work of this national peer review coordinator (depending on the situation in each country the national peer review coordinator may constitute the national coordination desk). Special attention should be given by the national coordination desk to the ONAs to ensure that they are involved from the beginning of the process.

It is also advised that each ONA nominates a coordinator who will be their central contact point during the peer review process and have a privileged communication with the national peer review coordinator. For those ONAs which have appointed a Statistical Head, the coordinator should preferably be that person.

The national peer review coordinator is the first contact point on any matter concerning the peer reviews. The coordinator, supported by the national coordination desk, is to make every effort to ensure:

- Well-functioning contact with the central coordination desk and the coordinators in the ONAs;
- Coordination of the activities for the NSI/ONAs including completion and transmission of the SAQs, core documents and any additional information for the peer review experts;
- Well-functioning contact with the chair of the peer review expert team and central coordination desk to set up the agenda of the in-country visit and to facilitate logistical aspects (hotel information for the peer review teams, etc.);
- A venue and facilities at the premises of the NSI for the peer review visit;
- A separate meeting room dedicated solely to the needs of the peer review expert team;
- Management of the relations with the ONAs and stakeholders which will be involved in the peer review process in order to comply with deadlines and respect the planning;
- Setting up, with the chair of the peer review expert team, the list of relevant entities attending the meetings planned for the in-country visit;
- Coordination of possible comments on the factual accuracy of the report and the drafting of a document containing the NSI view in case it differs from that of the peer review experts as set out in the draft report;
- Coordination of the activities to define the improvement actions.

Training workshops for all national peer review coordinators and peer review experts are organised before the launch of the peer review visits. Their purpose is to explain in detail the methodology and the conduct of the peer reviews.

iii. Relations between national coordination desks and the peer review expert team

Prior to the peer review visit, the chair of the peer review expert team will contact the national peer review coordinator to discuss and agree on an agenda for the visit. The central coordination desk, responsible for travel and logistical arrangements, will be kept informed.

Responsibilities and the information flow are visualized in the table below.

	Task	From/Responsible initiator	To/Co-responsible	Via CCD
Collection and analysis of information	SAQs are sent out to all NSIs	ESTAT	NSI	N
	Filled-in SAQ and accompanying documentation is sent	NSI	ESTAT	Y
	Check for completeness	CCD	NSI; ESTAT	Y
	Final package of SAQ and accompanying documentation sent	NSI	PRE team; ESTAT	Y
	Additional information requested	PRE team	NSI; ESTAT	Y
	Additional information sent	NSI	PRE team; ESTAT	Y
Preparation of the peer review visit	Agree on specific date	NSI; ESTAT		N
	Organise PRE team teleconference	CCD	PRE team	Y
	Propose elements of the draft agenda	PRE team	NSI; ESTAT	Y
	Propose and agree general agenda	PRE team; NSI	ESTAT	Y
	Final agenda and participants sent	NSI	PRE team; ESTAT	Y
Drafting the report and consultation procedure	Draft report is proofread and sent	PRE team	ESTAT; NSI	Y
	Comments and diverging views are sent	NSI	ESTAT	N
	Harmonised version is sent	ESTAT	PRE team	Y
	Consolidated version is proofread and sent	PRE team	ESTAT; NSI	Y
	Report is agreed and approved	ESTAT; NSI		N

13.2 Logistics

It is recommended to use the same venue for the whole duration of the visit. The venue should be located in the premises of the NSI. Availability of a room for the meetings as well as internet facilities should be foreseen. In addition, another fully-equipped room should be made available to enable the peer review experts to work during breaks. The peer review experts can also ask the national peer review coordinator to arrange for them to meet other national authorities in their premises.

If the peer review visit necessitates travelling to locations other than the main venue (e.g. a regional office, a ministry, other national authorities), this must be agreed in advance and set out in the agenda so that the central coordination desk can schedule travel arrangements.

13.3 Internal preparation

All national players should be involved through meetings/workshops/conferences from the beginning. The NSI is expected to ensure that all departments, divisions, ONAs and any other entities involved in the peer review process are well briefed on the purpose, nature, and timetable of the peer review as early as possible. In this respect it is important to operate at different levels:

- Within the NSI: The national peer review coordinator has to contact in advance all departments/divisions/units to communicate issues, time and duration of the visit.

It is recommended that a team, headed by the national peer review coordinator and composed of different representatives of the NSI (departments/divisions/other entities), be established in order to support the preparatory phase, follow the process and evaluate the impact with other national authorities. Once an effective co-ordination mechanism at national level has been established, all the activities connected with the peer reviews have to be coordinated.

A meeting with other national authorities should be planned in order to explain the purpose, timing and the content of the peer review as well as to reinforce collaboration with the national peer review coordinator to streamline the process and networking.

A constant information flow among all players has to be guaranteed not only in the preparatory phase, but also throughout the whole process. A well-functioning coordination mechanism is important in view of the significant workload caused by a peer review.

- With the ONAs: The national peer review coordinator and/or its team must support ONAs during the preparations for the peer review (to do this, it should be clear for NSIs and ONAs who are the contact points from both sides).
- ONAs must identify the persons who will participate in the peer review visit and prepare all the documents that will be necessary during the visit.
- Technical issues should be prepared based on a good articulation between the national peer review coordinator, or its team, and ONAs.

- With the Advisory body/Statistical council/committee (or similar), data providers and business associations: These stakeholders should be informed about the peer review process and invited to participate in selected meetings. They should be kept informed of progress and of the outcome (recommendations, improvement actions...).
- With users and user consultation/representative bodies: Based on the experience of the previous peer review round, the NSI should prepare a standard list of the main users that could be involved/interviewed in the peer review process. These could include journalists, policy makers, the scientific community, business associations and federations, trade unions, and representatives of a committee of users – if any.

13.4 Documentation

i. Self-assessment questionnaires

Self-assessment is a key part of the peer review process. Before the peer review visit, the countries have to complete the SAQs (both for the NSI and for the ONAs). Furthermore, the NSI is required to ensure (but not validate) the completion of the SAQ by the ONAs and to transmit all SAQs to the central coordination desk and Eurostat at least three months before the agreed date of the peer review visit. Instructions on the filling in are included in the SAQs.

When completing the questionnaires, the NSIs and ONAs have to refer to concrete evidence. Evidence means supporting documentation or other type of elements (e.g. websites, electronic tools) which corroborate the replies. Evidence can be provided as a list of internally available documents or links to publicly available documents. A summary of certain documents may be provided if the document is not available in English.

ii. Provision of core documentation and evidence

The NSIs are requested to provide all core documentation (e.g. a brief description of the national statistical system, laws, strategies, policies, plans, and other relevant material, and relevant information about other national authorities) together with the completed SAQs three months before the peer review visit starts. Annex I contains a full list of general information and core documentation to be provided as well as a numbering convention for these documents.

All SAQs have to be completed in English. The following documents have to be submitted:

- The “core” documents as described in Annex I of this Guide;
- Documents supporting the answers in the SAQs:
 - if they are publicly available, links can be provided (e.g. web pages, etc.);
 - if they are internal documents, they can be listed with their titles/names in English. If the peer review experts need (some of) the internal documents, they have to request them from the NSI

two months before the peer review visit. The NSI will have one month to send either the translated document or to prepare a summary of the content of the document in English and send them to the peer review experts one month before the peer review takes place.

The peer review language is English. However, the NSIs may need to use interpretation and translation facilities to translate some of the core documents set out in Annex I as well as during the meetings with the peer review experts.

iii. Further documentation

On the basis of the analysis of the SAQs and the documents provided by the reviewed countries, the peer review expert team might still ask the national coordination desk for additional documentation so as to better understand some issues. The request is to be made two months before the visit by the chair of the peer review expert team who should inform the national peer review coordinator on any English summaries of the document that are additionally required to be provided by the NSI/ONAs, based on the *lists of internal documents provided on request* indicated in SAQs. These documents, summaries should be provided to the central coordination desk one month before the visit.



Hints and tips:

- It may be possible to reuse some documentation provided in the last peer review – provided this documentation is still applicable. However, the documentation will have to be resubmitted.
- When requesting additional documents, especially from ONAs, the peer review expert team should be aware of the proportionality of ONAs participation in the peer review and possible confidentiality of internal documents.

14 Peer review visit

After assessing the answers in the SAQs, the peer review expert team conducts a visit of four to five days to the country concerned. The peer review experts and the NSI agree upon the agenda of the visit, based on the generic template in Annex II. The agenda includes the scheduling of interviews with other national authorities, and selected users, data providers and any further stakeholders, as appropriate. The final decision on which ONAs participate in the peer review visit remains with the NSI.

The chair of the peer review expert team informs the national coordination desk in advance (not later than 4 weeks before the visit) of any additional persons they wish to interview in order to allow the national coordination desk to contact them and to possibly include them in the agenda.

The agenda of the peer review visit identifies which aspects of the ES CoP and specific topics will be examined on each day. In order to ensure the participation of the ONAs in the peer review visit, the visit agenda should be detailed at this level.

If several authorities and users are to be involved, then the allocation of their time needs to be planned. The authorities need to know when staff is likely to be required.

Once the general peer review agenda has been agreed, the national coordination desk contacts the persons/entities to be interviewed so as to set up lists of participants at the meetings. The national peer review coordinator then submits to the chair of the peer review expert team a list of:

- Management and senior staff of NSI to be involved in the meetings;
- Up to 10 junior staff members (2-5 years' experience in the NSI and, if possible, from different departments across the organisation, representing different experiences in the NSI) to be interviewed. This session aims at providing a fresh view on the NSI and should therefore be kept strictly confidential and attended by junior staff only ;
- Management and staff in the ONAs to be interviewed;
- Data providers to be included in the interviews e.g. owners of registers which are being used in the statistical production process: cadastral register, population register, register of legal entities, providers of tax data or data on social security;
- Representatives of the Statistical Council and/or ESGAB-like body, if existent;
- Main users (such as representatives of scientific community/universities, representatives of business associations and federations, media, policy makers/government users) to be interviewed.

The national peer review coordinator may wish to be present at the various meetings. This is up to the discretion of the NSI. However, the meeting with junior staff is strictly confidential and the national peer review coordinator is not allowed to attend this meeting.

A short meeting of the peer review expert team is programmed at the end of every day of the visit. The national peer review coordinator or an appointed member of the national coordination desk should be available at this time in case any questions arise but should not participate in the meeting. The national coordinator/national coordination desk and the peer review expert team could also agree on different ways to exchange information or a different location for the peer review expert team meeting (such as the hotel). (See Chapter 16: Debriefing).

On the last day of the visit, a final meeting between the peer review expert team and senior management of the NSI is foreseen. It is highly recommended that the ONAs that have taken part in the peer review visit be invited to this session, so that they could benefit from receiving the peer review expert team's explanations on the strengths and the exact reasons behind the recommendations. A supervisory body/supervisory bodies could also be invited to this session, so that it/they could also benefit from receiving the peer review expert team's explanations on the strengths and the exact reasons behind the recommendations. The format of this

session and the exact bodies to participate depend on the country context and the peer review expert team should agree with the NSI whether the participation of such bodies is appropriate/useful.

The purpose of this meeting is to discuss the preliminary conclusions and recommendations, giving the NSI an opportunity to ask for explanations and to comment. After the conclusion of the visit, the central coordination desk asks all actors involved (NSI, peer review expert team, Eurostat) for information on the level of satisfaction of the overall process, including the conduct of the interviews by the peer review experts, based on a standard evaluation form, possibly in EU Survey format, for this purpose. The results are shared with Eurostat in order to suggest potential improvements in the process.



Hints and tips:

- The list of examples in the *Questions by interlocutor* (see Annex V) may provide additional information on the type of question that will be asked during the peer review visit.
- At the start of the visit, it is important that the chair of the peer review expert team clarifies that the team's task is to assess compliance with the ES CoP, not to provide advice on how to do this.
- When organising meetings with users and inviting representatives from e.g. a ministry that also has the function of a supervising authority, the NSI to make sure that the ministry understands that it has to send a user to the meeting with users.

15 Debriefing

Where needed, short debriefings between the national coordination desk and the peer review expert team are recommended. The purpose of the debriefings is to discuss potential requests arising during the peer review visit in order to let the national peer review coordinator re-schedule the agenda, and to contact other national authorities or users, if needed.



Hints and tips:

- The national peer review coordinator/national coordination desk and the peer review expert team should foresee and agree how and when to exchange information during the peer review visit and to clarify any issues if and as necessary.

16 Peer review report and recommendations

When drafting the report, the peer review expert team should bear in mind that the peer review provides an opportunity to improve the NSS. This requires a realistic approach to the assessment itself, but especially to the writing of the report and the drafting of the recommendations.

The draft recommendations as discussed on the last day of the peer review visit will be sent to the NSI by the chair of the peer review expert team at the latest one week after the visit.

The peer review experts shall prepare a draft peer review report on the NSI's compliance with the ES CoP and on possible improvements in implementing the ES CoP. The report could also include good or innovative practices if they have been identified during the peer review. It will also endeavour to identify elements/recommendations to be addressed to the ESS in general that will contribute to an enhanced partnership in the ESS. The report has a qualitative nature and includes a set of recommendations. The structure for the report can be found in Annex III.

The aim of having a structured report is to ensure as far as possible harmonisation of the reports. The report is structured as follows:

- Executive summary highlighting strengths and stating recommendations;
- Introduction explaining the peer review process and methodology and a description on what principles the peer review experts focused in the country;
- Brief description of the NSS;
- Progress/advancement in the last five years;
- Compliance with the European statistics Code of Practice:
 - Strengths;
 - Issues and recommendations distinguishing between fundamental/important to ensure compliance alignment with the ES CoP (compliance relevant) and less critical/technical supporting improvements (improvement related);
 - In addition, the recommendations should be future-oriented and grouped around identified broad issues/themes, with a reference to the principle(s) and indicator(s) – Examples for the formulation of broad issues and recommendations can be found in Annex VI - Formulation of issues and recommendations;
- Views of the NSIs as the national coordinator of the NSS/the peer review on those recommendations where they diverge from peer review experts' assessments;
- Annexes: agenda of the visit and list of participants.

The draft report shall be transmitted to the NSI at the latest four weeks after the end of the peer review visit so that the NSI can correct any factual errors and submit comments. At the same time, the NSI can issue a

diverging view on recommendations that it deems to be impossible/very difficult to implement, but the diverging views need to be reasoned and well justified.

The peer review report will be agreed in consultation between the peer review expert team, the NSI and Eurostat and will take into account as far as possible remarks or concerns expressed by the NSI.

When the report is finally approved, the final peer review report, including the diverging views, will be published on both Eurostat's and the NSI's websites.

The good/innovative practices identified during the peer reviews will be collected by Eurostat and included in a separately elaborated document.

17 Improvement actions

Improvement actions are to be defined by the NSI and, if relevant, in cooperation with the ONAs and in consultation with other stakeholders, on the basis of the recommendations from the peer review expert team.

The improvement actions should be based on the SMART approach (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-bound) and be clearly linked by the NSI (also for ONAs and other stakeholders) to the recommendations expressed in the peer review report. A timeline for the implementation of the actions (see Annex IV) should also be included. The timeline depends on many elements, such as the external environment, complexity of the action, and actors involved.

The NSI will have 8 weeks to define these actions after publication of the peer review report on the website. It will be Eurostat's responsibility to review whether the actions are SMART and sufficiently address the recommendation. If not, Eurostat will ask the NSI for reformulation within 2 weeks. The improvement actions will be published on Eurostat's and the NSI's websites together with the peer review report and will be monitored on an annual basis by Eurostat.

When drafting the improvement actions, it should be noted that the annual monitoring by Eurostat will end in December 2027. Therefore the implementation of the improvement actions should not be planned to go beyond this date.



Hints and tips:

- Past monitoring exercises have shown that NSIs tend to be too optimistic about the time needed for implementing the improvement actions; this often leads to many actions being classified as “delayed” in the subsequent annual monitoring reports.

List of annexes:

- Annex I: Information and core documents to be provided by the NSIs/ONAs
- Annex II: Template for the agenda of the peer review visit
- Annex III: Structure for the peer review report
- Annex IV: Procedure for defining improvement actions
- Annex V: Questions by interlocutor
- Annex VI: Formulation of issues and recommendations