



EUROPEAN  
STATISTICAL  
SYSTEM

eurostat 

# European Statistical System Peer Reviews

**Third round: 2021-2023**

## **Guides' Annex IV: Procedure for defining improvement actions**

Endorsed by the ESS Committee in October 2020

### Procedure for defining improvement actions

#### Improvement actions

1. As coordinator of the NSS, the NSI is the owner of the improvement actions and responsible for their compilation. The NSI will have 8 weeks to define improvement actions after the publication of the peer review report on the websites of Eurostat and the NSI. 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 NSI and Eurostat have 3 weeks to agree on the improvement actions and publish them alongside the peer reviews on their respective websites. The procedure for defining improvement actions offers the possibility of involving other stakeholders. The term "stakeholders" can cover the NSI, the ONAs, the government, the parliament, a supervising authority, data providers and/or others which may be an owner of/be responsible for the implementation of an improvement action. A contractor should not be regarded as a stakeholder. If the fulfilment of an improvement action depends on more stakeholders than the NSI or ONA(s), the NSI or the ONA can decide to sub-divide a general improvement action into smaller improvement actions (sub-actions) reflecting the responsibility/ies per stakeholder. However, it should be noted that this possibility does not oblige the NSI or ONAs to involve other stakeholders in the improvement actions, especially if it would deteriorate their relationship with this particular stakeholder.
2. The NSIs shall define improvement actions, if relevant, in cooperation with the ONA(s) and in consultation with other stakeholders. The improvement actions shall:
  - be based on the recommendations in the final peer review reports
  - be SMART (see below)
  - contain a deadline for putting the improvement actions in place. The timeline for implementing improvement actions depends on many elements, such as the external environment, complexity of the action, actors involved, etc. Therefore, there is no rule specific to this. The latest deadline for implementing the improvement actions is set at the end of 2027.
  - indicate the responsibility of the improvement action (entirely in the remit of the NSI, of the ONAs, other stakeholders ...).

It is possible that the fulfilment of an improvement action depends on more stakeholders and could remain open because the stakeholder(s) do(es) not or cannot fulfil its/their part in the action. To show progress made by all the different stakeholders and/or where the blocking part of the improvement action is situated, the improvement action involving more stakeholders could consist of:

- 1) the general improvement action reflecting the final goal of the action;
- 2) and several sub-actions for improvement – reflecting the responsibility/ies per stakeholder.

For example, if 2 different authorities need to be involved to address one recommendation, which will have to be translated into one general improvement action, the NSI – in cooperation with the 2 relevant/concerned stakeholders – could design 3 different sub-actions for improvement. The dependencies between the sub-actions for improvement of different stakeholders need to be reflected in defining the responsibilities for each sub-action. In that case, if stakeholder 1 would be responsible for the 1<sup>st</sup> and the 3<sup>rd</sup> sub-action of a general improvement action and depend on the work of another stakeholder for the 2<sup>nd</sup> sub-action to implement the 3<sup>rd</sup> sub-action, the general improvement action could be subdivided in 3 different sub-actions for improvement, 2 for stakeholder 1 and one for stakeholder 2.

3. The NSIs will send improvement action(s) to Eurostat within 8 weeks from the reception of the final version of the peer review report.
4. Eurostat can comment on the defined improvement actions and timeline, and, if necessary, indicate amendments within 3 weeks from the reception of the improvement actions. These amendments shall be agreed by the NSI.
5. Once the improvement actions are agreed between the NSI and Eurostat, they will be published on Eurostat's website alongside with the peer review report.

### **Monitoring of improvement actions**

1. Starting in January 2024 and until the end of 2027, the NSIs shall report annually on the progress of implementation achieved by the end of the previous year. In case of delays, the NSIs, possibly with the input from ONA(s) and/or other stakeholders, shall explain reasons and set out an adjusted timeline for the action/s concerned. The NSIs might also propose new improvement actions or modifications to existing improvement actions, however to a limited extent and possibly with the input from ONA(s) and/or other stakeholders.
2. Eurostat shall produce an annual progress report to the ESSC and ESGAB, providing an overview on the progress achieved in the implementation of improvement actions, including the list of pending issues, the delays, the reasons for the delays and an agreed timeline for addressing them. This progress report will be produced usually 3 months after the end of the reference period and presents a summary of the information provided and verified by the countries. The report is presented to and endorsed by the meeting of the ESS Committee.

Due notice shall be paid to other monitoring activities related to the ES CoP (e.g. the Commitment on Confidence) in order to avoid any duplication or overlap.

## **Specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and time-bound (SMART)**

### **i. Specific**

The first criterion stresses the need for a specific improvement action rather than a more general one. This means that the formulation of the improvement action should be precise, clear and unambiguous. To make improvement actions specific, they must describe exactly what is expected, why is it important, who is involved, where is it going to happen (e.g. in which area), which attributes are important and what type of output is expected.

A specific improvement action will usually answer the five "W" questions:

What: What needs to be accomplished? What type of output is expected?

Why: Specific reasons, purpose or benefits of accomplishing the improvement action.

Who: Who is involved?

Where: Identify for instance an area (e.g. IT, R&D, HR, legislation, etc.).

Which: Identify requirements and constraints.

### **ii. Measurable**

The second criterion stresses the need for concrete criteria for measuring progress toward the attainment of the improvement action. The thought behind this is that if an improvement action is not measurable, it is not possible to know whether progress is made toward successful completion. Measuring progress is supposed to help to stay on track, motivate to reach target dates, and experience the satisfaction of achievement that incites to continued effort required to reach the ultimate goal. It applies to both the end result and the milestones along the way. If it is not measurable, an improvement action cannot be managed. Using numbers, dates and times is one way to represent clear objectives.

A measurable improvement action will usually answer questions such as:

How much?

How many?

How will I know when it is accomplished?

### **iii. Attainable**

The third criterion stresses the importance of improvement actions that are realistic and attainable. An attainable improvement action can be achieved and is neither out of reach nor below standard performance, otherwise it may be considered meaningless. An improvement action that is attainable provides the motivation to find ways to achieve it. It incites to develop the attitudes, abilities, skills, and financial capacity to reach it. The theory states that an attainable goal may cause goal-setters to identify previously overlooked opportunities to bring themselves closer to the achievement of their goals.

An attainable improvement action will usually answer the question:

How: How can it be accomplished?

How: How are limitations and restrictions determined?

#### **iv. Relevant**

The fourth criterion stresses the importance of choosing improvement actions that matter. A bank manager's goal to "Make 50 peanut butter and jelly sandwiches by 2:00 pm" may be specific, measurable, attainable, and time-bound, but lacks relevance. Often support is needed to accomplish an improvement action: resources, an important voice, someone to knock down obstacles. Relevant improvement actions are more prone to receive that needed support.

Relevant improvement actions (when met) will help to drive an organisation forward. An improvement action that supports or is in alignment with other improvement actions/goals would be considered relevant.

A relevant improvement action can answer yes to these questions:

Does this seem worthwhile?

Is this the right time?

Does this match our other efforts/needs?

Is it applicable in current socio-economic-technical environment?

#### **v. Time-bound**

The fifth criterion stresses the importance of developing improvement actions within a time frame, giving them a target date. A commitment to a deadline helps to focus efforts on completion of the improvement action on or before the due date. Without deadlines, there may be reduced motivation and resolve required to execute tasks. This part of the SMART improvement actions' criteria is intended to prevent the improvement actions from being overtaken by the day-to-day work/situations that invariably arise in an organisation. A time-bound improvement action is intended to establish a deadline by which it should be attained.

A time-bound improvement action can answer yes to these questions:

When will the improvement action be accomplished?

Is there a stated deadline?