



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Brussels, 3.3.2017
C(2017) 1364 final

Dear President,

The Commission would like to thank the Houses of the Oireachtas for their Opinions on the proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing a common framework for European statistics relating to persons and households, based on data at individual level collected from samples {COM(2016) 551 final} and on the proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Regulation (EU) No 99/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 January 2013 on the European Statistical Programme 2013-17, by extending it to 2018-2020 {COM(2016) 557 final}.

The Commission would like to thank for the observations made by the House of the Oireachtas and welcomes its favourable consideration of the proposals and takes note of its observations and recommendations.

Concerning its proposal on European statistics on persons and households, the Commission would like to stress that the current system based on data at individual level collected from samples – is made up of a number of separate domain-specific Regulations, which specify the exact topics to be covered and the technical requirements for the data collection (e.g. sample size, quality criteria and transmission requirements). There are currently five legal bases for conducting European social surveys, which relate, respectively, to the Labour Force Survey (LFS), European Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC), the Adult Education Survey (AES), the European Health Interview Survey (EHIS), and the Survey on Information and Communications Technologies (ICT) usage in households (ICT-HH). Two European surveys are conducted on the basis of an informal agreement only: the Household Budget Survey (HBS) and the Harmonised European Time Use Survey (HETUS)

*Mr John MCGUINNESS
Chairman of the
Joint Committee on Finance, Public
Expenditure and Reform, and Taoiseach
Houses of the Oireachtas
Leinster House
Kildare Street
IRL – DUBLIN 2*

*cc. Mr Seán Ó FEARGHAÍL T.D.
President of Dáil Éireann
Houses of the Oireachtas
Leinster House
Kildare Street
IRL – DUBLIN 2*

*cc. Senator Denis O'DONOVAN
President of the Seanad Éireann
Houses of the Oireachtas
Leinster House
Kildare Street
IRL – DUBLIN 2*

The initiative aims above all to increase the relevance of European statistics for policy making purposes. The Commission underlines that the proposed regulation has been drafted on the basis of extensive user consultation carried out as part of the impact assessment. The proposal should guarantee the availability and comparability of the data in the long run and their consistency both externally with other EU initiatives and internally between domains. The system of European social surveys should be sufficiently robust and efficient, and should ensure that the high quality and reliability of statistics is maintained and even increased – which can be challenging given the continual change in this area of statistics: rapid innovation in methodologies and uses of Information Technology, the availability of new data sources, the changing needs and expectations of data users and continued pressure on available resources.

The proposal keeps costs contained as it fixes those characteristics having a major impact on them, such as precision requirements, periodicities, sample characteristics and data transmission deadlines while, at the same time puts respondent burden under strict control.

Concerning the proposed move from the existing 'four-wave cycle' to a 'six-wave cycle' for the survey on income and living conditions (EU-SILC), the Commission notes that there is a significant demand from users for data based on a six year-panel, in particular for getting better estimations of long-term deprivation, the persistent-at-risk-of poverty rate and social exclusion. Moreover, pathways to and out of poverty, as well as their determinants, take place over rather long periods of time, and consequently longer observation periods are needed. Regarding the risks of sample attrition, studies have shown that it can be reduced by improving the survey efficiency and the tracing techniques of respondents; and that techniques to correct for attrition are already in place in various Member States, even for panels of four years' duration.

Regarding the inclusion of wealth as a detailed topic in the income and living conditions domain, the Commission tries to meet users' demands for more coordinated and integrated data in the three dimensions of income, consumption and wealth (ICW), by some limited data on debts and the main sources of wealth. A dedicated survey would not serve that purpose because, on the one hand, it would overlap with the Household Finance and Consumption survey carried out under the auspices of the European Central Bank and, on the other, would not allow for a full integration with other information collected in EU-SILC. The availability of limited data on wealth in SILC will greatly increase the possibilities of linking SILC data with the other data sources on ICW and significantly improve the estimations of joint distributions of ICW, which are currently under development.

Concerning the proposal to extend the European Statistical Programme 2013-2017 to include the period 2018-2020, the Commission would like to underline that its purpose is to ensure and provide the financial assistance which the European Statistical System needs to be able to provide high-quality statistical information and close the statistical gaps that need to be addressed most urgently. The extended European Statistical Programme will focus on a number of priority areas that reflect the Commission's ten political priorities and contribute to building the permanent capacity needed to respond more quickly to emerging needs and to adapt the statistical infrastructure so as to harness the potential of new data sources.

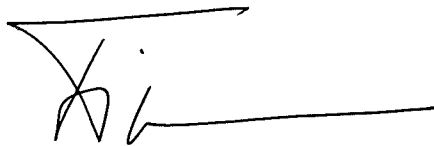
The Commission agrees that the rationale on extending the European Statistical Programme should be to contribute to a "Better Europe" through high-quality statistics in order to enhance the capacity of the Union to draft policy on the basis of evidence-based information. At the same time, efforts will be made to limit the administrative burden on statistical respondents.

With regard to the development of a methodology for a gender-based violence survey, cooperation with European institutions acting in this field will be sought in order to share expertise and to avoid duplication of effort.

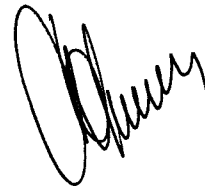
The points made above are based on the initial proposal presented by the Commission which is currently in the legislative process involving both the European Parliament and the Council.

The Commission hopes that these clarifications address the issues raised by the Houses of the Oireachtas and looks forward to continuing our political dialogue in the future.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized 'F' and 'T' followed by a long horizontal line extending to the right.

*Frans Timmermans
First Vice-President*

A handwritten signature in black ink, featuring a large, looped 'M' and 'T' followed by several smaller, connected letters.

*Marianne Thyssen
Member of the Commission*