



**Annual Report 2009**

**ESGAB's first annual report to the European Parliament and the Council  
on the implementation of the European Statistics Code of Practice by  
Eurostat and the European Statistical System as a whole**

## **ESGAB**

The European Statistical Governance Advisory Board (ESGAB) was established by the European Parliament and the Council in 2008 to provide an independent overview of the European Statistical System as regards the implementation of the European Statistics Code of Practice. ESGAB's work aims at enhancing professional independence, integrity and accountability of the European Statistical System, key elements of the Code of Practice, as well as at enhancing quality of European statistics.

Its tasks include the preparation of an annual report to the European Parliament and the Council on the implementation of the Code of Practice insofar as it relates to the Commission (Eurostat), including an assessment of the implementation of the Code of Practice in the European Statistical System as a whole, advice to the Commission (Eurostat) on appropriate measures to facilitate the implementation of the Code of Practice, on how to communicate the Code of Practice to users and data providers, on the updating of the Code of Practice and on questions related to user confidence in European statistics, if considered necessary.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This is the first annual report of the European Statistical Governance Advisory Board (ESGAB)<sup>1</sup>, whose purpose is to provide an independent overview of the European Statistical System (ESS) as regards the implementation of the European Statistics Code of Practice<sup>2</sup> ("the Code").

The Board started its work in March 2009, as soon as the seven members<sup>3</sup> had been appointed. Given the limited time available for the preparation of the annual report on the implementation of the Code by Eurostat and the ESS as a whole, ESGAB decided to focus on a limited number of principles. "Professional independence", because it is a crucial part of the Code, "Adequacy of resources" because of the increasing pressure related to the current situation of the economy, and finally, "Quality commitment" because of the close link with the issue of resources and the direct impact of data quality on the trustworthiness of the ESS. Moreover, the latter two principles were considered to be those in most need of improvements according to the Commission's 2008 report on the implementation of the Code. In addition, some remarks on co-ordination of statistical production are provided.

This first annual report builds mainly on already existing work and on an update of progress made since April 2008 with regard to the implementation of improvement actions and peer review recommendations<sup>4</sup>. The report is to a large extent based on information provided by Eurostat, which is responsible for the monitoring of individual Member States' compliance with the Code. ESGAB also held hearings with the Director General of the ECB Directorate General Statistics, the Chair of the Committee on Monetary, Financial and Balance of Payments Statistics (CMFB), the Chair of the Partnership Group (PG) and the Chair of the European Statistical System Committee (ESSC). Finally, ESGAB also analysed a number of documents related to governance issues within the ESS.

## 2. MAIN CONCLUSIONS

ESGAB concludes that overall there has been progress during the past year for all principles of the Code. However, the majority of improvement actions have still to be completed for full compliance.

Linked to the indicators being assessed in this report, ESGAB makes the following recommendations:

1. Legal underpinning of professional independence should be further pursued in those Member States where it has not yet been done. Member States should moreover ensure that it is implemented in practice.
2. An appropriate institutional framework is crucial in order to safeguard the professional independence of statistical authorities. Suspicions of interventions affecting the data produced need to be further investigated. Moreover, the procedures for the appointment and dismissal of Heads of National Statistical Institutes (NSIs) should be transparent and kept separate from political mandates.

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<sup>1</sup> Decision No 235/2008/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 March 2008 establishing ESGAB

<sup>2</sup> [http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/quality/documents/code\\_practice.pdf](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/quality/documents/code_practice.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> See membership: <http://ec.europa.eu/esgab>

<sup>4</sup> Peer reviews, covering principles 1-6 and 15 of the Code, were carried out in the 31 NSIs of the EU Member States and EFTA countries and in Eurostat over the period 2006-January 2008. These, together with self assessments, resulted in a number of improvement actions.

3. While the transparency related to the working arrangements between Eurostat and its portfolio Commissioner is welcomed, the frequency of meetings should be designed so as not to harm the perception of independence of European statistics.
4. Eurostat should further develop its way of communicating with users so that its independence is clearly demonstrated. It should e.g. occasionally organise its own press conferences and it should be made clear that the Spokesperson of the Commissioner speaks on behalf of the Commissioner.
5. As resources will remain limited, Member States and Eurostat should cooperate to make rapid progress on the implementation of a rationalised production system for EU statistics. Scarcity of resources needs to be dealt with in a longer-term perspective.
6. Professional training to increase the number of highly qualified statisticians should be emphasised by both educational institutions and the ESS.
7. Quality of statistical processes and outputs should be made a top priority.
8. The strengthened coordination role of Eurostat at EU level and of NSIs at national level, provided for in the new legal framework, should be fully respected by the relevant institutions and bodies.
9. Eurostat and ECB DG Statistics should ensure the practical implementation of the cooperation framework established between the two institutions, in particular by respecting the division of responsibilities, adhering to the same statistical principles and ensuring burden on respondents is kept to a minimum.
10. Given the new governance structure, the role of CMFB should be revisited.

### **3. FOLLOW-UP ON THE CONCLUSIONS OF THE 2008 REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EUROPEAN STATISTICS CODE OF PRACTICE**

Regarding the implementation of improvement actions until May 2009 (annex 1), steps have indeed been taken, but progress has been rather slow.

This report focuses on the principles 1 “Professional independence”, 3 “Adequacy of resources” and 4 “Quality commitment”.

#### **3.1. PROFESSIONAL INDEPENDENCE**

The Board recalls the definition of principle 1 and its indicators in the Code:

*“The professional independence of statistical authorities from other policy, regulatory or administrative departments and bodies, as well as from private sector operators, ensures the credibility of European statistics.”*

1. The independence of the statistical authority from political and other external interference in producing and disseminating official statistics is specified in law.
2. The head of the statistical authority has sufficiently high hierarchical standing to ensure senior-level access to policy authorities and administrative public bodies. He/she should be of the highest professional calibre.
3. The head of the statistical authority and, where appropriate, the heads of its statistical bodies have responsibility for ensuring that European statistics are produced and disseminated in an independent manner.
4. The head of the statistical authority and, where appropriate, the heads of its statistical

bodies have the sole responsibility for deciding on statistical methods, standards and procedures, and on the content and timing of statistical releases.

5. The statistical work programmes are published, and periodic reports describe progress made.
6. Statistical releases are clearly distinguished and issued separately from political/policy statements.
7. The statistical authority, when appropriate, comments publicly on statistical issues, including criticisms and misuses of official statistics.

### **3.1.1. European Statistical System compliance**

While the peer reviews showed a high compliance in general, improvements were considered possible, in particular regarding the first indicator where only 15 out of 32 statistical authorities were considered to have fully complied. Given national specificities, it was however not considered possible to implement more general ESS-wide measures; individual NSIs and Member States would need to take specific actions. In particular, a stronger legal underpinning was considered necessary in 13 cases and more explicit safeguards concerning NSI objectivity.

The 2009 update relating to the identified improvement actions shows that progress has taken place over the past year, but that less than a third of the actions were completed by the NSIs that identified improvement actions for this principle.

In a number of NSIs, approval of new legislation relating to this principle has recently taken place or is expected to take place later in 2009. ESGAB welcomes these developments while at the same time underlining the importance of the subsequent practical implementation.

Moreover, ESGAB has noted the sudden changes at top management level in at least three NSIs since 2007. ESGAB stresses that the procedures for the appointment and dismissal of Heads of NSIs should be transparent and kept separate from the mandates of government.

ESGAB considers compliance with the principle of Professional independence of utmost importance for the credibility of the ESS, in particular the indicators 1, 4 and 7 regarding independence of the statistical authority from political and other external interference. Moreover, an appropriate institutional framework is crucial in order to safeguard the professional independence of statistical authorities. In ESGAB's opinion it is therefore clear that sudden changes in the top management of NSIs directly or a short period after a change of government as well as suspicions of interventions affecting the data produced need to be further investigated.

### **3.1.2. Eurostat compliance**

In the peer review exercise Eurostat scored under average, although it was clearly recognised that Eurostat can act independently in practice. The peer review team considered it necessary to include safeguards of professional independence in the legal basis. This was done through the new Regulation on European Statistics<sup>5</sup>, which

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<sup>5</sup> Regulation (EC) No. 223/2009 of 11 March 2009 on European Statistics

introduced professional independence as one of the statistical principles, thus going further than the provisions of article 285 of the Treaty which speaks about scientific independence and as such does not cover dissemination. The new Regulation is very clear (article 6(2)): *“At Community level the Commission (Eurostat) shall ensure the production of European statistics according to established rules and statistical principles. In this respect, it shall have the sole responsibility for deciding on processes, statistical methods, standards and procedures, and on the content and timing of statistical releases.”*

The situation of Eurostat is specific as a Directorate General belonging to the Commission, but acting as an independent statistical agency. This situation puts certain requirements or constraints on Eurostat.

Like other Directorates General of the Commission, Eurostat has more or less weekly meetings with the portfolio Commissioner and his/her Cabinet. Eurostat’s working arrangements with the Cabinet of the Commissioner, which are publicly available on Eurostat’s website, clearly set out the general principles of cooperation and communication. This transparency is welcomed by ESGAB. Nevertheless, ESGAB considers that under normal circumstances a high frequency of meetings with the Commissioner could harm the perception of the independence of European statistics. ESGAB therefore invites Eurostat to review the institutional setting of its meetings together with the portfolio Commissioner.

ESGAB has also assessed Eurostat’s policy for press conferences. ESGAB shares the view of the peer review team that the lack of Eurostat press conferences is a deficiency as press conferences give an institution a ‘face to the public’. Since press contacts are important, ESGAB recommends Eurostat to occasionally organise its own press conferences and to organise background information sessions for journalists more frequently. ESGAB considers the first steps taken recently by Eurostat in this direction, when organising a press conference on “Statistics Explained”, a new electronic publishing system, a positive development.

ESGAB has noted that Eurostat does not have its own spokesperson, but relies on the spokesperson of the Commissioner. ESGAB recommends that it be made clear that the spokesperson speaks on behalf of the Commissioner.

Regarding press releases, Eurostat's "Protocol on Impartial Access to Eurostat Data for Users", available on its website, sets out the rights to pre-release access. In this context, ESGAB specifically addressed the validation of Member States’ debt and deficit data. Eurostat confirmed that while the Commissioner is informed about the issues involved, the methodology underlying these politically sensitive figures is not discussed with the Commissioner and that it takes its decisions independently, on the sole basis of advice from CMFB and Eurostat expertise.

ESGAB underlines the importance of professional independence within the ESS.

### **3.2. ADEQUACY OF RESOURCES**

The Board recalls the definition of principle 3 "Adequacy of resources" and its indicators in the Code:

*“The resources available to statistical authorities must be sufficient to meet European statistics requirements.”*

1. Staff, financial, and computing resources, adequate both in magnitude and in quality, are available to meet current European statistics needs.
2. The scope, detail and cost of European statistics are commensurate with needs.
3. Procedures exist to assess and justify demands for new European statistics against their cost
4. Procedures exist to assess the continuing need for all European statistics, to see if any can be discontinued or curtailed to free up resources.

### **3.2.1. European Statistical System compliance**

In the 2008 Commission report, a continuous shortage of resources was reported by some NSIs to be an obstacle to meeting ESS statistical requirements, particularly where staff salaries are comparatively low or where the IT infrastructure is lacking. Only six statistical authorities were considered to have fully complied with this principle in the 2008 report. The difficulty to assess the adequacy of resources in a context where national statistical authorities are producing statistics both for national and for EU purposes should however be recognised.

A significant number of improvement actions were completed during the past year, in particular improvements in staff training and administrative systems underpinning NSI resources. Nevertheless, the majority of actions still remain to be completed.

With the current economic crisis a continuous strain on NSI resources can be expected and there is a risk that compliance with this principle could lessen. The consequences for statistics may be very serious given the need to carry out e.g. the population and agricultural censuses, which are major undertakings for the next decade. The effect on the quality of data could be just as serious even if not as visible.

### **3.2.2. Eurostat compliance**

Work is progressing well with efforts having been taken during the past year to enlarge the pool of external, recruitable, statistically qualified staff. A review to see whether resources allocated to training and development activities are adequate is ongoing.

### **3.2.3. Development of the ESS**

A shortage of resources is perceived by ESGAB. It is indeed symptomatic of the currently predominant “stovepipe approach” to statistical production, whereby the whole production process, from survey design to dissemination, is independently managed for each statistical domain and takes place with little collaboration with other producers within the ESS contributing to European statistics.

In view of the challenges faced by the ESS, such as the ever increasing demands for new statistics for European Union policy purposes and the difficult public finances situation, ESGAB recommends several lines of action.

Firstly, as it is impossible to meet all needs, priorities will have to be set in order to allow the ESS to be innovative and relevant for upcoming information needs.

Secondly, further efforts should also be made to rationalise statistical production. ESGAB therefore welcomes the initiative taken by several Member States to modernise their production systems at national level and strongly encourages Member States to work with the Commission to implement the vision presented in the Commission Communication on the production method of EU statistics<sup>6</sup> in order to extend these efforts to the modernisation of the production methods for EU statistics at ESS level. The use of modern IT technology and increased cooperation across the ESS could provide important efficiency gains and can therefore only be encouraged, as can financing of development work (rather than routine production) at EU level which can benefit the whole system. The adherence to this approach and its implementation at both national and EU levels will be key for the issue of resources within the ESS.

Thirdly, it is also important to ensure that education systems are designed to provide highly qualified statisticians and to make further efforts to make the statistical profession attractive for highly-qualified statistical expertise by ensuring attractive working conditions.

Finally, it should be made clear to political authorities at national and EU level that statistical production requires heavy investments and long lead times. Therefore, abrupt cuts in NSI resources can have a huge damaging impact on the production and quality of important statistics for many years. Scarcity of resources needs to be dealt with in a longer term framework.

### 3.3. QUALITY COMMITMENT

The Board recalls the definition of principle 4 "Quality commitment" and its indicators in the Code:

*"All ESS members commit themselves to work and cooperate according to the principles fixed in the 'Quality declaration of the European statistical system'"*

1. Product quality is regularly monitored according to the ESS quality components.
2. Processes are in place to monitor the quality of the collection, processing and dissemination of statistics.
3. Processes are in place to deal with quality considerations, including trade-offs within quality, and to guide planning for existing and emerging surveys.
4. Quality guidelines are documented and staff are well trained. These guidelines are spelled out in writing and made known to the public.
5. There is a regular and thorough review of the key statistical outputs using external experts where appropriate.

According to the 2008 report only a small proportion of NSIs fully met the requirements and consequently this principle has the highest number of improvement actions. It should however be mentioned that the high number of actions can partly be attributed to the fact that this principle was interpreted differently by different peer review teams. The Sponsorship on Quality mentioned below will look into this issue.

<sup>6</sup> Commission Communication COM(2009)404 of 10 August 2009



### **3.3.1. European Statistical System compliance**

There has been progress over the past year, in particular with the introduction of new quality procedures, quality guidelines and training on quality. However, less than one third of the improvement actions were completed. Eurostat established a Quality Coaching initiative at the end of 2008, in which around 20 NSIs exchange knowledge and experience in the areas requiring improvement. In addition, Eurostat launched a new round of Code of Practice grants to promote implementation of ESS quality tools and standards.

### **3.3.2. Eurostat compliance**

Eurostat identified seven improvement actions. Of these, two had been completed by end of May 2009. External experts in data validation and quality reviews of key activities are now systematically used in the evaluation of the multi-annual statistical programmes, rolling reviews and peer reviews scheduled until 2010. Moreover, strategic and recurring findings from the Eurostat quality assessments are fed into the Annual Management Plan.

In an effort to follow up on quality reports on a more systematic basis, the ESS standard has been updated and a handbook on data quality reporting has been published in 2009 on Eurostat's quality web pages. The new Regulation on European Statistics makes quality reporting and its follow-up by Member States and Eurostat more binding. ESS-wide implementation of European statistics metadata standard goes hand in hand with quality reporting to users.

The full implementation of the quality assurance framework, including an office-wide assessment of data quality based on quality reviews is ongoing. The first Quality assessment cycle covering all Eurostat processes will be completed early 2011.

In order to increase data validation of data delivered from NSIs, actions towards building knowledge and competence around the existing validation building blocks are developed with the network of methodologists in Eurostat. An internal handbook and case studies are expected to be published by the end of 2009.

Concerning the completion of quality profiles, near full coverage has been achieved for the Structural Indicators. The coverage of Sustainable Development Indicators was at 80% in May 2009.

Eurostat also intends to develop further in 2010 its quality orientation for all processes, statistical and non-statistical, in a comprehensive management system to be gradually introduced in the organisation. This should in particular lead to a more integrated approach in planning, programming, monitoring and reporting activities, resource allocation processes and priority setting.

### **3.3.3. Commitment to quality**

Much has been done in the field of quality. Nevertheless, ESGAB considers progress in terms of implementation disappointing. ESGAB recognises that putting in place

processes for quality monitoring may be costly in the short run. On the other hand, having efficient processes is crucial, in particular in times of limited resources. A stronger commitment from top management in the statistical offices and a stronger adherence to common quality standards at the level of the ESS will be of essence. Regarding top management commitment, ESGAB welcomes the recent establishment of a high-level Task Force "Sponsorship on Quality" and looks forward to discussing its achievements and recommendations at a later stage.

## 4. OTHER OBSERVATIONS

### 4.1. COORDINATION OF STATISTICAL PRODUCTION

Coordination of statistical production in the ESS was specifically addressed in the peer reviews and in the 2008 Commission report. Extension of the Code to other producers of European statistics at national level than the NSI was considered a challenge. Considerable progress has been made with the adoption of the Regulation on European Statistics and the revision of the Regulation concerning the collection of statistical information by the ECB<sup>7</sup>. Nevertheless challenges remain, e.g. regarding the cooperation between Eurostat and the ECB, the ESS and the European System of Central Banks (ESCB) and CMFB.

#### 4.1.1. Regulation on European Statistics

The new European Statistics Regulation reinforces the coordination of statistical production, as it explicitly strengthens the coordination role both of Eurostat within the Commission and the ESS, and of the National Statistical Institutes within the Member States.

The Regulation specifies that Member States should designate a national statistical authority in charge of coordinating all activities related to the development, production and dissemination of European statistics at national level, which should also be the contact point for Eurostat. ESGAB welcomes these provisions. Ensuring adherence to the Code by the other national statistical authorities should be a priority for the designated national coordinator.

The Regulation also specifies that Eurostat *"may invite any institution or body of the Community to consult or cooperate with it for the purpose of developing methods and systems for statistical purposes in their respective field of competence. Any of those institutions or bodies which propose to produce statistics shall consult the Commission (Eurostat) and take into account any recommendation that it may make to this effect."* ESGAB emphasises the importance of respecting this provision, in particular within the Commission, in order to guarantee the production of high-quality statistics and avoid parallel data collections resulting in excessive burden on respondents.

The high-level dialogues between NSIs, Eurostat and main users are in ESGAB's view another important means to strengthen the cooperation between different stakeholders.

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<sup>7</sup> Council Regulation (EC) No 2533/98 concerning the collection of statistical information by the ECB

#### **4.1.2. The European Central Bank (ECB) and the European System of Central Banks (ESCB)**

The Treaty provides a role for both the Community and the ECB in the provision of statistics. Since there is an overlap between the statistics needed by the Community and those needed by the ECB, and since it is necessary to ensure consistency across areas of statistics within the framework of the European System of Accounts (ESA 95), the need for co-operation has been identified and agreed. The aim is to avoid duplication of work, to prevent conflicting requests for data from the two Institutions and to promote high-quality and consistent statistics at Community level.

Like the Commission, the ECB also has a legal framework concerning the collection of statistical information. This Regulation was recently revised and now includes a reference to statistical principles, which are very similar to those in the Regulation on European Statistics. A separate 'public commitment' by the ECB provides a definition of the statistical principles.

While ESGAB regrets that the ECB and the ESCB have chosen not to adhere to the Code despite being producers of European Statistics, the Board welcomes the fact that the statistical principles in both Regulations are now very similar. In particular, the ECB refers to the principle of scientific independence, which implies not only the absence of political interference, but also the absence of pressure from members of the Executive Board of the ECB. It is essential that both systems produce statistics according to the same statistical principles so that users are reassured that the quality of European statistics comply with the same high standards independently of which system has produced them. Moreover, and in line with principle 9 "Non-excessive burden on respondents" of the Code, having a clear division of responsibilities and avoiding overlaps is very important. ESGAB therefore welcomes the progress that has been achieved recently in the cooperation between the two institutions and looks forward to the practical implementation of the new cooperation framework.

#### **4.1.3. Committee on Monetary, Financial and Balance of payments statistics (CMFB)**

The primary role of CMFB is to advise the Commission (Eurostat) on key issues in the areas of monetary, financial and balance of payments statistics, and on their links with other areas of economic statistics, in particular national accounts. The combination of expertise from the NCBs and the NSIs has contributed to a wide acceptance of the committee's opinions.

One of its tasks is to provide opinions on methodological issues related to the EDP. Eurostat shall take a decision after consultation of CMFB on cases which are either complex or of general interest in the view of the Commission or the Member State concerned.

With the revamping of the overall ESS governance structure in the last years, ESGAB believes the role of CMFB should be revisited.

## 5. FUTURE WORK

Given the need to further improve compliance with the principle of Professional independence and its importance for the credibility of the ESS as a whole, ESGAB will continue its focus on this principle, including the procedures for the appointment and dismissal of Heads of NSIs. Moreover, ESGAB will further analyse the challenges linked to the principles of Adequacy of resources and Quality commitment, two closely related areas, and the need for appropriate infrastructures to monitor/follow up on and improve compliance with the Code. Finally, ESGAB will consider ways of communicating the Code to users and data providers with the aim of improving user confidence in European statistics.

**TABLE 1: PROGRESS WITH PEER REVIEW IMPROVEMENT ACTIONS**

	Principle	NSIs	Code of Practice Improvement Actions			
			Total	Completed by Feb 08	Completed by May 09	Remaining
1	Professional Independence	20	34	1	9	24
2	Mandate for data collection	17	26	1	8	17
3	Adequacy of resources	26	48	1	18	29
4	Quality commitment	29	103	1	28	74
5	Statistical confidentiality	23	44	2	19	23
6	Impartiality and objectivity	22	46	2	16	28
7	Sound methodology	21	46	3	15	28
8	Appropriate statistical procedures	23	40	2	10	28
9	Non-excessive burden on respondents	26	55	0	16	39
10	Cost effectiveness	26	48	0	16	32
11	Relevance	17	28	1	11	16
12	Accuracy and reliability	22	35	1	7	27
13	Timeliness and punctuality	9	14	0	5	9
14	Coherence and compatibility	23	33	1	9	23
15	Accessibility and clarity	28	81	2	29	50
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>681</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>216</b>	<b>447</b>
			(100%)	(3%)	(32%)	(66%)

## **INFORMATION COLLECTED BY EUROSTAT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CODE OF PRACTICE WITHIN THE NATIONAL STATISTICAL SYSTEMS**

The European Statistical System strategy towards fostering compliance with the Code of Practice basically follows – in line with the principle of subsidiarity and proportionality – a decentralised approach relying on and at the same time promoting the NSI co-ordination role within the system. Furthermore, NSIs have been encouraged to tailor their activities to the relative importance of data providers' contributions to European statistics rather than to pursue an inclusive approach. They should rely on existing national co-ordination mechanisms and bodies and reflect priority areas for action. The same flexibility applies with regard to the timing of the approach. It should be noted that national central banks have been exempted from the reporting to Eurostat on system-wide compliance.

The main steps which have been launched within the ESS to foster compliance with the Code by providers of European statistics other than the NSIs are outlined below.

Following the adoption of the Code of Practice, all NSIs – as far as relevant – have reached out to other national providers of European statistics co-ordinate implementation of the Code at national level. In some cases this was the first time NSIs identified and contacted all relevant actors of the national statistical system.

The vast majority of NSIs is pursuing a comprehensive approach resulting in an ongoing dialogue on progress with regard to improvement actions. Differences between NSIs in terms of speed, scope, kind and degree of the co-ordination activities can be allocated to the specific country circumstances, in particular the number and importance of actors involved, and the co-ordination role attributed to the NSI in the national system. It should be noted that in a number of countries a reinforcement of the NSI's co-ordination role – in some cases underpinned by changes in national legislation – has followed the adoption of the Code. The new Regulation on European statistics is expected to further reinforce this path through strengthening cohesion and co-ordination within the European Statistical System.

Most NSIs identified a subset of the relevant "major" data producers as being of particular importance with regard to the national system and/or the production of European statistics.

Some NSIs explicitly involved the whole national statistical system in the activities related to the implementation of the Code no matter whether they contribute to European statistics or not. Some NSIs have established a set of criteria for selecting which national bodies should be involved in their activities related to the implementation of the Code. For a small number of NSIs the work with the Code was the first time they had systematically reached out to all (important) data providers at a national level. In two countries the NSI is the only producer of European statistics.

Typically as a first step, almost all NSIs have launched information campaigns on the Code including dissemination of information material on paper like e.g. reproduction of the Code of Practice brochure in national language, release of a dedicated website with hyperlinks to the Eurostat Code of Practice website, publication of the NSI's self-

assessment, article(s) in the official statistics bulletin or journal, in net magazines or newsletters, or even in newspapers or through a press conference. All NSIs concerned have addressed the Code with relevant data providers at a national level in the framework of special seminars, conferences or information workshops or of other regular meetings.

As a next step, NSIs wrote an official letter to other relevant data producers and established a communication structure to agree on a strategy. To this end many NSIs have created an inter-institutional Working Group, Task Force of an existing co-ordination committee or a network group and one NSI envisages to establish one through legislation during 2009.

Most countries opted for a self-assessment against the principles and indicators of the Code of Practice to be carried out by the other national producers of statistics, others provided comprehensive support to carry out the assessment or provided initial assistance in the form of a central training event or set up some kind of helpdesk function. Almost all NSIs developed – some in co-operation with the inter-institutional network - an adapted version of the Code of Practice Questionnaire to be completed during a defined time period. In some NSIs this approach was piloted in a subset of data providers before extending it to the whole system. As a result almost all NSIs provided Eurostat early 2008 with a report on system-wide compliance with the Code, summarising the findings for the main actors and highlighting strengths and areas for improvement. Two NSIs reported self-assessments carried out and/or improvement action plans defined by further national institutions during 2008/09.

A few NSIs either launched activities relating to systematically addressing compliance with the Code by other data providers only in late 2008 or the beginning of 2009 – all but one on the basis of a new statistical law - or they report on ongoing discussions on defining a strategy at a national level. One NSI conducted peer reviews at national level in order to validate the assessment approach.

During April 2008 to May 2009 some NSIs report to have systematically followed-up improvement actions implemented by national data providers and a subset of them report on progress achieved. Some NSIs report not to have pursued any further activities.

To sustain the national statistical system-wide implementation of the Code beyond the self-assessments, some countries formally incorporate the system-wide improvement actions in the national statistical work programme or their multi-annual strategy plan. Some countries have included a reference to respecting the Code in their new statistical law or undertook to revise the quality framework to align it with the Code. Some NSIs work towards systematically addressing other institutions' compliance with the Code through some kind of quality labelling or certification of official statistics, including in some cases a common dissemination portal or through a system-wide TQM strategy.

## **INFORMATION COLLECTED BY EUROSTAT ON THE COMMUNICATION OF THE CODE OF PRACTICE TO USERS**

### **National Statistical Institutes**

According to the information collected by Eurostat from the thirty-one NSIs included in the exercise, there have been quite some efforts to involve users in the national process of implementing the Code.

A vast majority of NSIs have publicly accessible web pages dedicated to the Code. Most NSIs also provide links to Eurostat's webpage specifically devoted to the Code of Practice. Only very few NSIs have however made their self-assessment against the principles of the Code public via their website. Some provide links to the Eurostat website where an overview of the results of all self-assessments can be found and some have published the self-assessment on their Intranet to inform their staff. A large majority of NSIs have published the peer review of their Institute on their website or provided a link to Eurostat's website where all the peer reviews are published. Almost all NSIs have organised events, seminars, workshops or meetings involving users to present the Code, including meetings with national user councils and other user groups. As far as other activities involving users are concerned, distributing information leaflets to libraries and to the general public about the Code, incorporating references to the Code in university teaching programmes and in other training events as well as informing groups of users who visit the statistical office were mentioned.

### **Eurostat**

At the level of Eurostat, several actions were also taken. The 2008 Commission report on ESS implementation of the Code was preceded by a consultation of all Commission services. Eurostat made presentations on the implementation of the Code on the occasion of the 2008 Quality conference. Moreover, Eurostat's website has a specific section devoted to the Code of Practice and Quality, which presents the Code itself and provides comprehensive information related to Eurostat and ESS implementation. The Quality pages of the Eurostat website were developed and launched at the end of 2005. Its popularity is growing steadily, from 8800 web hits in the first quarter of 2006 to 12000 in the first quarter of 2009, with the highest rates noted during the first and the second quarters of 2008. Finally, Eurostat's leaflet on the Code of Practice has been widely distributed to users and partners within the ESS (31200 copies during 2005-2008).