



**ESAC Opinion on  
the draft 2021  
Annual Work Programme**

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## General comments

The draft 2021 Annual Work Programme (AWP), as presented in the three annexes, is a massive and very relevant Programme that systemically considers important measurable phenomena affecting the life of European citizens. ESAC congratulates Eurostat and the ESSC for the relevant work done during this difficult period, under the many restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

ESAC welcome the efforts from Eurostat and the National Statistical Institutes (NSIs) to show the changing situation from March 2020 onwards and the implications of the economic and social crisis produced by the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the Committee believes that this should better emerge in the 2021 WP. Since we are in the midst of a crisis with an unknown outcome, sufficient flexibility in the AWP commitments should be maintained in order to deal with a continuously changing reality.

## Recommendations on key areas of the programme

ESAC wishes to recommend a special part of the programme to plan and implement, as much as possible already in the 2021 AWP, a response that is informed, inclusive and targeted on the following issues:

- Monitoring the Population and Housing Census Programme in terms of its implementation, and in the context of the adverse impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in the year 2020 and beyond.
- Eurostat should promote the release of official national morbidity and subsequent mortality statistics, which are currently provided weekly from the 24 European countries in the EuroMOMO collaborative network. This will allow a reliable measurement of excess deaths (COD-Cause of Death statistics; aiming to avoid/minimise the so-called garbage COD codes) related to seasonal influenza, pandemics and other public health threats. Comparability issues should be taken into consideration. This is an important example where comparability and standardisation is strongly needed. It is recommended that Eurostat has a central role in continuing to promote the standardisation of the European statistics.
- Monitoring Education and Training in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic with emphasis on equity, social cohesion and active citizenship. Teaching at all levels is moving online, on an untested and unprecedented scale. Student assessments are also moving online. Possible, short-term and long-term adverse consequences on the affected cohorts should be examined.
- Monitoring well-being and progress on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals during and after the pandemic.
- Monitoring older persons to better understand their needs.

- Monitoring social inclusion, and assessing inequalities and poverty conditions after the pandemic.
- Identification and monitoring of economic activities/sectors most exposed to the effects of the economic crisis.
- Identification of the new economic activities/sectors that have emerged from the crisis.
- Improving the availability of data on international supply chains.
- Improving the availability of more timely short-term business indicators despite low response rates.
- Monitoring the changes in the labour market, identifying trends and policy approaches towards flexibilisation of the jobs (smart working).
- Analyzing the new role of digitalisation in the society and in particular at school, in the universities and in the labour market.
- Assessing the new skills needed by workers after this pandemic, to ensure a rapid recovery of jobs and an easier entrance in the job market.

ESAC underlines the importance of learning from this crisis how to adapt the statistical system, including reflecting on the relevance (suitability) of the internationally recognised Fundamental Statistical Principles and the European Statistics Code of Practice, so that the ESS is better able to respond in the future.

It is recommended to use this crisis as an opportunity to drastically boost an innovative process of production of statistics, so that the latter are better able to respond to novel requirements in a timely and trustworthy way.

Particular attention should be given to the use of administrative and privately held data, with a wide factual collaborative approach that empowers all involved statistics stakeholders in order to achieve a better informed society.

ESAC fully welcome the progress in the modernisation of the production of European Statistics as reported in the draft 2021 AWP to:

- (i) respond faster to emerging trends and user needs;
- (ii) make use of new types of data, data sources and tools;
- (iii) develop the skills of official statisticians;
- (iv) improve the statistical literacy of the public-at-large;
- (v) build partnerships and new approaches to the co-design and co-creation of some data sets for official uses with a wide range of stakeholders.

For statements (i) and (ii) above, ESAC recommends reinforcing activities of data production, also experimental, based on the use of innovative methods of data collection that can substitute the face-to-face interviews. (The new apps Covid Tracing Trackers are examples of information systems and automatic data collection software that can give quick answers as requested by the users). ESAC also

recommends that Eurostat and the National Statistics Institutes invest resources in the new methodologies of “trusted smart statistics” for automatic data collection and respond to emerging trends and users’ needs.

It is becoming ever more important for European citizens to be able to access official statistics and indicators that are fast in revealing emerging trends, especially to cope with a multitude of changes during and in the aftermath of the pandemic. In that sense, monitoring and providing resources to authoritative sources (NSIs and national health authorities) concerning the spread of the pandemic, with information at least at NUTS2 level, would be an important way for Eurostat to provide immediate answers to citizens’ requests for information, while ensuring the quality of that information.

This is very important to increase the trust of the citizens on official statistics. NSIs need to develop strategies to promote the use of trustworthy, salient and usable statistics, for different users and uses ranging from broad media communication to informing experts with more technical details.

Accordingly, ESAC emphasises the need to further promote the statistical literacy of the public-at-large, by proposing a stronger relationship with the media and increasing software and statistics produced by Eurostat and NSIs that are useful to educators, based on modern ways of communication that can give quantitative information on national and local phenomena. ESAC supports the development of new ways of communicating statistics to modernise the communication and dissemination of European statistics, by producing user analytics and innovative products as in the DIGICOM project.

ESAC endorses the statement (iii) by supporting the network among Eurostat, universities, National Statistical Institutes, the ECB and national central banks collaborating in the context of the European Master in Official Statistics (EMOS). This network can also be used for identifying the best training practices useful to enhance the skills of official statisticians.

ESAC fully supports the process to use georeferenced data (e.g., in Population and housing census) improving the geographical information system in order to increase the importance of the territory in order to assess priorities, and monitoring the evolution of economic, demographic, social and environmental phenomena.

The adaptations in environmental statistics are an important evidence for political decisions. The road map for the further development of environmental statistics is noted with interest. If possible, existing data sources should be used to compile the statistics; it is however also clear that traditional official sampling strategies are challenged in the face of assessing entities that show high levels of natural variation over space and time. It is recommended to pay particular attention to developing approaches for the monitoring of environmental change in areas that have been elusive to quantification such as water and land degradation and biodiversity, further exploring possibilities of using non-traditional data sources, e.g. by combining remote sensing derived data with locally crowd sourced data sets.

Further specific actions are needed for migration statistics to monitor the situation of migrants and the real impacts of integration policies, as well as to assess the data quality over time and the harmonisation across European countries.

Due to the increasing importance of the collaborative economy, ESAC appreciates that there is ongoing work regarding methodological guidelines on measurement and experimental statistics. The Committee would like to emphasise that collaborative economy is a cross-section topic. Therefore, in the future more statistical products are expected.

Further development and dissemination of transport related indicators will help monitoring the causes and impacts of climate change. In this sense data about more environmentally friendly transport modes, passenger mobility and road traffic are essential. In addition, a timely release of transport indicators gives good basic information and background. The modernisation and methodological improvements of transport statistics will be endorsed under the condition that no additional burden is put on respondents.

Closing the gap in real estate data and, above all, data on commercial real estate is an ambitious project and of utmost importance given the possible impact of developments in the area of commercial property markets for conjunctural developments and financial stability. In some economic institutions, this complex topic is still in early stages of consideration. Therefore, one focus should be on establishing uniform definitions. If administrative data is available and fit for use, it should be used. In the case of possible new surveys, the cost-benefit ratio will need to be taken into account in order to balance user needs and burden on respondents.

ESAC supports the ongoing efforts on analysing trade asymmetries to improve the quality of international trade statistics. This is especially important in the context of the possible introduction of a qualified single flow system in the future. Equally important are the ongoing efforts to reduce asymmetries in foreign direct investment.

More generally, ESAC fully supports the work of the ESSC to tackle the challenges posed by globalisation to the compilation of high quality statistics. Making further progress with respect to the consistent recording of MNE transactions will also allow monitoring possible changes in behaviour triggered by the pandemic crisis. Progress in this field requires, among others, further investment in the statistical infrastructure, including the identification of entities facilitated by a widespread use of the legal entity identifier, a consistent approach to group structure by a network of registers and provisions for the exchange of data among statistical compilers.

The implications of Brexit and its requirements on the statistical system concerning new aggregates, thresholds, confidentiality arrangements etc. will affect the ESS's work. A communication strategy to explain that impact to the public, decision-makers and the media would be crucial.

From ESAC's perspective, it is important and to be welcomed that all stakeholders are involved in the review of NACE. When implementing the NACE revision, it is important to ensure that it takes place in parallel with other major changes in economic statistics and classifications. In particular, alignment with the review of ISIC is essential.