



European Statistical  
Advisory Committee

**Opinion on the**

**Final evaluation of the  
implementation of the European  
Statistical Programme 2013-2020**

ESAC Doc. 2021/14

## 1. Introduction

The general objective of the European Statistical Programme (ESP) is for the European Statistical System (ESS) to continue being the leading provider of high-quality statistics on Europe.

Regulation (EU) 99/2013 establishing the ESP for the years 2013-2017, and extended by Regulation (EU) 2017/1951 to cover the remaining period 2018-2020, regulates the ESP evaluation. Article 15(3) of Regulation EU) 2017/1951 states that “by 31 December 2021, the Commission shall, after consulting the ESSC and the European Statistical Advisory Committee, submit a final evaluation report on the implementation of the programme to the European Parliament and to the Council.

The report shall in particular evaluate:

- a) the outcome of the reprioritisation and cost evaluation of statistical products;
- b) the actions taken by the ESS to reduce the implementation and production costs for Member States and to limit the overall burden stemming from the statistical projects and fields covered by the programme;
- c) the progress on rendering access to official statistics easier and more user-friendly, including the provision of data on the Eurostat website; and
- d) the progress on the improvement of data availability, including on social economy activities and on the Europe 2020 indicators.”

Even if the evaluation focused on the 2018-2020 period as 2013-2017 had already been covered by two previous mid-term evaluations of the ESP, the conclusions of the evaluation cover the implementation period of the programme in its entirety (2013-2020).

## 2. Opinion

According to Article 15 of Regulation (EU) 2017/1951, the European Statistical Advisory Committee (ESAC) shall give an opinion on the “final evaluation of the European statistical programme 2013-2020” (hereafter ‘FE-ESP2013-2020’) as regards statements a) to d) above.

### **A) Outcome of the reprioritisation and cost evaluation of statistical products**

The FE-ESP2013-2020 notes that despite improvements, prioritisation remained a challenge throughout the programme resulting in increased pressure on Member State resources.

Indeed, ESAC confirms that prioritisation of statistics remains a difficult task, and new mechanisms especially based on user dialogue need to be implemented in the next ESP 2021-2027. In particular, ESAC suggests that a stronger link with the National Councils of Statistics Users must be established in order to better select needs and especially priorities. ESAC believes that the ESSC will consider useful the actions of ESAC to establish a larger network with the national users to better identify needs and priorities.

However, from 2013 to 2020, in general, increasing needs for information expressed by the users of statistics have been observed, while a decreased interest overtime on a corresponding volume of statistics has not been identified. So, in general, the request for statistical information increased over time from 2013 to 2020 and ESAC foresees that this increment will continue in the next years.

This is due to three main reasons: (i) modern statistics describe reality with higher granularity and by using increasing and more detailed information (i.e., by using a larger number of variables observed over time and space); (ii) citizens frequently connected with social networks and enterprises attentive to the evolving needs of the Information Society in which we live require an increasing quantity of data to be properly informed and/or for decision-making; (III) a growing need for information on environmental issues linked to climate change can also be expected.

### **B) Actions taken by the ESS to reduce the implementation and production costs for Member States and to limit the overall burden stemming from the statistical projects and fields covered by the programme**

The FE-ESP2013-2020 observes that the production cost of statistics and the number of staff went down while the number of datasets produced increased. ESAC confirms that the actions taken by the ESS to reduce the production costs for the Member States and to limit the overall burden have been relevant and effective.

ESAC believes that, due to the increase in the requests for information, additional reduction of costs may affect the quality of the statistics and therefore should not be suggested for the future.

The increase of the digital transition, which represents one of the pillars of the recovery facility, will increase the number of registers and administrative data collected for different purposes.

ESAC observes that the ESP2013-2020 includes projects for using new sources of data, as reported in the FE-ESP2013-2020, and agrees on future investments in projects on the use of registers and administrative data and in the use of existing statistics by data linking and micro-data linking, in order to reduce the burden of respondents (individuals and enterprises) while increasing information without a great increase of costs. This relates in particular to future data requirements, for example in the context of the European Green Deal, health related statistics or measuring digitalisation.

The diffuse use of registers requires protocols that should be defined in a guide for the national statistical systems that allows standardising the organisation of the data for their quick interconnection. This guide should be probably included in the Handbook for Quality and Metadata Reports (EHQMR) and should propose best practices to assess the quality of the data of the registers. The increasing use of registers also requires renewed attention and investment in the comparability of data that are much more difficult to harmonise.

### **C) Progress on rendering access to official statistics easier and more user-friendly, including the provision of data on the Eurostat website**

The FE-ESP2013-2020 reports that the ESP contributed to progress on rendering access to official statistics easier and more user-friendly, but there is still scope for further improvement.

ESAC agrees that the ESP 2013-2020 has much contributed to rendering the use of official statistics easier and welcomes the complete redevelopment of the website of Eurostat started in 2014, with a great increase in the last years, taking great care of the ways of visualising data and statistics.

ESAC suggests developing different strategies for communicating statistics according to the typology of users of the website. Please, see the classification of users of statistics developed by ESAC ('The Users of Statistics and their role in the European Society', 2015) and confirmed by the DIGICOM project. Starting already from the first page of the Eurostat's website, its visualisation should be compliant with the typology of users visiting the website. The way the data is presented should be redesigned, taking into account the different types of users and levels of knowledge, and particular attention should be paid to the interpretation of the data and to comparability. For example, for the non-expert user it would be useful developing 'light metadata' with easy to understand explanations and definitions associated to the data indicators. While expert users can easily refer to metadata, other won't and their attention could be drawn with red flags and short comments. Otherwise the website may not meet the interest and not be centred on the type of information the visiting person would like to have.

Very interesting are the visualisation tools that can be useful for approaching non-experts and students in the schools, but they should if possible be translated into all

EU official languages, as this will be important to enhance and expand citizens' interest in statistics. Their use should be better integrated into 'statistics explained', together with 'statistics4beginners'.

For the typology of users: 'teachers and students', very interesting is the 'education corner', but this corner is difficult to find on the website because teachers and students reach it only from the 'help' on the first page. In addition, having segmentations of products by level of education would contribute to improving the interest and use by students and teachers.

There are some additional simplifications that should be adopted. For example, individuals visiting the website need to authenticate before asking for support; this seems unnecessary for simple requests of support and necessary only for a specific and complex request. To boost the user support efforts, intelligent automated support should be designed, such as a 'chatbot' that uses natural language processing.

ESAC considers the project to give access to Secured Use Files (SUF) for research very crucial and a priority to quickly finalise, with an additional perspective of enlarging the perimeter to all surveys with the use of very detailed microdata for research purposes, particularly the LFS and the SILC (widely used and for which the SUF do not fulfil the researchers' needs).

The FE-ESP2013-2020 emphasises the diffusion of culture of statistics. This is very important for the trust on official statistics. To achieve that, it is important to have the opinion of an important group that is not usually addressed by the consultations: the 'non-users'.

ESAC suggests using, even more, the Eurostat website to promote the culture of statistics. The 'education corner' is a good example, together with hackathons and European Statistics Olympics. A campaign to use statistical tools developed by Eurostat and NSIs and data included in the website should be considered in the future.

Many initiatives to promote statistical literacy exist. But it would be crucial to measure, regularly and in a comparable way across countries, the impact of those efforts and why statistical literacy is so important for democracy and the society well-being.

#### **D) Progress on the improvement of data availability, including on social economy activities and on the Europe 2020 indicators**

The FE-ESP2013-2020 reports an increase of data on social economy activities.

ESAC welcomes the increase of data on social economy activities, population, social conditions, as well as on migration, also disaggregation by migratory status. For social statistics the request of information certainly increased due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

New statistics in support to the European Green Deal are also needed, as well as territorial disaggregation of social statistics (as the report also recognises) and the promotion of new integration process indicators about migration (e.g. employment, education, social inclusion, active citizenship), based on longitudinal data, in order to monitor the situation of immigrants and the real impact of integration policies.

As noted under section B), the potential of using existing statistics (by data linking and micro-data linking), registers and administrative data should be fully exploited to avoid higher reporting obligations for respondents and production costs.