European Statistical System Peer Reviews

Third round: 2021-2023

Guides' Annex VI: Formulation of issues and recommendations

Endorsed by the ESS Committee in October 2020

The present document is meant to support the peer review experts by providing some guidance when developing and formulating the recommendations to be passed on to the NSI/ONAs. The issues and recommendations provided are just examples to underpin the way of formulating broad issues and recommendations in the ESS peer reviews and are not meant to be copied as such. The attention of the user of this annex should therefore focus on the way of formulating issues and recommendations, rather than on the examples of issues and recommendations provided therein.

This annex does not represent an exhaustive list of issues and recommendations, but is intended to raise awareness about the possible scope, magnitude and content of potential issues and recommendations. It suggests merely proposals for broad themes and recommendations and should serve as a guiding document showing the level of scope, magnitude and content to be followed. It should in no way be understood as a menu from which the peer review experts can/should choose the issues and recommendations.

The recommendations included into the peer review report do not need to be strictly comparable across countries as such (because the intention of the peer reviews is not to compare among countries), but should be harmonised, as much as possible, in terms of scope, magnitude, number and content. The following list of issues (crucial themes/headings) and an example of a recommendation linked to each of them has been prepared to provide inspiration and guidance for achieving an increased level of harmonisation of recommendations.

The number of recommendations will obviously vary to some extent between the countries according to their level of compliance with the European statistics Code of Practice and in terms of how much they could improve their practices. However, if at the end of the third round of peer reviews, the number of recommendations across the countries will vary from 14 to 40, it could mean that the scope, magnitude and content of the recommendations are not harmonised. A big number of recommendations could be an indication that the recommendations are issued at a too detailed level or are addressing particular domain statistics, which is not in the scope of these peer reviews. It is therefore, expected that the number of recommendations for each peer review remains within the range of 10 to 25 recommendations.

Furthermore, the recommendations need to be distinguished between:

1. *fundamental/important* to ensure compliance/alignment with the ES CoP (compliance-relevant meaning that the statistical authority does not comply with the principle/indicator) - for those recommendations the principle(s)/indicator(s) must be added in brackets;

2. *less critical/technical* supporting improvements (improvement related meaning that the statistical authority is (broadly) compliant with the principle/indicator but could improve) - for these recommendations the principle(s)/indicator(s) should be added if feasible/or a category if no suitable principle(s)/indicator(s) can be identified.

The recommendations should be formulated in such a way that the NSI/Eurostat/ONA is able to define suitable improvement actions. In case the recommendations are addressed to other stakeholders/actors than the NSI/Eurostat, this should be clearly spelled out in the peer review report. The formulation of each recommendation should clearly identify the rationale behind it and frame the potential future action(s). In addition, the narrative around each of the recommendations should provide sufficiently detailed explanations on why the peer review expert team issued the recommendation.

Broad issues/themes should be created to group a number of recommendations. The issues in this list are partly overlapping in some instances and the use of them depends on the situation and the content of the recommendations in each country. For example, if the peer review would result in the issuing of:
- only one or two recommendations fitting under an issue such as "strengthen governance", and
- only one or two recommendations fitting in an issue such as "enhance coordination", and
- eventually a few more recommendations fitting in an issue such as "strengthen the legal and the institutional environment",
the peer review experts should group all these recommendations in the broad issue "strengthen the legal and the institutional environment" instead of creating two additional broad issues each containing only one or two recommendations.

This is why for each of the examples of broad issues here below, bullets are provided for the possible content covered by the issue. However, the peer review experts are invited to create new broad issues that fit the context of a particular country. In doing so they need to ensure that the broad issues are corresponding, to the maximum extent possible, with the type of issues listed below, in terms of scope, magnitude and content.

1.   Strengthen Governance

- *Strategic level*
- *Governance bodies (ESGAB-like bodies)*
- *Oversight bodies on questioning/monitoring compliance of NSIs and ONAs*
- *User Council*
- *Strategy, programming, planning*
- *Professional independence (nomination)*
- *Legislation*
- *Partnerships for administrative or other data sources*
- *Internal regulations*
- *Coordination body*

Formulation of a recommendation:

The NSI should establish a national body overseeing the compliance of all the national statistical authorities with the principles of the European statistics Code of Practice (improvement related).

2.   Enhance Coordination

- *Legislation on coordination*
- *Definition of European/official statistics and identification of ONAs*
- *Coordination body*
- *Mutual support between NSI and ONAs (common standards and policies, guidelines, trainings)*
- *Promotion of information sharing, pooling of resources or operational tools*
- *Resources for coordination*
- *Communication in the NSS*
- *Common dissemination policy, release calendar and work programme*
- *Procedures for coordination*

Formulation of a recommendation:

The NSI should establish and chair a governance body within the National Statistical System, enabling it to properly fulfil its coordination role through the development of appropriate structures, procedures and tools (improvement related).

3.   Strengthen the legal and the institutional environment

- *Statistical law*
- *Definition of European/official statistics and identification of ONAs*
- *Partnerships for administrative and other data sources*
- *Positioning/recognition/influence of the NSI in the governmental environment (IT, data governance)*
- *Resources*
- *Confidentiality*
- *Commitment to quality*
- *Impartiality*
- *Strategy, programming, values, vision and mission*
- *Mandate for data collection*
- *Access to administrative, other and privately held data*

Formulation of a recommendation:

The NSI should establish itself as data expert/authority/steward in the governmental structures in order to be consulted and involved in all major developments relevant to its function (improvement related).

4.   Legislate statistical environment

- *Statistical law*
- *Professional independence (nomination)*
- *Coordination role*
- *Governance bodies (ESGAB-like bodies)*
- *Body that oversees, such as statistical council, user council*
- *Confidentiality*
- *Commitment to quality*
- *Impartiality*
- *Mandate for data collection*
- *Access to administrative, other and privately held data*

Formulation of a recommendation:

The NSI and relevant national authorities should ensure that there is a legal mandate for statistical authorities to collect data and access information from multiple data sources, including administrative data, for European statistical purposes (compliance-relevant: European statistics Code of Practice, indicator 2.1).

5.   Strengthen professional independence

- *Appointment/dismissal of the head of the NSI*
- *Sufficiently high hierarchical standing of the heads of Eurostat, NSIs and ONAs*
- *Legislate independence in developing, producing and disseminating statistics*
- *Integrity, accountability and impartiality*
- *Pre-release practices and release calendar*
- *Sole responsibility for methodology*
- *Committed resources*

Formulation of a recommendation:

The responsible authority/ies should establish transparent procedures for the recruitment and appointment of the head of the National Statistical Institute that are based on professional

criteria only, and ensure that the reasons for his/her dismissal, which cannot compromise professional or scientific independence, are specified in the legal framework (compliance-relevant: European statistics Code of Practice, indicator 1.8).

6.   Ensure adequate resources in numbers and skills

- *HR policy (mobility)*
- *Motivation*
- *Resources for coordination*
- *Skills development and training*
- *Adequate budget*
- *New technologies*
- *Monitoring*
- *Cost effectiveness*
- *User needs versus resources/priority setting*
- *Management practices*

Formulation of a recommendation:

The statistical authorities should have an up to date HR policy in place to ensure that the skills, competencies and expertise of staff match the operational and strategic needs of the national statistical system, so that any skills gaps can be identified, planned for and addressed (depending on the context of the country this recommendation can be either compliance-relevant: European statistics Code of Practice, indicator 3.1, or improvement related).

7.   Strengthen strategic programming

- *Strategy, programming, planning*
- *Planning indicators, monitoring and reporting*
- *One programme for the NSS*
- *Organisational structures, procedures and processes*
- *Body that oversees, such as statistical council, user council*
- *Consultation*
- *Programme evaluation*

Formulation of a recommendation:

The statistical authorities should develop a strategy with all key elements (i.e. mission, vision and strategic priorities and derived concrete goals) to meet the existing and future challenges. Those

goals should be monitored by the statistical authorities through relevant measurable indicators (improvement related).

8. Embed quality management throughout the national statistical system

- *Commitment to quality*
- *Total quality management*
- *Process approach (quality procedures and tools)*
- *Regular quality assessments/reviews/audits*
- *Quality framework*
- *Quality policy, quality strategy and quality guidelines*
- *Quality training*
- *Quality reporting*
- *National guidelines for ONAs*
- *Promoting quality as a strength*
- *Organisational structures for quality*
- *Promotion of information sharing, pooling of resources or operational tools*
- *Risk management*

Formulation of a recommendation:

The statistical authorities should develop and introduce a systematic approach to reviewing and assuring the quality of both their statistical output and those of the wider National Statistical System producing European statistics. This assurance framework should include an annual publication summarising quality assurance improvement actions that have been introduced in the relevant time period (depending on the context of the country this recommendation can be either compliance-relevant: European statistics Code of Practice, indicators 4.3 and 4.4, or improvement related).

9. Modernise statistical processes and methods

- *Innovative methods and tools*
- *Evaluation of processes and methods*
- *Resources and skills*
- *Partnerships*
- *Modern technology*
- *Commitment to innovation*

- *Sharing of methods*
- *Data sharing and integration*
- *New data sources*
- *Rewarding innovative ideas*

Formulation of a recommendation:

The statistical authorities should provide resources and support to encourage innovation at all levels of the organisation (improvement related).

10.   Extend the use of administrative data sources

- *Legislation on access to administrative data*
- *Commitment to using administrative data*
- *Partnerships for administrative sources*
- *Regular review of administrative sources*
- *Meetings with the holders of administrative sources*
- *Involvement in changes of administrative data sources*
- *Methodology*
- *Metadata*

Formulation of a recommendation:

The NSI and relevant national authorities should ensure that appropriate legal and/or other mechanisms are in place to secure that the NSI is consulted when administrative data systems are being developed or reviewed so that the needs of official statistics are taken into account (depending on the context of the country this recommendation can be either compliance-relevant: European statistics Code of Practice, indicator 2.2 or improvement related).

11.   Increase the use and integration of new and other data sources

- *Investment in the potential of existing data sources such as administrative registers for developing new and advanced statistical products*
- *Privately held data sources*
- *Big data*
- *Web scraping*
- *Artificial intelligence*
- *Deep machine learning*
- *Cooperation with universities and research institutes*

- *Data sharing and innovation*

Formulation of a recommendation:

The statistical authorities should examine the possibility of using new data sources, such as big data and develop suitable methodology to make use of those data for new statistical products (depending on the context of the country this recommendation can be either compliance-relevant: European statistics Code of Practice, indicators 9.4 and 10.3, or improvement related).

12. Facilitate the use and re-use of microdata

- *Existence of research data centres and safe centres*
- *RDC access requirements and modalities*
- *Microdata confidentiality issues*
- *Co-operation with universities and the research community*
- *Partnerships for microdata sharing*
- *Legislative issues concerning sharing of microdata*

Formulation of a recommendation:

The statistical authorities should adopt appropriate measures to ensure that all microdata available within the NSS can be accessed via national research data centres and data centres (improvement related).

13. Strengthen user focus/orientation

- *Consultation of users (e.g. user satisfaction survey, user conferences/meetings, other forms)*
- *Strategic programming*
- *Dissemination and other policies*
- *Metadata*
- *Improved communication*
- *Fighting fake news and misuse of statistics*
- *Statistical literacy (training)*
- *User Council*
- *Corporate social responsibility*
- *Innovative dissemination channels and products (visualisation)*
- *Partnerships with scientific community and other user groups*
- *NSS advisory body*

Formulation of a recommendation:

The statistical authorities should review and improve dissemination so that the individual needs of different user segments can be better addressed through multi-channel communication, innovative statistical outputs and the use of storytelling (improvement related).

14. Ensure trust in official statistics

- *Communication with users - Communication is an overarching theme, because to enhance trust in statistics, communication is inherent in all the other bullets listed here below*
- *Commitment to quality*
- *Appropriate statistical methodology*
- *Appropriate statistical procedures*
- *Transparency*
- *Professional independence*
- *Equal treatment of users*
- *Quality as a competitive advantage*
- *Quality reporting*
- *Value of official statistics*
- *Promotion of statistical output*
- *Statistical literacy*
- *Fighting fake news and misuse of statistics*
- *Corporate social responsibility*
- *Branding*
- *Labelling*

Formulation of a recommendation:

The statistical authorities should promote their products and services widely, publish user-oriented information on methodology and quality and educate users and media about the proper use, interpretation and value of official statistics (depending on the context of the country this recommendation can be either compliance-relevant: European statistics Code of Practice, indicators 1.7, 15.1, 15.2, 15.5, 15.6, 15.7, or improvement related).

15. Promote the value of official statistics

- *Branding*
- *User trust*

- *Improve cooperation with media*
- *Fighting fake news and misuse of statistics*
- *Strengthen communication with users and general public*
- *Modern communications channels (social networks)*
- *Interactive visualisations*
- *Statistical literacy*
- *Safe centres*

Formulation of a recommendation:

The NSI should develop/revise and implement a communication strategy for branding official statistics as a main source of quality, reliable, relevant and timely statistical data (improvement related).

16. Optimise data security versus data access

- *Research microdata files (RMF's)*
- *Anonymised research files (AMF's)*
- *Support research and scientific community*
- *Statistical disclosure control*
- *Statistical confidentiality policy*
- *Protect anonymity of individuals and businesses*
- *Treatment of identifiers*
- *Safe, managed data access*
- *Secured storage of data*
- *Information security policy and audits*
- *Register of data access*
- *Technical and organisational assurance of confidentiality*

Formulation of a recommendation:

The NSI should develop a policy on Access to Research Microdata files (RMF) which details the process for authorising access to RMF's and for managing RMF research projects. This policy should set out the procedures for applying for access to RMF data, the conditions and criteria under which data can be accessed, the obligations for the researcher to respect the confidentiality of the information contained in the RMF files and the safeguards that the researcher will put in place to manage disclosure control of any outputs they produce. This policy should be made publicly available on the NSI's website (compliance-relevant: European statistics Code of Practice, indicators 5.4, 5.5 and 5.6).

17. Optimise output quality

- *Relevance*
- *Accuracy and reliability*
- *Timeliness and punctuality*
- *Coherence and comparability*
- *Accessibility and clarity*
- *Methodology*
- *Metadata*
- *Standardisation*
- *Disclosure control*
- *Quality guidelines*
- *Process quality*
- *Quality reporting*
- *Quality measurement*
- *Error management*

Formulation of a recommendation:

The statistical authorities should develop a procedure to optimise data quality in terms of weighting the different quality dimensions and make it publicly available (improvement relevant)