

# **43<sup>rd</sup> Meeting of the European Statistical System Committee**

**13<sup>th</sup> May 2020**

Item 2 of the agenda

Detailed methodology for the next round of peer reviews

Work Programme Objective 9.1

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### 1. RECOMMENDATION FOR ACTION

The ESS Committee is invited to discuss and endorse the first part of the full package of the methodology for the third round of peer reviews comprised of:

- a document describing the **overall methodology for the next round of peer reviews** (based on the document endorsed at the ESSC meeting in October 2019 and revised for chapter IV on implementation arrangements and chapter V on communication);
  - a document describing the procedure and criteria for selecting the ONAs that will participate in the peer review of a given country (Annex I);
  - the self-assessment questionnaire for the NSIs/Eurostat (SAQ NSIs) (see Annex II)
  - the self-assessment questionnaire for the ONAs (SAQ ONAs) (see Annex III);
  - a document listing the information and the core documents to be provided by the NSIs, ONAs and Eurostat together with the filled-in SAQs (see Annex IV);
  - a document describing the structure of the peer review report (Annex V).
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For completeness, the second part of the full package of the methodology for the third round of peer reviews is mentioned below although they will not be discussed at the ESSC meeting in May 2020. These documents will be sent to the ESSC for a written consultation after the May ESSC meeting, in June 2020. The full package of the methodology for the third round of peer reviews is supposed to be available as of July 2020.

- the guide for the NSIs and for the ONAs participating in the peer review;
  - the guide for the peer reviewers;
  - the annexes to the two guides, including the:
    - 1) Information and core documents to be provided by the NSIs/ONAs/Eurostat;
    - 2) Template for the agenda/programme of the peer review visit;
    - 3) Structure for peer review report;
    - 4) Procedure for defining improvement actions;
    - 5) Questions by interlocutor to serve as guidance for the peer reviewers;
    - 6) List of possible issues and recommendations as guidance for peer reviewers.
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The ESS Committee is further invited to discuss the **draft communication strategy** for the ESS on the peer reviews and to agree on its principal elements with a view to endorse the final version of the communication strategy via a written consultation in summer 2020 (see Annex VI).

The ESS Committee is also invited to agree on the way forward as outlined in section 7.

## **2. BACKGROUND AND BRIEF HISTORY**

In its 38<sup>th</sup> meeting in October 2018, the ESS Committee welcomed Eurostat's concept paper on the third round of peer reviews, building on previous discussions of the Director Generals of the NSIs on the topic. In February 2019, the ESS Committee agreed to establish a dedicated ESS Task Force on peer reviews and endorsed its mandate and roadmap. Based on the work of the ESS Task Force on peer reviews, discussions in the Working Group on Quality in official statistics (QWG) and internal reflections, Eurostat presented a document on the overall methodology for the third round of peer reviews to the meeting of the ESSC in October 2019. The ESSC agreed on the objectives, scope and approach for the third round of peer reviews as well as on the list of implementation arrangements and asked to present further details in methodology document for the 43<sup>rd</sup> meeting of the ESSC (the current document). The ESSC also noted that the work of detailing these implementation arrangements was delegated to the QWG and included tasks such as the development of the self-assessment questionnaires, guides for peer reviewers and NSIs/ONAs and several templates.

The work undertaken by the QWG and its sub-groups since then as well as internal reflections provided the necessary input to draft the revised and more detailed version of the overall methodology for the third round of peer reviews and to develop the instruments and tools as mentioned above, some of which are attached for review and endorsement.

The work undertaken by a specialised communication company to draft a communication strategy accompanying the third round of peer reviews as well as internal reflections in Eurostat provided the necessary input for the draft version of the communication strategy, attached for discussion.

## **3. POLICY CONTEXT**

As recognised in the ESS Vision 2020, quality is one of the ESS comparative advantages in a world experiencing a growing trend of instant information. The European statistics Code of Practice (ES CoP) is the backbone of the ESS common quality framework, and ESS statistical authorities have committed themselves to adhere to the ES CoP. The importance of compliance with the ES CoP was further underlined by the adoption of the Quality Declaration by the ESSC in September 2016.

In this context, it is crucial for the ESS to be equipped with a ES CoP review mechanism, the peer reviews, supporting with credible evidence this self-commitment to adhere to the ES CoP.

After the revision of the ES CoP in 2016-2017 and its adoption by the ESS Committee in November 2017, the compliance/alignment of the national statistical systems (NSS) and Eurostat with the principles of this revised ES CoP should be re-assessed as well as NSS be supported in their further development with future-oriented recommendations for improvement emanating from the peer reviews. To this end, a corresponding methodology had to be developed, in consultation and agreement with the EU Member States and EFTA countries. Furthermore, in order to accompany the peer review process with a targeted communication campaign, a draft communication strategy was developed to use the peer reviews to better communicate the value of European statistics and increase the understanding of peer reviews and their outcome among users.

The consultation process on the methodology and its instruments/tools involved the expert groups from the QWG, the QWG itself, the Directors of methodology through the DIME and the ESS Task Force on peer reviews.

## **4. CONSEQUENCES FOR NATIONAL STATISTICAL INSTITUTES**

The methodology for the third round of peer reviews will be the basis for implementing the peer reviews in the EU Member States and EFTA countries and has to be followed in all stages of the peer review process. The communication campaign based on the communication strategy will have to be implemented by the EU Member States and EFTA countries and the material developed in

this process is meant to support the NSIs and Eurostat in promoting the value of European statistics and the role of the peer reviews therein.

## **5. OUTSTANDING ISSUES**

Following the endorsement of the first part of the package of the methodology for the third round of peer reviews by the ESS Committee in its meeting in May 2020, the second part of the package will be consulted with the ESS Committee through a written procedure in June 2020. After the formal endorsement of the full package of the methodology for the third round of peer reviews, the third round of peer reviews will be launched by Eurostat with official letters and the publication of all the documents on the website of Eurostat.

Following the agreement on the principal elements of the communication strategy by the ESS Committee in its meeting in May 2020, the strategy will be further developed and endorsed through written consultation of the ESS Committee in July/August 2020. Once finalised, it will serve as a basis for the development of the material and tools to implement the communication strategy, to be used in the communication campaign for the peer reviews starting in early 2021.

## **6. RISK ASSESSMENT**

If no methodology for the third round of peer reviews is agreed upon and hence, no peer reviews will be implemented, it will be difficult to assess the compliance/alignment with the principles of the revised ES CoP and to prove to external stakeholders that the European Statistical System (ESS) is a principle-based system striving for continuous improvement. This, in turn, may have an adverse impact on its image and reputation. Furthermore, if the first part of the full package of the methodology with the accompanying instruments and tools is not endorsed and the principal elements of the communication strategy are not agreed upon in the meeting of the ESS Committee in May 2020, the peer review process will be delayed and the previously agreed timeline will not be kept.

## **7. NEXT STEPS**

Based on the agreement to launch the third round of peer reviews in 2020 with the peer review of Eurostat, followed by the peer reviews of the EU Member States and EFTA countries in 2021-2022, the following steps and timeline are envisaged:

- Finalisation by Eurostat of the procurement procedure for the contract with a company tasked to implement the peer reviews in the EU Member States and EFTA countries – April 2020;
- (Virtual) Meetings of the ESS Task Force on peer reviews to review main aspects of the first part of the full package of the methodology - April 2020;
- Consultation of the DIME on the guides for peer reviewers and the NSIs and the ONAs participating in the peer review – April 2020;
- Presentation by Eurostat of the 2020 (final) monitoring report on the implementation of improvement actions from the second round of peer reviews – in the ESS Committee meeting of May 2020;
- Endorsement by the ESS Committee of the first part of the full package of the methodology for the third round of peer reviews including the overall methodology and some of the supporting instruments and tools (operationalised criteria for selecting the ONAs to participate in the peer review, SAQs for the NSIs and ONAs, Information and core documents to be provided by the NSIs/ONAs/Eurostat together with the filled-in SAQ, structure of the peer review report) – May 2020;

- Agreement by the ESS Committee of the principal elements of the communication strategy on the peer reviews – May 2020;
- Written consultation of and endorsement by the ESSC on the “Guide for the NSIs and the ONAs participating in the peer review” and the “Guide for the peer reviewers” and their six annexes – June 2020;
- Further development of the communication strategy and agreement by the ESSC in written consultation – July/August 2020;
- Official launch of the third round of peer reviews through official letters and the publication of the full methodology package on Eurostat’s website – July 2020;
- Selection procedure for the nomination of peer review experts by the NSIs and the company tasked with the implementation of the peer reviews – July 2020
- Decision on the peer review expert teams and lead experts – August 2020
- Preliminary agreement with the NSIs on the timing of the peer reviews in each EU Member State and EFTA country – September 2020;
- Training of the peer review experts and the NSIs’ national peer review coordinators – October 2020;
- Workshop for the communication officers of the NSIs on communicating the value of European statistics linked to peer reviews – November/December 2020;
- Peer review of Eurostat by ESGAB, from the self-assessment phase to agreeing on the final version of the Eurostat peer review report – October 2020 – November 2021;
- Peer reviews of the NSS of the EU Member States and EFTA countries – 2021-2022
- Report on the main findings and lessons learnt from the third round of peer reviews – autumn 2023. The concrete activities (e.g. workshop on lessons learnt, etc.) will be agreed at a later stage.

## **Overall methodology for the third round of peer reviews**

This document describes the overall methodology for the third round of peer reviews in the European Statistical System (ESS). It includes the objectives of the peer reviews, the scope, including the involvement of ONAs, and the approach, already agreed upon by the ESSC in its meeting in October 2019. It further includes a description of the implementation arrangements such as the selection procedure for the ONAs to participate in the peer reviews, the self-assessment phase, the composition of the peer review expert teams, the peer review visits, the peer review reports and the harmonisation of recommendations, as well as the procedure to develop improvement actions. The document also includes a short description of possible communication activities; a draft communication strategy with its main elements such as its objectives, target groups, the communication approach, key messages, monitoring and evaluation aspects, risks and a timeline is presented as Annex VI of this document.

### **I. Objectives**

The third round of peer reviews has the following two objectives:

- To review the compliance/alignment of the European Statistical System (ESS) with the European statistics Code of Practice (ES CoP), in order to demonstrate to the ESS and to external stakeholders that the ESS is a system based on the principles of the ES CoP;
- To help National Statistical Institutes (NSIs), other national authorities (ONAs) developing, producing and disseminating European statistics, and Eurostat to further improve and develop the national statistical systems (NSS)/Eurostat by indicating future-oriented recommendations; at the same time they should stimulate government authorities to support the implementation of these recommendations.

Both objectives target internal and external (to the ESS) stakeholders; they have therefore an internal and external dimension. The internal dimension covers the review of compliance/alignment with the ES CoP, progress achieved since the second round of peer reviews and improvements inside the NSIs, Eurostat and the ESS/NSS, something that is inherent to the ESS, and can be achieved by the ESS on its own. The external dimension covers in the broadest sense all external stakeholders' active involvement in the implementation of the peer review recommendations and the related improvement actions. It is thus, more difficult to achieve as it reaches beyond the authority of the NSIs and Eurostat to mainly government bodies. The external dimension is hoped to be enhanced with the help of an extensive communication campaign (see Annex VI for more details).

### **II. Scope**

The third round of peer reviews will:

- Cover the 16 principles of the ES CoP;
- Differentiate the focus/emphasis of assessing the principles between the self-assessment phase and the peer review visit, depending on the institutional set-up and specific situation

of each NSS. While in the self-assessment phase all principles will be assessed as they are equally important, the peer review expert team will have the possibility to decide, for each country, on which principles it will focus during the peer review visit. The basis for the decision will be the following criteria: a) potentially problematic areas identified in the self-assessment questionnaires (SAQs), b) areas identified to be in need for improvements in the second round of peer reviews and c) improvement actions from the second round of peer reviews experiencing difficulties in implementation. The principles on professional independence (P1) and coordination and cooperation (P1bis) as well as principles including elements of modernisation (e.g. principles 2, 4, 7, 8, 15) will be in any circumstance assessed for every member of the ESS;

- Identify advancement and progress of the NSS/Eurostat in complying/aligning with the principles of the ES CoP, compared to the second round of peer reviews;
- Cover the NSS, meaning the NSI and selected other national authorities developing, producing and disseminating European statistics (ONAs). The NSIs having a coordination role in the national statistical system will decide which ONAs are selected for the self-assessment phase and invited for the peer review visit, based on commonly agreed ESS criteria for the selection of the ONAs. The NSIs will accompany their selection of ONAs with a short explanatory note to be sent to Eurostat. The criteria for selection include:
  - Importance for European statistics, measured by a percentage threshold of producing European statistics,
  - Importance for European statistics, measured by its significance,
  - Degree of compliance with the ES CoP by an ONA,
  - Importance of an ONA from the perspective of the NSI;
- Endeavour to identify elements/recommendations to be addressed to the ESS in general that will contribute to an enhanced partnership in the ESS;
- Not aim to assess the quality of specific statistical products, because other mechanisms exist to assess compliance with the applicable legislation for every statistical product.

### **III. Approach**

A combination of an audit-like and a peer reviewing approach will be used to benefit from the positive aspects of both approaches.

The following elements from an audit-like approach will be applied:

- Involvement of external experts to guarantee the credibility and objectivity of the peer reviews;
- The provision of documents as evidence for statements;
- The ownership of the recommendations by the peer review expert team;
- The right for the NSIs/Eurostat to express diverging views on the recommendations for improvement as formulated by the peer review expert team; diverging views will be published together with the peer review report, in an annex;
- The responsibility of the NSI/Eurostat to formulate the improvement actions to address the recommendations in the peer review report.

The following elements of a peer review approach will be used:

- Common agreement within the ESS on the methodology of the peer reviews, including the objectives, scope and implementation arrangements;
- Participation of experts from the NSIs (peers) in the peer review expert teams, including from among the senior management of the NSIs;
- Peer learning through the involvement of experts from the NSIs;
- Focus on improvements as an objective of the reviews.

Means to apply the correct balance between the two approaches will be discussed with the peer review experts during their training in October 2020.

#### **IV. Implementation arrangements**

The implementation of the ESS peer reviews will be supported by a contractor, identified through an open procurement procedure. The contractor will be responsible for engaging and supporting the peer review experts, for the logistics of the peer reviews, for providing well-formatted and language-checked reports and for organising the training and workshops for the peer review experts and national peer review coordinators from the NSIs.

The implementation arrangements describe the following elements of the peer reviews:

- The procedure for the selection of the ONAs to participate in the peer review;
- The self-assessment phase;
- The composition and selection of the peer review expert teams;
- The organisation and modalities of the peer review visits;
- The arrangements for the peer review reports and the recommendations;
- Improvement actions - the procedure to develop the improvement actions to address the recommendations from the peer review expert team and their monitoring.

##### IV.1 Procedure for the selection of the ONAs

With the launch of the peer reviews in the EU Member States and EFTA countries, Eurostat will ask the NSIs to start the procedure to select between three to six ONAs, which will participate in the peer review in a given country. The exact number of the participating ONAs will be handled in a flexible way and can also be below the minimum of three ONAs or slightly above the maximum of six ONAs. The decision on the final number of selected ONAs is in the authority of the NSI and is subject to the national set-up and discretion.

The proposed procedure for selecting the ONAs in Annex IV of this document contains more details and suggestions for the NSIs on how to decide on the ONAs, which should participate in the peer review. It needs to be highlighted that the final decision on the selection is in the authority of the NSI and the operationalised criteria proposed in the document constitute a guidance for the NSIs only. The four criteria (1) Importance for European statistics, measured by a percentage threshold of producing European statistics, 2) Importance for European statistics, measured by its significance, 3) Degree of compliance with the ES CoP by an ONA, 4) Importance of an ONA from the perspective of the NSI) can be used individually or in combination and be measured by qualitative and/or quantitative metrics.

The procedure is explained in more detail in Annex I of this document.

Once the selection procedure has been finalised, the NSI will send an explanatory note to Eurostat:



- Informing Eurostat about the ONAs selected to participate in the peer review;
- Providing an explanation about the selection process and the application of the criteria as well as a justification for the selected ONAs;
- Providing additional explanations if the number of selected ONA is below three or above six.

This note should be sent to Eurostat approximately 5-6 months before the peer review visit takes place.

Once selected for participation in the peer review, the ONAs will be asked to fill in a SAQ, will participate in the dedicated meeting(s) during the peer review visit, will receive recommendations from the peer review expert team and will have to develop improvement actions to address these recommendations, in close cooperation with the NSI as the national coordinator.

#### IV.2 Self-assessment phase

There will be a self-assessment questionnaire (SAQ) for the NSIs/Eurostat and another one for the ONAs. For Eurostat, the self-assessment questionnaire for the NSIs will be used by the European Statistical Governance Advisory Board (ESGAB) as a basis to adjust it to the specific situation of Eurostat (e.g. for principle 1.bis). The SAQs are available in WORD and have to be sent in pdf; NSIs and ONAs should pay attention to the provision of concise information in the SAQs. Documents and material gathered in the second round of peer reviews, if still relevant, will be used to ease the burden on the NSIs.

##### IV.2.1 Self-assessment questionnaire for the NSIs and Eurostat

The SAQ for the NSIs and Eurostat has been streamlined and shortened compared to the version used during the second round of peer reviews in order to ease burden on the NSIs/Eurostat. It is organised in three main sections, one for each area of the ES CoP: institutional environment, statistical processes and statistical output. Within each section, sub-sections correspond to each of the 16 principles and include the relative indicators. The self-assessment questionnaire is included in Annex II and is built in the following way:

#### I. Standard questions on indicators in each principle:

For each indicator in each principle of the ES CoP, there are two standard questions: one on how the indicator is implemented and another one on what is the self-appraisal of the degree of implementation of the indicator.

#### II. Additional questions on the level of the principle:

For a number of principles, there are additional questions, which look for forward-looking/innovative practices for the entire principle, for a broader view on the principle and for inspirations for a possible revision of the ES CoP. Answers to these questions will not be considered to assess compliance with the ES CoP.

#### III. SWOT questions on the level of the principle:

For each principle, there are four questions on the strengths and weaknesses (internal factors), as well as threats/challenges and opportunities (external factors), covering the entire principle.

Part of the answers to the question on the strengths may be used to collect forward-looking/innovative practices and to produce an ESS report on these practices, as decided by the ESSC in its meeting in October 2019.

#### IV. Summarising questions on the level of the ES CoP area:

For each of the three areas, there are reviewing and summarising questions on the progress made by the NSI/Eurostat in the last 5 years in the given area as well as existing and possible future action plans, and proposals for enhancing the ESS partnership in the area.

The answers to the questions on how the indicator is implemented should be based on the respondents' professional judgment and experiences; in addition, inspiration can be found in the respective methods and tools of the ESS Quality Assurance Framework (QAF), version 2.0. The related methods and tools are linked to each indicator of the questionnaire in a hyperlink format. The QAF has the role of a reference document in this peer review process, but not that of a benchmark.

In accordance with the audit-like approach of the ESS peer reviews, NSIs/Eurostat are asked to provide evidence for the answers. The following documents have to be submitted with the SAQ for NSI/Eurostat (see for more details in Annex IV):

- The “core” documents as described in the Guide for the National Statistical System (NSS);
- Documents supporting the answers in the SAQ:
  - if they are publicly available, links can be provided (e.g. web pages, etc);
  - if they are internal documents, they can be listed with their titles/names in English. If the peer reviewers need (some of) the internal documents, they have to request them from the NSI two months before the peer review visit. The NSI will have one month to send either the translated document or to prepare a summary of the content of the document in English and send them to the peer reviewers one month before the peer review takes place.

#### IV.2.2. Self-assessment questionnaire for the ONAs

The SAQ for the ONAs is organised in three main sections, one for each area of the ES CoP: institutional environment, statistical processes and statistical output. Within each section, sub-sections correspond to each of the 16 principles and list the relevant indicators, for information. The self-assessment questionnaire is included in Annex III and is built in the following way:

##### I. Standard questions on each principle

For each principle, there are two questions: one on how the principle is implemented, based on the indicators listed and another one on what is the self-appraisal of the degree of implementation of the principle.

## II. Questions on the strengths and weakness on the level of the ES CoP area

For each area, there are reviewing and summarising questions on the strengths and weaknesses of the ONA.

Part of the answers to the question on the strengths may be used to collect forward-looking/innovative practices and to produce an ESS report on these practices, as decided by the ESSC in its meeting in October 2019.

## III. Questions on future plans at the level of the ES CoP area

For each of the three areas there are questions on existing and possible future action plans in the given area.

For principle 1bis on Coordination and cooperation, questions ask for the assessment on how the coordination and cooperation aspects are implemented in the National Statistical System (NSS) and the ESS from the perspective of the ONA – based on the analysis of the respective indicators of the ES CoP.

In accordance with the audit-like approach of the ESS peer reviews, the ONA is asked to provide evidence for the answers. The following documents have to be submitted with the SAQ for ONAs (see for more details in Annex IV):

- The “core” documents as described in the Guide for the National Statistical System;
- Documents supporting the answers in the questionnaire:
  - if they are publicly available, links can be provided (e.g. web pages, etc);
  - if they are internal documents and /or documents in national language only, they can be listed with their titles/names in English. If peer reviewers need (some of) the internal documents, they have to request them from the ONA two months before the peer review visit. The ONA will have one month to send either the translated document or to prepare a summary of the content of the document in English and send them to the peer reviewers one month before the peer review takes place.

If documents to support the answers in the SAQ do not exist, the ONA is encouraged to find another way of providing evidence for the statement/answers to the questions.

### IV.2.3. Treatment of the SAQs

The SAQs will be addressed to the NSI and the participating ONAs of each country and to Eurostat; the NSI needs to make sure that the SAQ is filled in by the participating ONAs.

The filled-in SAQs of the NSI and the ONAs participating in the peer review will be shared with the respective peer review expert team only (in Eurostat it will only be received by the person that is part of the peer review expert team and the Task Force on peer reviews and quality for documentation purposes).

The SAQs as attached in annexes II and III will be sent out to all NSIs (primarily for information purposes) after the endorsement of the full package of the methodology for the third round of peer reviews, in July 2020. The filled in SAQs have to be sent to the central coordination desk of the

contractor implementing the peer reviews, which will verify the completeness of the information and in turn send them to the peer review expert team, and the Eurostat Task Force on peer reviews and quality three months before the peer review visit will take place in the given country.

#### IV.3 The composition and selection of the peer review expert teams

The peer review expert team will consist of four experts, including at least one external expert and one expert from Eurostat. The composition of the peer review expert team will provide for a balanced combination of competencies, knowledge and skills. The following requirements need to be met by the combined experience, knowledge and skills of the four experts constituting one peer review expert team:

- Senior management experience in an NSI/ONA;
- Knowledge about the set-up and functioning of an NSS;
- Knowledge of strategic developments in statistics at national/EU/international levels;
- Knowledge about recent developments in the ESS;
- Expertise in statistics and modernisation activities;
- Active involvement in ESS related activities.

Taking into account the above-mentioned requirements, the composition of a peer review expert team will look as follows:

- One (current or recent) senior manager from an NSI, who will be the chair (lead expert) of the peer review expert team and will ensure that the knowledge about the NSS and ESS is represented in the peer review expert team;
- One external (to the ESS) expert, whose presence will ensure the credibility and independence of the peer review process but who will need to possess some of the knowledge mentioned above and be acquainted with the functioning of the ESS;
- One expert from an NSI (or another external expert depending on the experience and knowledge), meeting some of the requirements mentioned above;
- One expert from Eurostat, meeting some of the requirements mentioned above, who will be an equal member of the peer review expert team. In addition, the Eurostat expert will facilitate the work of the peer review expert team, support the application of the methodology for the peer reviews, support the harmonisation of the recommendations and accompany the peer review process in the given country.

Once the contractor is selected and the contract signed, a pool of experts to be engaged as peer review experts will be created. In July 2020, both the contractor and all NSIs will be requested to nominate experts, who meet (some of) the requirements set out in the methodology for peer reviews. The NSIs may propose experts from their own NSI, or from ONAs or even external experts. Retired experts can potentially be proposed if they still actively contribute to latest ESS developments. From the proposed list of experts and based on the requirements for the experts set out in the methodology, Eurostat will select a maximum number of 20-25 experts. Eurostat will furthermore form six to seven peer review expert teams (with four experts in each team, three of them selected in this procedure and one from Eurostat selected by Eurostat) and nominate the chair of each peer review expert team. The chairs of the peer review expert teams will be selected based on their experience, skills and background. This selection procedure should be finalised in August

2020. Some experts will be kept on a reserve list, in case of nominated experts withdrawing from the assignment. The once nominated peer review expert teams will remain stable - to the extent possible - for the entire duration of the peer review process; hence each peer review expert team will implement in average four to five peer reviews.

Training of the peer review experts on the methodology and report writing is essential to achieve a better harmonisation of the reports and the recommendations. Therefore, once the experts and the respective teams are selected, the company, under the strict guidance of Eurostat and based on the peer review methodology approved by the ESS Committee, will organise training for them in October 2020. The participation as trainers of some of the national peer review coordinators and members of the ESS Task Force on peer reviews can be considered to provide the NSI perspective on the peer review process. The training will cover the methodology of the peer reviews, the drafting of recommendations and reports with an emphasis on harmonising recommendations, auditing skills and other aspects of the peer review process. A separate training for the national peer review coordinators will also be organised in September/October 2020 to train them on the methodology and the implementation arrangements.

The peer review of Eurostat will be conducted by the European Statistical Governance Advisory Board (ESGAB), based on its mandate, using a similar approach but with the self-assessment questionnaire and methodology adjusted to the specifics of Eurostat. It is envisaged that two representatives from NSIs of the EU Member States will participate in the peer review of Eurostat as observers. The selection of the NSIs should be arranged by the Partnership Group.

#### IV.4 The organisation and modalities of the peer review visits

In July 2020 Eurostat will officially launch the third round of peer reviews by publishing the SAQs and the guides for the NSIs/ONAs and peer reviewers on Eurostat's website. Eurostat will also send letters to the NSIs asking for the nomination of a national peer review coordinator and contact information, for the nomination of a responsible and contact person for all communication issues on the peer reviews as well as reminding the NSIs to start the selection procedure for the ONAs to be involved in the peer review.

Peer review visits will last four to five working days, depending on the specific situation in a country and on set-up of the NSS; it may take five days in a more decentralised NSS. The duration of the visit should be agreed between the chair of the peer review expert team and the NSI/Eurostat sufficiently in advance but at the latest when the agenda of the peer review visit is being discussed and agreed upon.

The exact dates of the peer review visits will be agreed on the basis of a consultation process to be launched in July 2020. NSIs will be contacted to identify some suitable weeks/dates for the peer review visit to take place in their country, taking into account constraints such as dates of the population and agriculture census, Council Presidencies, international meetings and others. Taking also other elements into account such as the availability of peer review experts, especially those from NSIs, the dates for the peer review visit to each country will be agreed in September 2020 with all EU Member States and EFTA countries.

The peer review in a country will officially start – 6-7 months before the agreed date - with a letter announcing the peer review visit and confirming the exact dates of the peer review visit. The letter will also inform about the need to send the filled-in SAQs as well as the core and supporting documents and request the information about the ONAs selected to participate in the peer review of

the country. The latter information and a corresponding explanatory note about the selection procedure of the ONAs and its results has to be sent to Eurostat around 5-6 months before the peer review takes place.

The filled-in SAQs (for the NSI and the selected ONAs) and relevant documents (core documents and evidence for statements/answers in the SAQs) should be sent to the central coordination desk of the contractor, which in turn sends them to the peer review expert team, and the Eurostat Task Force on peer reviews and quality, three months before the start of the peer review visit. This will provide sufficient time to review the documents, to request additional information and explanations, and – on the basis of their review – to discuss and agree on the specific agenda for the peer review visit.

The chair of the peer review expert team (lead expert) will hold video/telephone conferences with the peer review expert team approximately 10 weeks before the peer review visit. They will be used to discuss the roles in the visit, the answers to the SAQs and potential issues to be raised during the visit and hence to be included into the agenda for the peer review visit. On the basis of this discussion/consultation the chair (lead expert) will propose main elements for a draft agenda (e.g. which issues need to be discussed during the peer review visit, how much time needs to be devoted to them, etc.) and then agree with the NSI national peer review coordinator on them, 8 weeks before the visit. The detailed agenda is finalised by the NSI 2-3 weeks before the visit; it will include meetings inside the NSI and with the selected ONAs, meetings with different stakeholders such as users, media, business associations, the research community, government users, ESGAB-like bodies (if they exist) and others.

The peer review expert team will meet in the evening of the day before the peer review visit to the NSI starts, to review the agenda and agree on the specific roles of team members for each day of the peer review visit and on questions to ask. In the evening of every day the peer review expert team meets and summarises the results of the day's discussions with a view to prepare the list of recommendations. A complete list of draft recommendations will be prepared by the chair of the peer review expert team, in close consultation with the team, in the evening before the last day of the visit. The draft recommendations will be presented by the chair (lead expert) to the senior management of the NSI in a meeting on the last day of the peer review visit. Representatives of participating ONAs may participate in this final meeting, if considered useful and necessary by the NSI.

This meeting will be used to discuss and to exchange opinions on the proposed recommendations with a view to reach a common understanding of the content of the recommendations and the underlying issues / reasons for proposing them. The meeting can be used for clarifying misunderstandings but the list of recommendations remains in the ownership of the peer review expert team. It will be transmitted in writing to the senior management of the NSI one week after the peer review visit at the latest.

#### IV.5 The arrangements for the peer review reports and recommendations

**The peer review report** will follow a standard structure:

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1. Executive summary

The summary should explicitly highlight and briefly describe the strengths (positive messages) about the NSS and list the recommendations, which will refer to the opportunities for improvement identified during the peer review. For the latter, the report should highlight especially professional independence (ES CoP Principle 1) and coordination and cooperation (ES CoP Principle 1.bis) as well as the principles including elements of modernisation (i.e. ES CoP Principles 2, 4, 7, 8, 15). The reasons for including a recommendation should be described briefly. Finally, a standard positive message should be included at the end of the summary explaining that the NSI will produce an action plan to address the recommendations for improvement.

## 2. Introduction

The introduction should explain the peer review process and methodology and include explanations on why the focus on principles of the ES CoP may differ across reports and countries (standard text to be used for all the peer review reports). In addition, there will be a description on what principles the peer review for the given country focuses (to be drafted by the peer review team) including an explanation for the reasons.

## 3. Brief description of the national statistical system/Eurostat (max 2,5 pages)

The brief description of the NSS/Eurostat should cover legislation, organisation, appointment procedures for the head of the NSI/Eurostat, statistical programmes, resources, coordination of the NSS (including at least a 0,5 page text on the ONAs invited in the peer review visit), data access, relations with users/dissemination of statistical products and services.

## 4. Progress/advancement in the last 5 years (max 1-2 pages)

This description should be based on the implementation of the improvement actions after the second round of peer reviews, the answers from the SAQs and discussions during the peer review visit.

## 5. Compliance with the Code of Practice and future orientation

### 5.1. Strengths of Eurostat/the NSI and the participating ONAs in relation to their compliance with the Code of Practice

This section is meant to describe those aspects and elements where Eurostat/the NSI and the participating ONAs show high standards and where no problems/issues are detected. The strengths should be grouped around identified broad issues/themes, with a reference to the principle(s) and indicator(s) concerned. Strengths could also be a good/innovative practice.

Strengths regarding the principles of professional independence, coordination and cooperation and those including elements of modernisation (e.g. principles 2, 4, 7, 8, 15) should be highlighted in this section. Future-oriented projects and activities that are not necessarily linked to the ES CoP should also be highlighted in this chapter. The text should cover Eurostat/the NSI and the participating ONAs being visible and named. The structure of the section should be flexible, i.e. it should be adapted depending on the outcome of the review.

### 5.2. Issues and recommendations

This section should describe in further detail the issues where improvements are needed. The recommendations of the peer review team should be split into fundamental/important to ensure compliance/alignment with the ES CoP (compliance-relevant), and less critical/technical supporting improvements (improvement related). In addition, they should be future-oriented and

grouped around identified broad issues/themes, with a reference to the principle(s) and indicator(s).

Both types of recommendations should cover Eurostat/the NSI and the participating ONAs being visible and named, in particular if recommendations are addressed to them. In case the recommendations are addressed to other stakeholders/actors than Eurostat/the NSI and the participating ONAs, this will be clearly spelled out in the report.

The text should also lead the reader of the report to understand the recommendations as included into the executive summary. Recommendations in the executive summary and in the report should be the same. While in the executive summary the reasons for including such a recommendation will be described briefly, the main report should provide sufficiently detailed explanations on why the recommendations were issued by the peer review expert team. The formulation of each recommendation should clearly identify the rationale to what is behind it and frame the potential future action(s).

The structure of the section is flexible, i.e. it could be adapted depending on the outcome of the review.

### 5.3. Views of the NSIs as the national coordinator of the NSS/the peer review on those recommendations where they diverge from peer review experts' assessment.

Annex A: Programme of the visit

Annex B. List of participants (to be decided by each country but in view of the GDPR it may be advisable to mention only names of people whose names are published in the organizational chart of the authorities, all other people are mentioned with the function and the name of the authority only).

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**The recommendations** included into the report as well as the reports themselves need not 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 in terms of scope, magnitude, number and content, as much as possible.

For the recommendations, several measures will be applied to achieve an increased harmonisation of recommendations.

- A list of possible issues and recommendations linked to them as well as distinguishing between fundamental/important (compliance-relevant) and less critical (improvement related) recommendations is available to make experts aware of the possible scope, magnitude and content of potential recommendations. During the training of the experts, they will be made aware that the list suggests merely proposals for issues and recommendations and is to be understood as a guiding document; the attention of the experts will be drawn to the fact that they should not use the list as a menu from which they can easily choose issues and recommendations.
- Thorough training of the experts will be provided on drafting the reports and the recommendations before the peer review visits commence, with a focus on formulating recommendations in such a way that the NSI is able to define suitable improvement actions.
- In case the recommendations are addressed to other stakeholders/actors than the NSI/Eurostat, this will be clearly spelled out in the report (and one measure to encourage



other authorities to take on board these recommendations will be a reinforced communication campaign on the peer reviews and the value of European/official statistics, see chapter V).

- The Eurostat expert in the peer review expert team will support the other experts in the team in formulating more harmonised recommendations already during the peer review visit based on his/her knowledge of how recommendations were drafted in other peer review reports.
- At given times during the peer review process in 2021-2022 (e.g. after 8 peer review reports were finalised), the available reports and recommendations will be reviewed by a group of people (editorial board), which could be chosen from among the members of the ESS Task Force on peer reviews, in order to provide additional input for harmonisation.
- Finally, continuous training of the experts on drafting reports and recommendations will be implemented and workshops will be organised on exchanging experiences during the entire peer review process.

The following timelines will apply for drafting, commenting and approving the peer review report:

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Actor</b>	<b>Timeline</b>
Drafting the peer review report	Expert team	4 weeks after the visit
Formatting and language checking	Company	2 days
Commenting and checking factual correctness of the report, setting out diverging views on recommendations	NSI	4 weeks
Commenting and further harmonising recommendations (to the extent possible)	Eurostat	2 weeks
Integrating comments	Expert team	1 week
Final formatting and language checking	Company	2 days
Approval of the report	NSI, Eurostat	2 weeks

The final agreement on the content of the report between the peer review expert team, Eurostat and the NSI is to be reached through consultation.

While commenting the report, the NSI/Eurostat as well as the ONAs, coordinated by the NSI, can issue a diverging view on recommendations, that it deems to be impossible/very difficult to implement but the diverging views need to be reasoned and well justified. When the report is finally approved, the final peer review report, including an annex containing the diverging views, will be published on both Eurostat's and the NSI websites.

#### IV.6 Improvement actions

##### IV.6.1 Procedure for defining improvement actions

The procedure for defining improvement actions offers the possibility of involving other stakeholders. The term “stakeholders” can cover the NSI, the ONAs, the government, the parliament, a supervising authority, data providers and/or others which may be an owner of/be responsible for the implementation of an improvement action. A contractor should not be regarded as a stakeholder. If the fulfilment of an improvement action depends on more stakeholders than the NSI or ONA(s), the NSI or the ONA can decide to sub-divide a general improvement action into smaller improvement actions (sub-actions) reflecting the responsibility/ies per stakeholder. However, this possibility does not oblige the NSI or ONAs to involve other stakeholders in the

improvement actions, especially if it would deteriorate their relationship with this particular stakeholder.

1. The NSIs shall define improvement actions, if relevant, in cooperation with the ONA(s) and in consultation with other stakeholders. The improvement actions shall:
  - be based on the recommendations in the final peer review reports;
  - be SMART;
  - contain a realistic deadline for putting the improvement actions in place. The timeline for implementing improvement actions depends on many elements, such as the external environment, complexity of the action, actors involved, etc. Therefore, there is no rule specific to this. The latest deadline for implementing the improvement actions is set at the end of 2027.
  - indicate the responsibility of the improvement action (entirely in the remit of the NSI, of the ONAs, other stakeholders ...).

It is possible that the fulfilment of an improvement action depends on more stakeholders and could remain open because the stakeholder(s) do(es) not or cannot fulfil its/their part in the action. To show progress made by all the different stakeholders and/or where the blocking part of the improvement action is situated, the improvement action involving more stakeholders could consist of:

- 1) the general improvement action reflecting the final goal of the action;
  - 2) and several sub- actions for improvement - reflecting the responsibility/ies per stakeholder.
2. The NSIs will send improvement action(s) to Eurostat within 8 weeks from the reception of the final report. Eurostat can comment on the defined improvement actions and timeline, and, if necessary, indicate amendments within 3 weeks from the reception of the improvement actions. These amendments shall be agreed by the NSI. Once the improvement actions are agreed between the NSI and Eurostat, they will be published on Eurostat's website alongside with the peer review report as well as on the NSI's website.

#### IV.6.2 Monitoring of the improvement actions

Annually, starting in January 2024 and until the end of 2027, the NSIs shall report on the progress of implementation achieved by the end of the previous year. In case of delays, the NSIs, possibly with the input from ONA(s) and/or other stakeholders, shall explain reasons and set out an adjusted timeline for the action/s concerned. New improvement actions might be proposed by the NSIs, but to a limited extent, possibly with the input from ONA(s) and/or other stakeholders.

Eurostat shall produce an annual progress report to the ESSC and ESGAB, which will describe the progress achieved in the implementation of improvement actions, the list of pending issues, the delays, the reasons for the delays and an agreed timeline for addressing these. This progress report will be produced usually 3 months after the end of the reference period. It is a summary from the information produced by the countries and includes verification by the countries before being presented to the meeting of the ESS Committee.

## **V. Communication (more details are contained in the draft communication strategy in Annex VI)**

Continuous and targeted internal and external communication about the objectives of the peer reviews, the process and its results is of utmost importance to ensure acceptance of the results by the NSI/Eurostat, the ONAs and the relevant government authorities and for receiving support for the implementation of those recommendations that are beyond the responsibility of the NSI.

### V.1 Internal communication in the NSS

The internal NSS communication has to be organised by NSIs targeting staff inside the NSIs, ONAs and decision-makers in the country. In preparing for the peer review, the already ongoing communication on the ES CoP should be reinforced by an active promotion campaign inside the NSIs/Eurostat and vis-à-vis ONAs to make their staff understand the ES CoP, its meaning and impact on their daily work. This could be done by organising internal workshops, presentations, publishing articles on the Intranet, creating a specific section on the Intranet for the peer review, etc.

Communication should continue throughout the entire peer review process. Filling in the SAQ, gathering of the relevant documentation and organisation of the peer review visit should be a collective exercise to involve as many staff as feasible/suitable and to inform them about the process. Junior staff should be informed in particular about the purpose of the peer review to prepare it for the specific meeting with the peer review expert team. This continuous communication on the peer review process will also serve the declared purpose of the peer review to encourage internal reflection and improvements.

After the finalisation of the peer review report, staff should be informed about the report through presentations and the Intranet and be – to the extent possible - involved in / informed about the design and discussions on the improvement actions.

A somewhat lighter communication approach, but with similar content, has to be applied to the participating ONAs to prepare them for their involvement in the peer review and, after the finalisation of the peer review report, provide them with feedback on the peer review results and follow-up.

### V.2 External communication

External communication on the peer review process should be used to take a broader perspective and to:

- Promote the value of European statistics and raise awareness among certain target groups;
- Demonstrate the commitment of the ESS to the principles of the CoP;
- Demonstrate the importance of peer reviews in maintaining the quality, trustworthiness and usefulness of official statistics in Europe.

A professional communication company, selected through a procurement procedure, was asked to design a communication strategy with the objectives outlined above and to design the communication material for the campaign based on the strategy. The first draft of the communication strategy is contained in Annex VI. Based on the comments from the ESSC in May and from the ESS Task Force on peer reviews and the Task Force on ESS Strategic Communication as well as on the outcomes of the focus groups on the visuals and key slogans for the communication campaign, the draft communication strategy will be revised and endorsed by a written consultation of the ESSC in July/August 2020.

## VI. Time table for the third round of peer reviews

Based on the agreement to launch the third round of peer reviews in 2020 with the peer review of Eurostat, followed by the peer reviews of the EU Member States and EFTA countries in 2021-2022, the following time schedule will be applied in the peer review process:

No	Activity	Timeline
1	Finalisation by Eurostat of the procurement procedure for the contract with a company tasked to implement the peer reviews in the EU Member States and EFTA countries	April 2020
2	(Virtual) meetings of the ESS Task Force on peer reviews to review the first part of the full package of the methodology	April 2020
3	Consultation of the DIME on the guides for peer reviewers and the NSS	April 2020
4	Presentation of the final monitoring report on the implementation of the improvement actions from the second round of peer reviews by Eurostat to the ESSC	May 2020
5	Endorsement by the ESS Committee of the first part of the full package of the methodology for the third round of peer reviews including the overall methodology and some of the supporting instruments and tools (operationalised criteria for selection of the ONAs to participate in the peer review, Information and core documents to be provided by the NSIs/ONAs/Eurostat together with the filled-in SAQ, structure of the peer review report)	May 2020
6	Endorsement by the ESS Committee of the principal elements of the communication strategy on the peer reviews	May 2020
7	Written consultation of and endorsement by the ESSC of the second part of the full package of the methodology for the third round of peer reviews	June 2020
8	Official launch of the third round of peer reviews through official letters and the publication of the full methodology package on Eurostat's website	July 2020
9	Further development of the communication strategy and agreement by the ESSC in written procedure	July/August 2020
10	Selection procedure for the nomination of peer review experts by the NSIs and the company tasked with the implementation of the peer reviews	July 2020
11	Compilation of the list of peer review experts based on proposals from the NSIs and the selected company; selection of experts for the peer review expert teams	August 2020
12	Formation of teams and decision on lead experts	September 2020
13	Consultation and agreement on the dates for the peer review visits to all countries and defining a timetable for the visits	September 2020
14	Preliminary agreement with the NSIs on the timing of the peer reviews in each EU Member State and EFTA country	September 2020
15	Training of peer review experts and NSI national peer review coordinators	October 2020
16	Workshop for the communication officers of the NSIs on communication on the peer reviews	November/December 2020
17	Peer review of Eurostat, starting with the filling in of the SAQ and ending with the agreed peer review report	October 2020 – November 2021
18	Peer reviews EU Member States and EFTA countries	2021-2022
19	Report on the main findings and lessons learnt from the third round of peer reviews	Autumn 2023

For an individual peer review of a given country the following timeline is planned:

	ESTAT	NSI	ONA	Contractor	PR Team
<b>July 2020:</b> ESTAT contacts NSIs requesting appointment of national coordinator	x	x			
<b>July 2020:</b> ESTAT publishes SAQs, Guides and Annexes and sends them to national coordinators, informs NSIs officially about start of PR procedure and asks NSIs to prepare ONA selection; Contractor contacts national coordinator about possible dates of PR visit	x	x		x	
<b>July 2020:</b> Start the selection procedure for the nomination of peer review experts by the NSIs and the company tasked with the implementation of the peer reviews	x	x		x	
<b>July/August 2020:</b> Contractor + ESTAT fix 2-3 dates for PR visit in each country	x			x	
<b>August 2020:</b> Compilation of the list of peer review experts based on proposals from the NSIs and the selected company; selection of experts for the peer review expert teams	x				
<b>September 2020:</b> ESTAT+Contractor+PR team agree on individual weeks of PR visits, ESTAT informs national coordinator about date, identity and details of PR team	x	x		x	x
<b>September/October 2020:</b> Workshops for PR teams+ national coordinators	x	x			x
<b>November/December 2020:</b> Workshop on communication campaign for NSI communication officers	x	x			
<b>6-7 months before:</b> ESTAT confirms to NSI specific date of visit, informs about request to send SAQs, core documents, ONA selection (+justification)	x	x			
<b>5-6 months before:</b> NSI sends information about selected ONAs+justification to ESTAT	x	x			
<b>3 months before:</b> National coordinator submits completed SAQs+supporting documents to contractor		x	x	x	
<b>10 weeks before:</b> Chair of PR team holds video/telephone conference with team members to discuss roles, answers to SAQs, potential issues	x				x
<b>9 weeks before:</b> Chair of PR team proposes elements of draft agenda to national coordinator+informs about roles in PR team	x	x			x
<b>8 weeks before:</b> Chair of PR team+national coordinator agree on general agenda items+duration of visit		x			x
<b>2-3 weeks before:</b> Finalised detailed agenda sent by NSI to Chair of PR team+ESTAT; all stakeholders invited+confirmed presence	x	x			x
<b>PR Visit (4-5 days)</b>	x	x	x		x
<b>1 week after PR visit:</b> Chair of PR team sends list of recommendations to NSI+ESTAT	x	x			x
<b>4 Weeks after:</b> Chair of PR team sends draft report to contractor for formatting+language checking; within 2 days, contractor sends draft report to national coordinator; after reception, 4 weeks for NSI/ONAs to comment/check factual correctness/set diverging views; response sent to ESTAT	x	x	x	x	x
<b>8 weeks after:</b> 2 weeks for ESTAT to comment/harmonise recommendations; report sent to contractor who forwards to PR team	x			x	x
<b>10 weeks after:</b> 1 week for PR team to integrate comments, 2 days for final formatting/language checking by contractor				x	x
<b>11 weeks after:</b> 2 weeks for final approval by NSI/ESTAT; publication of report on respective websites	x	x			
<b>13 weeks after:</b> 8 weeks for NSI to develop improvement actions		x	x		
<b>21 weeks after:</b> 2 Weeks for ESTAT to comment on improvement actions, indicate amendments if necessary	x				
<b>23 weeks after:</b> 3 weeks for ESTAT+NSI to agree on improvement actions, publication alongside reports on respective websites	x	x			

## **VII. Annexes**

- Annex I: Procedure and criteria for selecting ONAs to participate in the peer review;
- Annex II: The self-assessment questionnaire for the NSIs/Eurostat (SAQ NSIs);
- Annex III: The self-assessment questionnaire for the ONAs (SAQ ONAs);
- Annex IV: Information and core documents to be provided by the NSIs/ONAs/Eurostat
- Annex V: Structure of the peer review report;
- Annex VI: Draft communication strategy for the third round of peer reviews