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IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EUROPEAN STATISTICS CODE OF PRACTICE

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National Statistical Offices: Credibility and Autonomy

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CONTENTS

1. BACKGROUND	1
2. SCOPE AND PURPOSE OF THE EUROPEAN STATISTICS CODE OF PRACTICE.....	1
3. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EUROPEAN STATISTICS CODE OF PRACTICE	2
3.1 COMPREHENSIVE SELF-ASSESSMENT AGAINST THE PRINCIPLES AND INDICATORS OF THE CODE	2
3.2 PEER REVIEW PROCESS	3
3.3 NEXT STEPS	4
ANNEX - RECOMMENDATION OF THE COMMISSION	5
EUROPEAN STATISTICS CODE OF PRACTICE.....	9
<i>Preamble.....</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>Principle 1: Professional Independence</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>Principle 2: Mandate for Data Collection</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>Principle 3: Adequacy of Resources</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>Principle 4: Quality Commitment</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>Principle 5: Statistical Confidentiality.....</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>Principle 6: Impartiality and Objectivity.....</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>Principle 7: Sound Methodology.....</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>Principle 8: Appropriate Statistical Procedures.....</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>Principle 9: Non-Excessive Burden on Respondents</i>	<i>14</i>
<i>Principle 10: Cost Effectiveness</i>	<i>14</i>
<i>Principle 11: Relevance</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>Principle 12: Accuracy and Reliability.....</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>Principle 13: Timeliness and Punctuality.....</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>Principle 14: Coherence and Comparability.....</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>Principle 15: Accessibility and Clarity.....</i>	<i>16</i>

1. Background

On June 2004, the Council of Ministers of the European Union Member States invited the European Commission (EC) to put forward a proposal, by June 2005, to develop minimum European standards on the independence, integrity and accountability of both national and Community statistical authorities.

On December 2004 the EC adopted a Communication to the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament on which a consistent strategy was proposed for strengthening the European Union's governance of fiscal statistics along three lines of action:

- building up the legislative framework
- improving the operational capacities of the relevant EC services
- establishing European standards on the independence of the national and community statistical authorities.

The Council of Economy and Finance Ministers (ECOFIN) in February 2005 welcomed the overall strategy and in particular the work which was already in progress on the Code for European standards for the statistical authorities.

In reply to the respective Council of Ministers invitations of June 2004 and February 2005, the EC adopted on 25 May 2005 a Communication on the independence, integrity and accountability of the national and community statistical authorities and a Recommendation promulgating the European Statistics Code of Practice elaborated by statistical authorities and adopted by the Statistical Programme Committee (SPC).

2. Scope and purpose of the European Statistics Code of Practice

The European Statistics Code of Practice is an ambitious approach to ensuring quality in statistics. It is a self-regulatory instrument containing standards for the independence of statistical authorities which provides a further guarantee for the good functioning of the European Statistical System (ESS) and the production of high quality and reliable statistics. The ESS refers to the partnership comprising Eurostat, the National Statistical Institutes and other national statistical bodies responsible in each Member State for producing and disseminating statistics.

It has a dual purpose:

- To improve trust and confidence in the statistical authorities by proposing certain institutional and organisational arrangements.
- To reinforce the quality of the statistics they produce and disseminate, by promoting the coherent application of best international statistical principles, methods and practices by all producers of official statistics in Europe.

With the adoption of the European Statistics Code of Practice, Eurostat and the statistical authorities of the European Union (EU)-Member States have committed themselves to a comprehensive approach towards achieving high quality statistics. It builds upon a common ESS definition of quality in statistics and targets all relevant areas from the institutional environment, the statistical production processes to our output: European official statistics.

The European Statistics Code of Practice sets out 15 key principles for the production and dissemination of European official statistics and the institutional environment under which national and Community statistical authorities operate. A set of indicators of good practice for each of the 15 principles provides a reference for reviewing the implementation of the Code. The 15 principles are regrouped in 3 main headings in the following way:

Institutional environment: *Professional independence, Mandate for data collection, Adequacy of resources, Quality commitment, Statistical confidentiality, Impartiality and objectivity.*

Statistical processes: *Sound methodology, Appropriate statistical procedures, Non-excessive burden on respondents, Cost effectiveness.*

Statistical output: *Relevance, Accuracy and reliability, Timeliness and punctuality, Coherence and comparability, Accessibility and clarity.*

The Code is addressed for implementation to:

Governance authorities (i.e. Governments, Ministries, European Commission, Council of Ministers) - to provide guidelines for them to ensure that their statistical services are professionally organised and resourced to produce credible European Statistics in a manner that guarantees independence, integrity and accountability;

Statistical authorities and their staff - to provide a benchmark of statistical principles, values and best practices that should help them in producing and disseminating high quality, harmonised European Statistics.

It is addressed for information to:

Users - to show that European and national statistical authorities are impartial and that the statistics they produce and disseminate are trustworthy, objective and reliable;

Data providers - to show that the confidentiality of the information they provide is protected, and that excessive demands will not be placed on them.

3. Implementation of the European Statistics Code of Practice

In its meeting on 25 May 2005, the SPC supported a stepwise monitoring procedure for the implementation of the Code over three years during which the countries self assessments should be paired with elements of peer review, benchmarking and monitoring on the basis of the Code's explanatory indicators added to each principle.

3.1 Comprehensive self-assessment against the principles and indicators of the Code

On the basis of a common questionnaire developed by a Task Force of the SPC on the implementation of the Code of Practice, National Statistical Institutes (NSIs) and Eurostat undertook to carry out a first self-assessment against the principles and indicators of the Code during the first year of

implementation of the Code. Replies to this questionnaire have been received from all NSIs of the EU Member States, Eurostat and in addition the NSIs of Iceland, Norway and Liechtenstein.

The questionnaire follows the structure of the European Statistics Code of Practice. It is subdivided into 15 principles and 3-7 indicators for each of the principles. Each principle has been divided into two parts: a first part containing questions on the implementation of the Code's indicators and a second part devoted to individual strengths and weaknesses and, in particular, a list of actions planned to improve quality.

This exercise was considered to be an important aspect designed to address concerns about the integrity of the ESS and at the same time providing a valuable basis for the future steps in the implementation of the Code of Practice.

A preliminary analysis of the self-assessments suggests that the ESS has a strong profile in the areas covered by the following principles of the Code of Practice:

- Principle 1 Professional Independence (with some reservations with regard to issues requiring a more thorough assessment of the actual situation),
- Principle 2 Mandate for data collection,
- Principle 5 Statistical Confidentiality,
- Principle 6 Impartiality and Objectivity,
- Principle 7 Sound Methodology,
- partly Principle 13 Timeliness and Punctuality (as far as dissemination practices and procedures are concerned, however reservations with regard to timeliness of data in some domains on which more information is to be collected and analysed).

While a majority of statistical authorities report high standards in these areas, improvements are certainly possible and necessary. However, rather than covering the ESS as a whole, they are to be directed towards single statistical authorities and/or specific issues and statistical domains.

Among areas for which full compliance with the Code require action on a broader scale are those covered by Principle 4 Quality commitment and parts of Principle 8 Appropriate Statistical Procedures and Principle 12 Accuracy and Reliability.

3.2 Peer review process

To complement the self-assessments with an external evaluation, all National Statistical Institutes and Eurostat will be subject to a peer review during 2006/07 establishing compliance with the Code in particular in the areas related to the institutional environment and dissemination of statistics (principles 1-6 and 15 of the Code of Practice). The peer reviews were launched in 2006 and will be carried out in the 27 National Statistical Institutes (NSIs) of the European Union Member States¹, in 3 NSIs of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA)² countries and in Eurostat by the end of 2007. Switzerland, also a member of EFTA, joined this exercise later than other countries and the peer review will be carried out at a later stage.

¹ Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Germany, Denmark, Estonia, Spain, Finland, France, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Latvia, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Sweden, Slovenia, Slovakia, United Kingdom.

² Iceland, Norway and Liechtenstein

The peer review addresses the institutional environment and dissemination part of the Code of Practice comprising the following principles: (1) Professional Independence, (2) Mandate for data collection, (3) Adequacy of resources, (4) Quality Commitment, (5) Statistical Confidentiality, (6) Impartiality and Objectivity and (15) Accessibility and Clarity. Thus, in principle, the peer review relies on assessing (legal) frameworks, policies and procedures at a horizontal level, rather than looking into statistical processes or outputs which would require a domain-specific approach.

Several measures are being implemented in order to ensure a high quality for this exercise: Common information and assessment bases have been defined; and peer review guidelines for participating peers and NSIs have been published. Eurostat provides a debriefing of the single reviews together with a common reporting format thus contributing to ensuring the comparability of peer review reports. Experts are selected in a way such that a high degree of overlap between various review teams is ensured; which allows for a learning curve to be developed over time.

Preliminary results of first peer reviews broadly confirm the findings of the self-assessments what in itself can be taken as a signal contributing to trust in the ESS. In addition, many good practices have been detected in different fields of activities of the NSIs and improvement actions have been defined for all principles of the Code.

3.3 Next steps

In line with the ECOFIN conclusions of November 2005, the EC proposes to set up a high-level advisory body. Its main tasks will relate to reporting on the implementation of the Code by Eurostat and on advising the EC with regard to system-wide issues relating to the implementation and communication of the Code of Practice.

Further steps envisaged in the context of the ESS implementation of the Code of Practice include projects at various levels to enhance process and product quality, including progress in the collection of ESS good practices and a co-operation project with other international organisations led by Eurostat on the use and convergence of international quality assurance frameworks. In addition, compliance monitoring established by Eurostat in the area of statistics will allow quality issues at the level of statistical domains to be addressed. Some areas of the Code will be specified in more detailed protocols as a first step to allow users to distinguish more clearly those statistics which have been produced in compliance with the Code.

A final report by the EC on the implementation of the Code in the ESS will be submitted to the European Parliament and to the Council of Ministers in 2008.

RECOMMENDATION OF THE COMMISSION**on the independence, integrity and accountability of the national and Community statistical authorities*****(Text with EEA relevance)**

THE COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES,

Having regard to the Treaty establishing the European Community, and in particular Article 211 thereof,

Whereas:

- (1) Official statistics play a central role in democratic societies as they provide public authorities, policy makers, economic and social actors as well as all citizens, with objective and impartial information, on the basis of which informed decisions may be taken and issues openly debated.
- (2) In order to fulfil that role, official statistics must be produced and disseminated according to common standards guaranteeing compliance with the principles of impartiality, reliability, objectivity, scientific independence, cost-effectiveness and statistical confidentiality;
- (3) At the same time the role of European statistics is becoming increasingly important in the context of a relaunched Lisbon strategy³ and the Integrated Guidelines for Growth and Jobs (2005-2008)⁴; high-quality statistics are also needed in order to monitor and review the implementation of other key policy initiatives at European level such as the sustainable development strategy, the common immigration and asylum policy, etc.
- (4) In that context, the specific role of fiscal data and government accounts is even more essential for economic and monetary surveillance and the proper implementation of the Stability and Growth Pact; in particular, statistical data used in the framework of the excessive deficit procedure are to be of the highest quality possible.
- (5) On 22 December 2004, the Commission adopted a Communication to the Council and the European Parliament entitled “Towards a European governance strategy for fiscal statistics”⁵, proposing a consistent strategy for strengthening the European Union’s governance of fiscal statistics along three lines of action.

* The Annex is part of the document COM(2005) 217 final, 25 May 2005, Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and to the Council on the Independence, Integrity and Accountability of the National and Community statistical authorities. Recommendation of the Commission on the independence, integrity and accountability of the national and Community statistical authorities.

³ COM(2005) 24, 2.2.2005 : Working together for growth and jobs – A new start for the Lisbon strategy.

⁴ COM(2005) 141, 12.4.2005: Integrated Guidelines for Growth and Jobs (2005-2008) including a Commission Recommendation on the broad guidelines for the economic policies of the Member States and the Community and a Proposal for a Council Decision on guidelines for the employment policies of the Member States.

⁵ COM(2004) 832

- (6) First, and following the invitation made by the Council, monitoring by the Commission of the quality of reported fiscal data has to be reinforced; to that effect, a proposal for a Council Regulation amending Regulation (EC) No 3605/93 as regards the quality of statistical data in the context of the excessive deficit procedure⁶ was adopted by the Commission on 2 March 2005 and is currently under discussion.
- (7) Second, the operational capacities of the Commission in the statistical field have to be strengthened ; in the specific context of statistical monitoring under the excessive deficit procedure, regular dialogue visits and in-depth monitoring visits are required and all existing expertise has to be mobilised, including at national level.
- (8) Third, there is a need to establish Europe-wide standards as regards the independence, integrity and accountability of the national statistical institutes in response to the invitation addressed to the Commission by the Council on 2 June 2004 to present by June 2005 a proposal to develop minimum European standards for the institutional setup of statistical authorities, which reinforce the independence, integrity and accountability of the Member States' national statistical institutes.
- (9) In response to this invitation, on 17 November 2004 the Member States discussed in the Statistical Programme Committee the basic principles to be developed in a Code of Practice, and agreed to study the principles further and to establish indicators allowing the implementation of the Code to be monitored.
- (10) A working group was subsequently entrusted by the Statistical Programme Committee with the task of finalising a proposal for a code of practice on European statistics.
- (11) The resulting Code of Practice was unanimously endorsed by the Statistical Programme Committee on 24 February 2005, thus demonstrating that the principles it contains are shared by all the statistical institutes, which should then be invited to follow the Code as a guiding instrument.
- (12) The existing institutional set-up of the statistical authorities varies significantly across Member States, owing to the different and sometimes diverging legal and administrative arrangements in the Member States, which reflect their respective political and cultural traditions.
- (13) In the light of the achievements made by the statistical authorities through the adoption of the Code as a self-regulatory instrument and the expectation that they will implement it, it is considered that this Recommendation is appropriate and proportionate.
- (14) This Code of Practice has the dual purpose of, on the one hand, improving trust and confidence in statistical authorities by proposing certain institutional and organisational arrangements and, on the other hand, reinforcing the quality of the statistics they produce and disseminate, by promoting the coherent application of best international statistical principles, methods and practices by all producers of official statistics in Europe.
- (15) Member States should therefore be recommended to recognise the importance of the Code of Practice and take the measures required to ensure its correct implementation by the relevant authorities concerned, as well as to promote it among users and data providers.

⁶ OJ C , p.

(16) It has to be noted that the Commission intends to take similar measures in parallel within its own sphere of competence and in particular to monitor observance of the Code of Practice, within the European Statistical System.

I. HEREBY RECOMMENDS THAT MEMBER STATES:

A. recognise in the attached Code a common set of standards at European level for the statistical authorities;

B. ensure that the principles of the Code are respected by their statistical authorities with a view to producing and disseminating high- quality, harmonised Community statistics and to contributing in general to the proper functioning of the European statistical system as a whole;

C. ensure that their statistical services are professionally organised and resourced to produce Community statistics in a manner that guarantees independence, integrity and accountability, on the basis of the guidelines provided by the Code;

D. raise awareness of the existence of this Code and its contents among statistical respondents and data providers, as well as all users of statistics, using appropriate information and dissemination channels;

E. promote an extensive exchange of information and expertise within the European statistical system, based on the experience gained through the implementation of the Code;

F. support, and intensify where necessary, the wide-ranging co-operation between statistical authorities within the European Statistical System, as well as with statistical authorities of international bodies and organisations;

G. provide the information necessary to enable the Commission to monitor adherence to the principles laid down in the Code.

II. RECOGNISES IN THE ATTACHED CODE A COMMON SET OF STANDARDS AT EUROPEAN LEVEL FOR THE STATISTICAL AUTHORITIES AND IN THIS CONTEXT:

A. will ensure that the principles of the Code are respected by Eurostat with a view to producing and disseminating high-quality, harmonised Community statistics and to contributing in general to the proper functioning of the European statistical system as a whole;

B. will ensure that Eurostat, as the statistical authority of the European Union, is professionally organised and resourced to produce Community statistics in a manner that guarantees independence, integrity and accountability, and will take the appropriate measures accordingly, on the basis of its own internal organisation powers;

C. will take appropriate measures to facilitate the implementation of the Code in the European Statistical System, in particular towards developing official Community statistics so that information produced in observance of this Code can be recognised by the users.

III. FURTHERMORE INTENDS:

A. to develop tools for improving at European level the quality of Community statistics, taking into account their cost-effectiveness;

B. to set up a reporting system to monitor adherence to the Code within the European Statistical System in line with the proportionality principle;

C. to consider proposing an external advisory body, possibly a reformed European Advisory Committee on Statistical Information in the Economic and Social Spheres, with a view to conferring on that body an active role in monitoring the implementation of the Code and, consequently, the enhancement of independence, integrity and accountability, and in expressing opinions on the balancing of the priorities of the statistical programmes;

D. to present to the European Parliament and to the Council, within three years of the adoption of this Recommendation and after consultation of the Statistical Programme Committee and possibly of the external advisory body mentioned above, a report on progress in the implementation of this Code in the European Statistical System, based in particular on self-assessments and peer reviews and including, where necessary, proposals to enhance independence, integrity and accountability.

Done at Brussels,

For the Commission

The President

EUROPEAN STATISTICS CODE OF PRACTICE

adopted by the Statistical Programme Committee on 24 February 2005

Preamble

Definitions: For the purpose of this document:

European Statistics shall mean Community Statistics as defined in Council regulation (EC) No 322/97 of 17 February 1997 on Community Statistics, produced and disseminated by national statistical authorities and the Community's statistical authority (Eurostat) in conformity with Article 285(2) of the Treaty.

The Statistical Authority shall mean, at national level, the National Statistical Institute (NSI) and other statistical bodies in charge of producing and disseminating European Statistics and, at Community level, Eurostat.

The European Statistical System, hereinafter referred to as the ESS, shall mean the partnership comprising Eurostat, National Statistical Institutes and other national statistical bodies responsible in each Member State for producing and disseminating European Statistics.

In coherence with the Treaty establishing the European Community, and in particular Article 285(2) thereof, with the Council regulation (EC) No 322/97 of 17 February 1997 on Community Statistics, and with the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics adopted by the United Nations Statistical Commission on 14 April 1994, the present Code of Practice has the dual purpose of:

- Improving trust and confidence in the independence, integrity and accountability of both National Statistical Authorities and Eurostat, and in the credibility and quality of the statistics they produce and disseminate (i.e., an external focus);
- Promoting the application of best international statistical principles, methods and practices by all producers of European Statistics to enhance their quality (i.e. an internal focus).

The Code is addressed for implementation to:

- *Governance authorities* (i.e. Governments, Ministries, Commission, Council) -to provide guidelines for them to ensure that their statistical services are professionally organised and resourced to produce credible European Statistics in a manner that guarantees independence, integrity and accountability;
- *Statistical authorities and their staff* - to provide a benchmark of statistical principles, values and best practices that should help them in producing and disseminating high quality, harmonised European Statistics.

It is addressed for information to:

- Users - to show that European and national statistical authorities are impartial and that the statistics they produce and disseminate are trustworthy, objective and reliable;
- Data providers -to show that the confidentiality of the information they provide is protected, and that excessive demands will not be placed on them.

The Code of Practice is based on 15 Principles. Governance authorities and statistical authorities in the European Union commit themselves to adhering to the principles fixed in this code and to reviewing its implementation periodically by the use of Indicators of Good Practice for each of the 15 Principles, which are to be used as references.

The Statistical Programme Committee established by Council Decision 89/382/EEC of 19 June 1989 will regularly carry out peer review monitoring of the implementation of the present Code.

Institutional environment

Institutional and organisational factors have a significant influence on the effectiveness and credibility of a statistical authority producing and disseminating European Statistics. The relevant issues are professional independence, mandate for data collection, adequacy of resources, quality commitment, statistical confidentiality, impartiality and objectivity.

Principle 1: Professional Independence - *The professional independence of statistical authorities from other policy, regulatory or administrative departments and bodies, as well as from private sector operators, ensures the credibility of European Statistics.*

Indicators

- The independence of the statistical authority from political and other external interference in producing and disseminating official statistics is specified in law.
- The head of the statistical authority has sufficiently high hierarchical standing to ensure senior level access to policy authorities and administrative public bodies. He/She should be of the highest professional calibre.
- The head of the statistical authority and, where appropriate, the heads of its statistical bodies have responsibility for ensuring that European Statistics are produced and disseminated in an independent manner.
- The head of the statistical authority and, where appropriate, the heads of its statistical bodies have the sole responsibility for deciding on statistical methods, standards and procedures, and on the content and timing of statistical releases.
- The statistical work programmes are published and periodic reports describe progress made.
- Statistical releases are clearly distinguished and issued separately from political/policy statements.

- The statistical authority, when appropriate, comments publicly on statistical issues, including criticisms and misuses of official statistics.

Principle 2: Mandate for Data Collection - *Statistical authorities must have a clear legal mandate to collect information for European statistical purposes. Administrations, enterprises and households, and the public at large may be compelled by law to allow access to or deliver data for European statistical purposes at the request of statistical authorities.*

Indicators

- The mandate to collect information for the production and dissemination of official statistics is specified in law.
- The statistical authority is allowed by national legislation to use administrative records for statistical purposes.
- On the basis of a legal act, the statistical authority may compel response to statistical surveys.

Principle 3: Adequacy of Resources - *The resources available to statistical authorities must be sufficient to meet European Statistics requirements.*

Indicators

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

Principle 4: Quality Commitment - *All ESS members commit themselves to work and co-operate according to the principles fixed in the Quality Declaration of the European Statistical System.*

Indicators

- Product quality is regularly monitored according to the ESS quality components.
- Processes are in place to monitor the quality of the collection, processing and dissemination of statistics.
- Processes are in place to deal with quality considerations, including tradeoffs within quality, and to guide planning for existing and emerging surveys.

- Quality guidelines are documented and staff are well trained. These guidelines are spelled out in writing and made known to the public.
- There is a regular and thorough review of the key statistical outputs using external experts where appropriate.

Principle 5: Statistical Confidentiality - *The privacy of data providers (households, enterprises, administrations and other respondents), the confidentiality of the information they provide and its use only for statistical purposes must be absolutely guaranteed.*

Indicators

- Statistical confidentiality is guaranteed in law.
- Statistical authority staff sign legal confidentiality commitments on appointment.
- Substantial penalties are prescribed for any wilful breaches of statistical confidentiality.
- Instructions and guidelines are provided on the protection of statistical confidentiality in the production and dissemination processes. These guidelines are spelled out in writing and made known to the public.
- Physical and technological provisions are in place to protect the security and integrity of statistical databases.
- Strict protocols apply to external users accessing statistical microdata for research purposes.

Principle 6: Impartiality and Objectivity - *Statistical authorities must produce and disseminate European Statistics respecting scientific independence and in an objective, professional and transparent manner in which all users are treated equitably.*

Indicators

- Statistics are compiled on an objective basis determined by statistical considerations.
- Choices of sources and statistical techniques are informed by statistical considerations.
- Errors discovered in published statistics are corrected at the earliest possible date and publicised.
- Information on the methods and procedures used by the statistical authority are publicly available.
- Statistical release dates and times are pre-announced.
- All users have equal access to statistical releases at the same time and any privileged pre-release access to any outside user is limited, controlled and publicised. In the event that leaks occur, pre-release arrangements should be revised so as to ensure impartiality.
- Statistical releases and statements made in Press Conferences are objective and nonpartisan.

Statistical processes

European and other international standards, guidelines and good practices must be fully observed in the processes used by the statistical authorities to organise, collect, process and disseminate official statistics. The credibility of the statistics is enhanced by a reputation for good management and efficiency. The relevant aspects are sound methodology, appropriate statistical procedures, non-excessive burden on respondents and cost effectiveness.

Principle 7: Sound Methodology - *Sound methodology must underpin quality statistics. This requires adequate tools, procedures and expertise.*

Indicators

- The overall methodological framework of the statistical authority follows European and other international standards, guidelines, and good practices.
- Procedures are in place to ensure that standard concepts, definitions and classifications are consistently applied throughout the statistical authority.
- The business register and the frame for population surveys are regularly evaluated and adjusted if necessary in order to ensure high quality.
- Detailed concordance exists between national classifications and sectorisation systems and the corresponding European systems.
- Graduates in the relevant academic disciplines are recruited.
- Staff attend international relevant training courses and conferences, and liaise with statistician colleagues at international level in order to learn from the best and to improve their expertise.
- Co-operation with the scientific community to improve methodology is organised and external reviews assess the quality and effectiveness of the methods implemented and promote better tools, when feasible.

Principle 8: Appropriate Statistical Procedures - *Appropriate statistical procedures, implemented from data collection to data validation, must underpin quality statistics.*

Indicators

- Where European Statistics are based on administrative data, the definitions and concepts used for the administrative purpose must be a good approximation to those required for statistical purposes.
- In case of statistical surveys, questionnaires are systematically tested prior to the data collection.
- Survey designs, sample selections, and sample weights are well based and regularly reviewed, revised or updated as required.
- Field operations, data entry, and coding are routinely monitored and revised as required.

- Appropriate editing and imputation computer systems are used and regularly reviewed, revised or updated as required
- Revisions follow standard, well-established and transparent procedures.

Principle 9: Non-Excessive Burden on Respondents - *The reporting burden should be proportionate to the needs of the users and should not be excessive for respondents. The statistical authority monitors the response burden and sets targets for its reduction over time.*

Indicators

- The range and detail of European Statistics demands is limited to what is absolutely necessary.
- The reporting burden is spread as widely as possible over survey populations through appropriate sampling techniques.
- The information sought from businesses is, as far as possible, readily available from their accounts and electronic means are used where possible to facilitate its return.
- Best estimates and approximations are accepted when exact details are not readily available.
- Administrative sources are used whenever possible to avoid duplicating requests for information.
- Data sharing within statistical authorities is generalised in order to avoid multiplication of surveys.

Principle 10: Cost Effectiveness - *Resources must be effectively used.*

Indicators

- Internal and independent external measures monitor the statistical authority's use of resources.
- Routine clerical operations (e.g. data capture, coding, validation) are automated to the extent possible.
- The productivity potential of information and communications technology is being optimised for data collection, processing and dissemination.
- Proactive efforts are being made to improve the statistical potential of administrative records and avoid costly direct surveys.

Statistical output

Available statistics must meet users' needs. Statistics comply with the European quality standards and serve the needs of European institutions, governments, research institutions, business concerns and the public generally. The important issues concern the extent to which the statistics are relevant, accurate and reliable, timely, coherent, comparable across regions and countries, and readily accessible by users.

Principle 11: Relevance - *European Statistics must meet the needs of users.*

Indicators

- Processes are in place to consult users, monitor the relevance and practical utility of existing statistics in meeting their needs, and advise on their emerging needs and priorities.
- Priority needs are being met and reflected in the work programme.
- User satisfaction surveys are undertaken periodically.

Principle 12: Accuracy and Reliability - *European Statistics must accurately and reliably portray reality.*

Indicators

- Source data, intermediate results and statistical outputs are assessed and validated.
- Sampling errors and non-sampling errors are measured and systematically documented according to the framework of the ESS quality components.
- Studies and analyses of revisions are carried out routinely and used internally to inform statistical processes.

Principle 13: Timeliness and Punctuality - *European Statistics must be disseminated in a timely and punctual manner.*

Indicators

- Timeliness meets the highest European and international dissemination standards.
- A standard daily time is set for the release of European Statistics.
- Periodicity of European Statistics takes into account user requirements as much as possible.
- Any divergence from the dissemination time schedule is publicised in advance, explained and a new release date set.
- Preliminary results of acceptable aggregate quality can be disseminated when considered useful.

Principle 14: Coherence and Comparability - *European Statistics should be consistent internally, over time and comparable between regions and countries; it should be possible to combine and make joint use of related data from different sources.*

Indicators

- Statistics are internally coherent and consistent (e.g. arithmetic and accounting identities observed).

- Statistics are coherent or reconcilable over a reasonable period of time.
- Statistics are compiled on the basis of common standards with respect to scope, definitions, units and classifications in the different surveys and sources.
- Statistics from the different surveys and sources are compared and reconciled.
- Cross-national comparability of the data is ensured through periodical exchanges between the European Statistical System and other statistical systems; methodological studies are carried out in close co-operation between the Member States and Eurostat.

Principle 15: Accessibility and Clarity - *European Statistics should be presented in a clear and understandable form, disseminated in a suitable and convenient manner, available and accessible on an impartial basis with supporting metadata and guidance.*

Indicators

- Statistics are presented in a form that facilitates proper interpretation and meaningful comparisons.
- Dissemination services use modern information and communication technology and, if appropriate, traditional hard copy.
- Custom-designed analyses are provided when feasible and are made public.
- Access to microdata can be allowed for research purposes. This access is subject to strict protocols.
- Metadata are documented according to standardised metadata systems.
- Users are kept informed on the methodology of statistical processes and the quality of statistical outputs with respect to the ESS quality criteria.