

## **European Statistical Advisory Committee**

**“Good decisions need good data,  
good data require sufficient statistical resources”**

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The European Statistical System (ESS) is currently facing major challenges. Official statistics must respond to constantly fluctuating data requirements in the context of global structural changes. These changes have accelerated over time with the consequence that the need for statistically-based decision-making has increased relentlessly. This applies to all user groups, from the political actors and administrations to business users and researchers and indeed to the public at large. Moreover, new data requirements, such as those resulting from the intense debates on sustainable growth and quality of life, also increase the need for reliable information.

Alongside this, the importance of and demand for official statistics in the political arena are growing in prominence. This is especially the case in the context of the response to the global financial and economic crisis which has shaken European economies and also posed a major challenge to the public finances and the European monetary system. With more rigorous monitoring of fiscal stability and macroeconomic developments now high on the political agenda in Europe, high quality and timely statistical indicators are of paramount importance.

Statistics must continue to be fit for purpose in underpinning decision-making for those critical policies that are most relevant to European citizens and where wrong decisions would have a very high cost for Europe. This presupposes an early and close dialogue between the compilers of statistics and the policy-makers so that an informed view can be made on the relevance of the statistics that are being collected. To this end, the data must provide timely input to the policy deliberations, since out-of-date statistics lose most, if not all, of their policy relevance. This process must not compromise the transparency and reliability of data which must be safeguarded so that the data are not vulnerable to political interference and electoral cycles.

An additional challenge for the statistical systems of European countries is the achievement of an appropriate balance between nationally/locally specific and cross-nationally harmonised data. Key statistical series need to be comparable across the countries of Europe and so the human and technical resources allocated to the statistical function must be sufficient to ensure the correct application of European/international statistical standards. Similarly a balance needs to be achieved between continuing support for robust time series and the development of new statistics which address emerging policy issues otherwise we risk have statistical systems which are irrelevant to current circumstances.

The European Statistical Advisory Committee (ESAC), which represents the different users of statistical data at European level, recognises the growing challenges the European Statistical System is facing. However, ESAC is concerned about the danger that, in the face of severe budget pressures, statistical offices in the European Member States will not have adequate resources to cope with the challenges outlined above. For years, official statistical systems in Europe have operated under diminishing budgets that have been shrinking in real (i.e. inflation adjusted) terms.

ESAC recognises that statistical offices cannot be completely insulated from the economies needed to restore balance to the public finances. But the need for economies in financial resources must not affect the ability of national statistical offices to deliver the tasks for which they are responsible. This is especially true in times when new data demands, quality requirements and the political importance of statistical information are all growing so rapidly.

ESAC urges the political leaders in Europe not to further widen the gap between available resources and the increasing challenges facing the ESS. Good decisions, whether in politics, business, science or society, need good data. And good statistical data require sufficient resources. The cost to our societies of inadequate official data is considerable.