



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

EUROSTAT

Directorate A: Cooperation in the European Statistical System; International cooperation; Resources

Unit A-1: European Statistical System Governance and External Relations

Panel discussion: "Statistics beyond 2020 – Challenges and risks"

Speaking points for Maria Helena Figueira

- Year 2020 marks the end of several planning periods relevant for European statistics:
 - ESS Vision 2020,
 - European statistical programme,
 - European Union's Multiannual Financial Framework
- Strategic reflection has already started within the ESS on challenges to be expected and addressed after 2020 and what should be the strategic priorities to pursue collectively;
- at the same time, Eurostat as part of the Commission has started working on a proposal for the next European statistical programme;
- Eurostat has engaged in a number of consultations with the national statistical institutes to feed that process and will continue to consult its partners in later stages of the legislative procedure;
- in the following I will present the main challenges and risks for European statistics beyond 2020 as identified during the ongoing strategic reflection within the ESS and Eurostat.

Challenges for official statistics

1 – Changing economies and societies

- Rapid technological change creates new economic activities and triggers changes in many sectors (eg. expanding services),
- The measurement of a number of those new activities is challenging, also because of their cross-border nature (globalisation) and required new metrics to be developed
- Changes in the labour market, with new forms of work emerging and rising mobility of workers but also of the population as a whole (e.g. migration flows)
- Greater emphasis on measuring environmental performance and life satisfaction

2 – Changing data uses and user needs

- Changes in users' behaviour: demand for quick data and tailor-made services, instant feedback via social media
- Increasing role of statistics for evidence based policy-making and to avoid policy based evidence-making
- But at the same time, increased need for statistical literacy as the average user profile of official statistics turns towards non-experts
- Greater emphasis on timeliness than on accuracy
- Users' trust put in danger by the increased misuse of statistics ('fake news') – need to make users able to recognise and stick to trustworthy data
- Substantial gap between citizens and political institutions, requiring more dialogue

3 – Data revolution

- Rapid technological developments in the information market
- Bigger competition from the private/commercial providers of information
- Need to increasingly rely on multi-source integration and data analytics
- Necessity to guarantee better access to registers and to privately-held data (big data)
- But at the same time, the accessibility, stability and usability of new data sources remains an issue – work is continuing on those aspects.

4 – Budget constraints

- Pressure on budgets call for better communicating the value of official statistics
- Necessity to set good priorities
- Need to invest in modern infrastructure to improve efficiency
- Staff required to have diverse and encompassing skills (expensive to recruit)

Risks

- Communicating statistics in the post-truth society: reputational risks for statistical organisations due to 'fake news'
- Risk of losing relevance if we are not agile enough in responding to user needs
- Competition in the information market, with different quality levels
- Quality as benchmark ('stamp') but trade off regarding timeliness
- Staff skills might be not adapted to a quickly changing world

Overall, the list of challenges and risks is long but this should not make us worried. Without challenges there is less ambition and less progress. They can also be seen as opportunities that we have to seize.

Therefore, the ESS has had a strategic reflection and agreed to focus on 3 main priority areas in jointly responding to the common challenges:

1. **Satisfied user needs** (new phenomena, quality improvements, better dissemination and communication, stronger user capabilities, promotion of the value of European statistics);
2. **Suitable capabilities** (professional staff, adequate resources, access to (new) data, data protection, new data production methods, commitment to quality);
3. **Effective partnerships** (inside ESS and outside: with technology sector, research and academia, media, data protection regulators, education sector, ESCB, and other international organisations).

I will be very happy to have an exchange of views with the audience about the challenges and response of the European statistical system. The ESS Committee will have a discussion on this in November.

I very much see this panel discussion and this conference as offering us an opportunity to have an open dialogue among all stakeholders.

Thank you very much for your attention.