



Press Release

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European statistics should better meet user needs

The European Commission provides European statistics of generally sufficient quality and fit for use by policy makers, business and the public, according to a new report by the European Court of Auditors. While the auditors give the Commission a passing grade, they also warn of a number of weaknesses. European statistics should be more useful to their users and better tailored to their needs. Stakeholders such as academia and the research community as a whole should be properly consulted on plans and priorities for European statistics. And there are data gaps in important statistical areas such as labour, business and health.

Official statistics are indispensable for evidence-based decision-making by politicians and business leaders, as well as for the work of researchers, journalists and the public. In the EU, they are used for collecting and allocating funds, as well as for designing and assessing policies in all areas, including employment, environment and the economy. Between 2013 and 2020, almost half a billion euros of taxpayers' money was spent from EU coffers on the production of European statistics. The auditors checked whether the Commission had taken steps to ensure a high level of quality, and examined the areas of labour, businesses and health in depth.

"The production of statistics is not an end in itself", said Ildikó Gáll-Pelcz, the ECA member who led the audit. "They are a public good, and must be generated first and foremost with users in mind. In an age of disinformation and serial crises, it is paramount that European official statistics must be high-quality, meet users' needs and explore innovative ways of production."

Eurostat, the EU's statistical office directly connected to the Commission, consults users to identify which needs it should address in its future work. However, the auditors found that the main representative body for the users of statistics – the European Statistical Advisory Committee – had failed to represent all users in a balanced and effective manner, and should be more inclusive in order to ensure a collective viewpoint. Today, civil society, NGOs representing vulnerable groups, and international organisations are not involved at all.

The auditors also found gaps in health statistics, which are still incomplete because some are voluntary and not all Member States submit all the agreed data to Eurostat. Eurostat also faces difficulties in obtaining the required data in some Member States in areas such as business. As

The purpose of this press release is to convey the main messages of the European Court of Auditors' special report. The full report is available at eca.europa.eu.

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a consequence, it incorrectly applies the definition of small and medium-sized companies. Another gap pointed out by the auditors concerns Eurostat's lack of verification powers in some areas. Eurostat has no rights to verify Member States' data on labour and population, for instance, and therefore cannot verify their reliability. These statistics form the basis for various EU contributions, including pandemic recovery funding. This could lead to the allocation of EU funds based on such data being inaccurate.

Timeliness is another concern, particularly for health and business statistics. While member states can submit some data to Eurostat as late as two years after the fact, which already reduces their benefit for users, in some cases member states submitted data significantly past the deadline, only partially, or not at all. The European statistical system is also not flexible enough to respond quickly with new sets of data when new needs arise. This has become evident in connection with COVID-19, where it was necessary to find alternative ways of calculating death rates.

The auditors found that funding for European statistics was not appropriately sourced, and that it did not sufficiently prioritise innovative projects. They also call attention to Eurostat's pre-release of statistics to certain groups of users, which poses a risk of economic profiteering by those who get early access. The option of pre-release access could give rise to opportunities for economic benefit that may seriously distort markets, and the Commission should reconsider its current practice.

Background information

Special report 26/2022, "European statistics: Potential to further improve quality", is available on the [ECA website](#). The ECA previously published a [report on Eurostat](#) in 2012 and will shortly publish a report on GNI calculation.

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