

PEER REVIEW REPORT

ON COOPERATION/LEVEL OF INTEGRATION WITHIN THE
EUROPEAN STATISTICAL SYSTEM

FRANCE

GERRY O'HANLON

KATALIN SZÉP

JAGDEV VIRDEE

FEBRUARY 2015

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	3
2. INTRODUCTION	4
3. MAIN FINDINGS	5
3.1 Overall summary of the main findings	5
3.1.1 Findings in the strategy	5
3.1.2 Findings in the design	6
3.1.3 Findings in process chain management	6
3.1.4 Findings in process chain implementation	6
4. OTHER ISSUES	7
5. NATIONAL STATISTICAL INSTITUTE VIEWS WHERE THEY DIVERGE FROM PEER REVIEWERS' ASSESSMENT	8

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The National Institute for Statistics and Economic Studies (INSEE) cooperates with the ESS and the wider international statistical community. However, there is no specific policy in respect of this and many activities are undertaken on a case by case basis. The perceived advantage is weighed against the cost of participation in taking any decision on participation in common projects. Preparation for missions and meetings is done at directorate level without systematic coordination by the International Relations Department. Conclusions from EU meetings are implemented if they are subsequently endorsed at senior management level in INSEE.

INSEE has participated in a range of Essnet¹ projects over the years – acting as coordinator in a number of cases. Some examples of where it has acted as a coordinator include the following projects: Profiling Large & Complex Multinational Enterprises; European Socio Economic Groups; and Center of Competence on Seasonal Adjustment. No dedicated resources for participation in common projects is provided for in the INSEE budget – instead, participation is decided on a case by case basis and funded as necessary from general departmental budgets.

EU regulations are given the highest priority in INSEE's five year and annual work programmes. No details are given on specific derogations but it would seem that some currently exist and others will be required in respect of some draft proposals under discussion.

INSEE has not participated in benchmarking exercises up to now but plans to do so in the future. When there is evidence that another Member State has recognised experience in a particular field, INSEE is prepared to seek more information at the design phase of new projects.

When its quality is deemed to be acceptable, the Euro Group Register (EGR) will be used to improve the quality of the French statistical business register. INSEE also uses the Electronic Data Files Administration and Management Information System (eDAMIS) and Statistical Data and Metadata Exchange (SDMX) in communicating with Eurostat. INSEE provides summary EU data for all key indicators, there are links to the ESS, and most important data and information are available in English on its website.

¹ ESSnet stands for "A network of several European Statistical System (ESS) organisations aimed at providing results that will be beneficial to the whole ESS"

2. INTRODUCTION

This peer review report is part of a series of assessments, the objective of which is to evaluate the extent to which National Statistical Institutes (NSIs) in the EU Member States and EFTA/EEA countries cooperate with, and are integrated into, the European Statistical System (ESS). The review was conducted in parallel with a larger peer review exercise to assess the compliance of the NSI and the wider National Statistical System (NSS) with the European statistics Code of Practice (CoP). The latter review is the subject of a separate report.

Each peer review in the Member States and EFTA/EEA countries is conducted by three reviewers and has four phases: completion of self-assessment questionnaires by a country; their assessment by Peer Reviewers; a peer review visit; and the preparation of reports on the outcomes.

The self-assessment questionnaire on cooperation/level of integration with the ESS sought evidence from the NSI to demonstrate the level of its engagement with European and other international partners. The self-assessment was conducted under four main headings, namely to identify the extent to which cooperation/integration is reflected in: the NSI's strategy; the design and implementation of its systems; and the adoption of common and standardised processes, solutions and policies in practice (i.e. process chain management and implementation).

The French peer review was conducted by Mr Gerry O'Hanlon (chair), Ms Katalin Szép and Mr Jagdev Virdee, with a peer review visit to Paris on 8-12 December 2014.

3. MAIN FINDINGS

3.1 OVERALL SUMMARY OF THE MAIN FINDINGS

The National Institute for Statistics and Economic Studies (INSEE) cooperates with the ESS and the wider international statistical community. However, there is no specific policy in respect of this and many activities are undertaken on a case by case basis. The perceived advantage is weighed against the cost of participation in taking any decision on participation in common projects. It is notable that they do not engage in benchmarking and they do not proactively seek out and import good ideas from other NSIs. Despite the absence of a formal policy, it is clear that INSEE does however engage to a significant extent with its European and other international partners.

3.1.1 FINDINGS IN THE STRATEGY

INSEE has not participated in benchmarking exercises up to now but indicated that it is planning to undertake a project of this nature with Germany in the future.

INSEE has participated in a range of Essnet² projects over the years – acting as coordinator in a number of cases. Some examples of where it has acted as a coordinator include the following projects: Profiling Large & Complex Multinational Enterprises; European Socio Economic Groups; and Center of Competence on Seasonal Adjustment. It has plans to participate in further projects over the next three years. No dedicated resources for participation in common projects is provided for in the INSEE budget – instead, participation is decided on a case by case basis and funded as necessary from general departmental budgets.

Some examples of implementing recommendations from common ESS projects include: using the Electronic Data files Administration and Management Information System (EDAMIS) Web Portal for reporting to Eurostat; Tau-Argus for disclosure control; and the planned use of Statistical Data and Metadata Exchange (SDMX).

Participation in international meetings is encouraged when an explicit benefit is expected for INSEE, taking into account its specificities. For instance, in 2013, 262 missions of coordination at the European and international level were undertaken: 128 for Eurostat, 30 for other European Commission bodies, 51 for Essnet, and 53 for other international events. All these missions involved approximately 90 INSEE officials. Preparation for missions and meetings is done at directorate level without systematic coordination by the International Relations Department. Conclusions from EU meetings are implemented if they are subsequently endorsed at senior management level in INSEE.

There is no specific policy regarding staff exchanges but there are currently 5 members of staff working as detached national experts in Eurostat or elsewhere in the European Commission.

² ESSnet stands for “A network of several European Statistical System (ESS) organisations aimed at providing results that will be beneficial to the whole ESS”

3.1.2 FINDINGS IN THE DESIGN

EU regulations are given the highest priority in INSEE's five year and annual work programmes. No details were given on specific derogations but it would seem that some currently exist and others will be required in respect of some draft proposals under discussion.

When a new project is not based on very specific sources like administrative data, and when there is evidence that another Member State has recognised experience in this field, INSEE is prepared to seek more information. However, there would not appear to be any formal policy in place requiring the assessment of relevant solutions and their adoption where appropriate.

3.1.3 FINDINGS IN PROCESS CHAIN MANAGEMENT

The Generic Statistical Business Process Model (GSBPM) is adopted progressively when new projects are being implemented and when improvement actions are being carried out by the Quality Unit.

3.1.4 FINDINGS IN PROCESS CHAIN IMPLEMENTATION

When its quality is deemed to be acceptable, the Euro Group Register (EGR) will be used to improve the quality of the French statistical business register, especially through the implementation of the European System of interoperable Business Registers (ESBR).

The French statistical system is extremely open to the possibility of data sharing with ESS partners through its statistical law. However, in practice, it is difficult to find foreign partners to exchange data with, since the law in other countries is often more restrictive.

INSEE uses eDAMIS web portal and eDAMIS web application for sending data and metadata to Eurostat. The National Accounts Division uses SDMX-RI for regular data exchanges with Eurostat and the Employment and Earnings Division started using it for sending the Labour Cost Indices in April 2014. Census data were also sent using SDMX through the Census hub in 2014.

INSEE provides summary EU data for all key indicators, there are links to the ESS and most important data and information are available in English on its website.

4. OTHER ISSUES

INSEE management would like to see a greater focus at EU level on the inter-country comparability of European statistics. While there is a strong focus on adopting harmonised standards, methods and sources at European level, INSEE believes that more is required to check the comparability of the statistical outputs by, for example, challenging the plausibility of the results across countries.

The increased role envisaged for NSIs, under the draft amendment to Regulation (EC) 223/2009, in regard to the coordination of all activities at national level relating to European statistics will require INSEE to adopt a more structured and formal approach than at present.

5. NATIONAL STATISTICAL INSTITUTE VIEWS WHERE THEY DIVERGE FROM PEER REVIEWERS' ASSESSMENT

INSEE acknowledges the auditor team, chaired by Gerry O'Hanlon, for their report on its cooperation/level of integration within the European Statistical System. Without any mandate from the French government with respect to the development and level of integration of the European Statistical System, INSEE adopts the pragmatic point of view of an official statistician and a user in the design of its actions in this matter. Mindful of the release of consistent, well-documented and interpretable European statistics, it promotes the idea that comparability of national statistics is a necessary input of meaningful and useful European statistics for policy makers and European citizens. INSEE does support the development of integrated modularised and standardised processes and harmonised surveys, but also considers that comparability cannot only result from these strategies, as inputs, practices, skills and organisation differ among the member states. While these strategies clearly allow for broad improvement in many circumstances, some cases of heterogeneous national official statistics compiled under European regulations illustrate that additional work is sometimes necessary for correct and relevant use of the different statistics. Validation of statistics is a demanding exercise that can also benefit from the development of automatic procedures but cannot be reduced to them. Nevertheless, INSEE's commitment in two of the three key Vision 2020 Implementation Projects (ESBR and Simstat) illustrates that its pragmatic approach may be compatible with structuring projects as long as they aim, for instance, at making the compilation of European statistics more efficient or their interpretation easier. INSEE will thus be keen to maintain its involvement in European projects that have well-defined objectives, clear decision-making milestones and tangible benefits shared by all the NSIs.