2025-2027 round of Peer Reviews for the Western Balkans, Türkiye and ENP East countries

Overall methodology

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This document describes the overall methodology for the 2025-2027 round of Peer Reviews in the following countries: Albania, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Moldova, Montenegro, Kosovo[1], North Macedonia, Serbia, Türkiye and Ukraine (peer review countries). It includes the objectives of the peer reviews, the scope, including the involvement of other national authorities developing, producing and disseminating official statistics (ONAs) and the approach. It further includes a description of the implementation arrangements such as the selection procedure for the ONAs to participate in the peer reviews, the self-assessment phase, the composition of the peer review expert teams, the peer review visits, the peer review reports and the harmonisation of recommendations, as well as the procedure to develop improvement actions.

1. Objectives

The objectives of this round of peer reviews are to:

- review the compliance/alignment of the peer review countries with the European statistics Code of Practice (ES CoP), in order to demonstrate to their societies and external stakeholders, including EU authorities, that the peer review countries' statistical systems are based on the principles of the ES CoP;
- help National Statistical Institutes (NSIs) and other national authorities (ONAs) developing, producing and disseminating official statistics to further improve and develop the national statistical systems (NSS) by indicating future-oriented recommendations; at the same time, they should stimulate government authorities to support the implementation of these recommendations.

Both objectives target internal and external (to the NSS of the peer review countries) stakeholders; they have therefore an internal and external dimension. The internal dimension covers the review of compliance/alignment with the ES CoP, the progress achieved in the last 5 years, improvements inside the NSIs and the NSS, something that is inherent to the statistical authorities, and can be achieved by them on their own. The external dimension covers in the broadest sense all external stakeholders' active involvement in the implementation of the peer review recommendations and the related improvement actions. It is thus, more difficult to achieve as it reaches beyond the authority of the NSIs and is mainly oriented towards government bodies. The external dimension is hoped to be enhanced with the help of adequate communication efforts.

2. Scope

This round of peer reviews will:

- Cover the 16 principles of the ES CoP;
- Identify advancement and progress of the NSS in complying/aligning with the principles of the ES CoP in the last 5 years.

[1] *This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.*

- Cover the NSS, meaning the NSI and selected ONAs. The NSIs having a coordination role in the national statistical system will decide which ONAs are selected for the self-assessment phase and invited for the peer review visit, based on commonly agreed criteria for the selection of the ONAs. The NSIs will accompany their selection of ONAs with a short explanatory note to be sent to Eurostat. The criteria for selection include:
    - Importance for official statistics, measured by a percentage threshold of producing official statistics,
    - Importance for official statistics, measured by its significance,
    - Degree of compliance with the ES CoP by an ONA,
    - Importance of an ONA from the perspective of the NSI;
- Not aim to assess the quality of specific statistical products, because compliance with the applicable EU legislation is monitored via the annual Eurostat compliance monitoring process.

3. Approach

A peer review approach with some audit-like elements will be used to benefit from the positive aspects of both approaches.

The following elements of a peer review approach will be used:

- Common agreement on the methodology of the peer reviews, including the objectives, scope and implementation arrangements;
- Participation of experts from Member State NSIs (peers) in the peer review expert teams, including from among the senior management of the NSIs;
- Peer learning through the involvement of observers from the other reviewed NSIs in the region;
- Focus on improvements as an objective of the reviews.

The following elements from an audit-like approach will be applied:

- Involvement of external experts to guarantee the credibility and objectivity of the peer reviews;
- The provision of documents as evidence for statements;
- The ownership of the recommendations by the peer review expert team;
- The responsibility of the NSI to formulate the improvement actions to address the recommendations in the peer review report.

4. Implementation arrangements

The implementation of peer reviews will be done through contracts managed by Eurostat. The contractor is responsible for engaging and supporting the peer review experts, for the logistics of the peer reviews, for providing well-formatted and language-checked reports and for organising the training (if needed) for the peer review experts and national peer review coordinators from the NSIs.

The implementation arrangements describe the following elements of the peer reviews:

- The procedure for the selection of the ONAs to participate in the peer review;
- The self-assessment phase;

- The composition and selection of the peer review expert teams;
- The organisation and modalities of the peer review visits;
- The arrangements for the peer review reports and the recommendations;
- The procedure to develop the improvement actions to address the recommendations from the peer review expert team and their monitoring.

4.1 Procedure for the selection of the ONAs

With the launch of the peer review for a given country 6-7 months before the peer review visit, Eurostat will ask the concerned NSI to start the procedure to select ONAs which will participate in the peer review in a given country.

If a country has up to five ONAs, all of them should participate. Should a country with five or less ONAs decide not to involve all of them in the peer review, the decision will need to be duly justified.

For all countries that have more than five ONAs, a selection will be done to identify five ONAs that will participate in the peer review. If a country with more than five ONAs decides to involve less than five ONAs, the decision will need to be duly justified.

The proposed procedure for selecting the ONAs in Annex A of this document contains more details and suggestions for the NSIs on how to decide on the ONAs, which should participate in the peer review. It needs to be highlighted that the final decision on the selection is in the authority of the NSI and the operationalised criteria proposed in the document constitute a guidance for the NSIs only. The four criteria (1) Importance for official statistics, measured by a percentage threshold of producing official statistics, 2) Importance for official statistics, measured by its significance, 3) Degree of compliance with the ES CoP by an ONA, 4) Importance of an ONA from the perspective of the NSI) can be used individually or in combination and be measured by qualitative and/or quantitative metrics. More details can be found in Annex A of this document.

Once the selection procedure has been finalised, the NSI will send an explanatory note to Eurostat:

- Informing Eurostat about the ONAs selected to participate in the peer review;
- Providing an explanation about the selection process and the application of the criteria as well as a justification for the selected ONAs;
- Providing additional explanations if the number of selected ONA is different from the expected number (all ONAs for countries with no more than 5 ONAs, and five ONAs for countries with more than 5 ONAs).

This note should be sent to Eurostat approximately 5-6 months before the peer review visit takes place.

Once selected for participation in the peer review, the ONAs will be asked to fill in a SAQ, will participate in the dedicated meeting(s) during the peer review visit, will receive recommendations from the peer review expert team and will have to develop improvement actions to address these recommendations, in close cooperation with the NSI as the national coordinator.

4.2 Self-assessment phase

There will be a self-assessment questionnaire (SAQ) for the NSIs and another one for the ONAs. The SAQs are available in Word and have to be sent in pdf; NSIs and ONAs should pay attention to the provision of concise information in the SAQs.

4.2.1 Self-assessment questionnaire for the NSIs

The SAQ for the NSIs is organised in three main sections, one for each area of the ES CoP: institutional environment, statistical processes and statistical output. Within each section, sub-sections correspond to each of the 16 principles and include the relative indicators. The self-assessment questionnaire is included in Annex B and is built in the following way:

i. Standard questions on indicators in each principle:

   For each indicator in each principle of the ES CoP, there are two standard questions: one on how the indicator is implemented and another one on what is the self-appraisal of the degree of implementation of the indicator.

ii. Additional questions on the level of the principle:

   For a number of principles, there are additional questions, which look for forward-looking/ innovative practices for the entire principle and for a broader view on the principle. Answers to these questions will not be considered to assess compliance with the ES CoP.

iii. SWOT questions on the level of the principle:

   For each principle, there are four questions on the strengths and weaknesses (internal factors), as well as threats/challenges and opportunities (external factors), covering the entire principle.

   Part of the answers to the question on the strengths may be used to collect forward looking/innovative practices, which could potentially be summarised and shared among the countries after all the peer reviews are finalised.

iv. Summarising questions on the level of the ES CoP area:

   For each of the three areas, there are reviewing and summarising questions on the progress made by the NSI in the last 5 years in the given area as well as existing and possible future action plans.

The answers to the questions on how the indicator is implemented should be based on the respondents' professional judgment and experiences; in addition, inspiration can be found in the respective methods and tools of the ESS Quality Assurance Framework (QAF), version 2.0. The related methods and tools are linked to each indicator of the questionnaire in a hyperlink format. The QAF has the role of a reference document in this peer review process, but not that of a benchmark.

In accordance with the audit-like elements of the peer reviews, NSIs are asked to provide evidence for the answers. The following documents have to be submitted with the SAQ for NSI (see for more details in Annex I of the "Guide for the NSIs/ONAs participating in the peer review"):

- The “core” documents as described in the “Guide for the NSIs/ONAs participating in the peer review”;
- Documents supporting the answers in the SAQ:
  - if they are publicly available, links can be provided (e.g. web pages, etc);
  - if they are internal documents, they can be listed with their titles/names in English. If the peer review experts need (some of) the internal documents, they have to request them from the NSI two months before the peer review visit. The NSI will have one month to send either the translated document or to prepare a summary of the content of the document in English and send them to the peer review experts one month before the peer review takes place.

4.2.2 Self-assessment questionnaire for the ONAs

The SAQ for the ONAs is organised in three main sections, one for each area of the ES CoP: institutional environment, statistical processes and statistical output. Within each section, sub-sections correspond to each of the 16 principles and list the relevant indicators, for information. The self- assessment questionnaire is included in Annex C and is built in the following way:

i. Standard questions on each principle

For each principle, there are two questions: one on how the principle is implemented, based on the indicators listed and another one on what is the self-appraisal of the degree of implementation of the principle.

ii. Questions on the strengths and weakness on the level of the ES CoP area

For each area, there are reviewing and summarising questions on the strengths and weaknesses of the ONA.

Part of the answers to the question on the strengths may be used to collect forward looking/innovative practices.

iii. Questions on future plans at the level of the ES CoP area

For each of the three areas there are questions on existing and possible future action plans in the given area.

For principle 1bis on Coordination and cooperation, questions ask for the assessment on how the coordination and cooperation aspects are implemented in the National Statistical System (NSS) from the perspective of the ONA – based on the analysis of the respective indicators of the ES CoP.

In accordance with the audit-like elements of the peer reviews, the ONA is asked to provide evidence for the answers. The following documents have to be submitted with the SAQ for ONAs (see for more details in Annex I in the “Guide for the NSIs/ONAs participating in the peer review”):

- The “core” documents as described in the “Guide for the NSIs/ONAs participating in the peer review”;

- Documents supporting the answers in the questionnaire:
    - if they are publicly available, links can be provided (e.g. web pages, etc);
    - if they are internal documents and /or documents in national language only, they can be listed with their titles/names in English. If peer review experts need (some of) the internal documents, they have to request them from the ONA two months before the peer review visit. The ONA will have one month to send either the translated document or to prepare a summary of the content of the document in English and send them to the peer review experts one month before the peer review takes place.

If documents to support the answers in the SAQ do not exist, the ONA is encouraged to find another way of providing evidence for the statement/answers to the questions.

4.2.3 Treatment of the SAQs

The SAQs will be addressed to the NSI and the participating ONAs of each country; but it is the NSI that will forward the SAQs to the ONAs and needs to make sure that the SAQ is filled in by the participating ONAs.

The filled-in SAQs of the NSI and the ONAs participating in the peer review will be shared with the respective peer review expert team only (in Eurostat they will be received by Unit B3 only).

The SAQs as attached in annexes B and C will be sent out at the time of launching this round of peer reviews to all NSIs (primarily for information purposes), after the full package of the methodology for this round of peer reviews has been endorsed. The filled-in SAQs have to be sent to Eurostat's unit B3 and the contractor implementing the peer reviews, which will verify the completeness of the information and in turn send them to the peer review expert team, with a copy to Eurostat's Unit B3, three months before the peer review visit will take place in the given country.

4.3 The composition and selection of the peer review expert teams

The peer review expert team will consist of three to four experts including at least one external expert and one expert from Eurostat. The composition of the peer review expert team will have a balanced combination of competencies, knowledge and skills. The following requirements need to be met by the combined experience, knowledge and skills of the experts in the peer review expert team:

- Senior management experience in an NSI/ONA;
- Knowledge about the set-up and functioning of an NSS;
- Knowledge of strategic developments in statistics at national/EU/international levels;
- Knowledge about recent developments in the ESS;
- Expertise in statistics and modernisation activities;
- Active involvement in ESS activities.

The selection of the experts will make use of the pool of experts involved in the third round of ESS Peer Reviews. Additional experts from EFTA and UNECE (only for countries from the European Neighbourhood in the East) may join the expert team, depending on the region and availability of experts. For the planned 11 peer reviews two peer review expert teams will be formed and their composition will look as follows:

- One (current or recent) senior manager from an NSI, who will be the chair (lead expert) of the peer review expert team and will ensure that the knowledge about the NSS and ESS is represented in the peer review expert team;
- One external expert, whose presence will ensure the credibility and independence of the peer review process but who will need to possess some of the knowledge mentioned above and be acquainted with the functioning of the ESS;
- One expert from Eurostat, meeting some of the requirements mentioned above, who will be an equal member of the peer review expert team.

Eurostat's unit B3 will be responsible for constituting the two expert teams and will support the responsible contractor in organising training for the peer review experts, in case of need. It will also select the chair of each peer review team and liaise with the EFTA statistical office and the regional adviser at the UNECE to involve their experts, if necessary.

For each peer review an observer from another country among the 11 countries to be reviewed in this round may participate, to stimulate peer learning and regional cooperation and to support the peer review process in the country of the observer. This person could be the national peer review coordinator or another person with a long-standing and/or senior management experience in the NSI and a horizontal overview of the NSI. The reviewed NSI should agree with the principle of an observer participating in its peer review and Eurostat will express an opinion on the proposed observer to be taken into account by the NSI.

4.4 The organisation and modalities of the peer review visits

After the official start of this round of peer reviews, all NSIs will be asked to officially nominate a national peer review coordinator and the contact person for communication issues on the peer reviews (the communication officer), and to provide their contact information. NSIs should in parallel start the selection procedure for the ONAs to be involved in the peer review.

Peer review visits will in principle last five working days.

In 2024, in agreement with NSIs, a timetable for all peer reviews will be established. Depending on the specific situation in a country and on set-up of the NSS, the exact duration of the visit will be agreed between the chair of the peer review expert team and the NSI sufficiently in advance but at the latest when the agenda of the peer review visit is being discussed and agreed upon.

The exact dates of the peer review visits are agreed on the basis of a consultation process between Eurostat and the NSIs. NSIs are contacted to identify some suitable weeks/dates for the peer review visit to take place in their country, taking into account constraints such as dates of the population and agriculture census, international meetings and others. Taking also other elements into account such as the availability of peer review experts, the exact dates for the peer review visit to each country are agreed in late 2024 for all countries undergoing a peer review in 2025 and in mid-2025 with all countries undergoing a peer review in 2026 and 2027.

The peer review in a country will officially start – 6-7 months before the agreed date - with a letter announcing the peer review visit and confirming the exact dates of the peer review visit. The letter will also inform about the need to send the filled-in SAQs as well as the core and supporting documents and request the information about the ONAs selected to participate in the peer review of the country. The latter information and a corresponding explanatory note about the selection procedure of the ONAs and its results have to be sent to Eurostat around 5-6 months before the peer review takes place.

The filled-in SAQs (for the NSI and the ONAs participating in the peer review) and relevant documents (core documents and evidence for statements/answers in the SAQs) should be sent to Eurostat’s unit B3 and the contractor, which checks th documents and then in turn sends them to the peer review expert team, and to Eurostat’s Unit B3, three months before the start of the peer review visit. This provides sufficient time to review the documents, to request additional information and explanations, and – based on their review – to discuss and agree on the specific agenda for the peer review visit.

The chair of the peer review expert team (lead expert) holds video/telephone conferences with the peer review expert team approximately 10 weeks before the peer review visit. They are used to discuss roles of the peer review expert team members in the visit, answers to the SAQs and potential issues to be raised during the visit and hence to be included into the agenda for the peer review visit. On the basis of this discussion/consultation the chair (lead expert) proposes main elements for a draft agenda (e.g. which issues need to be discussed during the peer review visit, how much time needs to be devoted to them, etc.) and then agree with the NSI national peer review coordinator on them, 8 weeks before the visit. The detailed agenda is finalised by the NSI 2-3 weeks before the visit; it includes meetings inside the NSI and with the ONAs participating in the peer review, meetings with different stakeholders such as users, media, business associations, the research community, government users, bodies like the European Statistical Governance Advisory Board (ESGAB) (if they exist), international organisations and others.

The peer review expert team meets in the evening of the day before the peer review visit to the NSI starts, to review the agenda and agree on the specific roles of team members for each day of the peer review visit and on questions to ask. In the evening of every day the peer review expert team meets and summarises the results of the day's discussions with a view to prepare the list of recommendations. A complete list of draft recommendations is prepared by the chair of the peer review expert team, in close consultation with the team, in the evening before the last day of the visit and a first written draft of it is produced and shared with the NSI during the same evening. This will give the NSI (and ONAs) the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the recommendations and prepare questions for the debriefing meeting. The draft recommendations are then also orally presented by the chair (lead expert) to the senior management of the NSI in a meeting on the last day of the peer review visit. Representatives of participating ONAs may participate in this final meeting, if considered useful and necessary by the NSI.

This meeting is used to discuss and exchange opinions on the proposed recommendations with a view to reach a common understanding of the content of the recommendations and the underlying issues / reasons for proposing them. The meeting can be used for clarifying misunderstandings but the list of recommendations remains in the ownership of the peer review expert team. A consolidated version of the recommendations is transmitted in writing to the senior management of the NSI one week after the peer review visit at the latest.

4.5 The arrangements for the peer review reports and recommendations

The peer review report follows a standard structure:

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1. Executive summary

The summary should explicitly highlight and briefly describe the strengths (positive messages) about the NSS and list the recommendations, which will refer to the opportunities for improvement identified during the peer review. For the latter, the report should highlight especially professional independence (ES CoP Principle 1) and coordination and cooperation (ES CoP Principle 1.bis) as well as the principles including elements of modernisation (i.e. ES CoP Principles 2, 4, 7, 8, 15). The reasons for including a recommendation should be described briefly. Finally, a standard positive message should be included at the end of the summary explaining that the NSI will produce an action plan to address the recommendations for improvement.

2. Introduction

The introduction should explain the peer review process and methodology (standard description).

3. Brief description of the national statistical system (max 2,5 pages)

The brief description of the NSS should cover legislation, organisation, appointment procedures for the head of the NSI, statistical programmes, resources, coordination of the NSS (including at least a 0.5 page text on the ONAs invited in the peer review visit), data access, relations with users/dissemination of statistical products and services.

4. Progress/advancement in the last 5 years (max 1-2 pages)

This description should be based on the answers from the SAQs and discussions during the peer review visit.

5. Compliance with the ES CoP and future orientation

5.1. Strengths of the NSI and the participating ONAs in relation to their compliance with the ES CoP

This section is meant to describe those aspects and elements where the NSI and the participating ONAs show high standards and where no problems/issues are detected. The strengths should be grouped around identified broad issues/themes, with a reference to the principle(s) and indicator(s) concerned. Strengths could also be a good/innovative practice.

Strengths regarding the principles of professional independence, coordination and cooperation and those including elements of modernisation (e.g. principles 2, 4, 7, 8, 15) should be highlighted in this section. Future-oriented projects and activities that are not necessarily linked to the ES CoP should also be highlighted in this chapter. The text should cover the NSI and the participating ONAs being visible and named. The structure of the section should be flexible, i.e. it should be adapted depending on the outcome of the review.

5.2. Issues and recommendations

This section should describe in further detail the issues where improvements are needed. The recommendations of the peer review expert team should be split into fundamental/important to ensure compliance/alignment with the ES CoP (compliance-relevant), and less critical/technical supporting improvements (improvement related). In addition, they should be future-oriented and grouped around identified broad issues/themes, with a reference to the principle(s) and indicator(s).

Both types of recommendations should cover the NSI and the participating ONAs being visible and named, in particular if recommendations are addressed to them. In case the recommendations are addressed to other stakeholders/actors than the NSI and the participating ONAs, this will be clearly spelled out in the report.

The text should also lead the reader of the report to understand the recommendations as included into the executive summary. Recommendations in the executive summary and in the report should be the same. While in the executive summary the reasons for including such a recommendation will be described briefly, the main report should provide sufficiently detailed explanations on why the recommendations were issued by the peer review expert team. The formulation of each recommendation should clearly identify the rationale to what is behind it and frame the potential future action(s).

The structure of the section is flexible, i.e. it could be adapted depending on the outcome of the review.

Annex 1: Programme of the visit

Annex 2: List of participants (to be decided by each country but in view of the GDPR it may be advisable to mention only names of people whose names are published in the organizational chart of the authorities, all other people are mentioned with the function and the name of the authority only).

The recommendations included into the report as well as the reports themselves need not to be strictly comparable across countries as such (because the intention of the peer reviews is not to compare among countries).

The following timelines apply for drafting, commenting and approving the peer review report:

Activity	Actor	Timeline
Drafting the peer review report	Peer review expert team	4 weeks after the visit
Commenting and checking factual correctness of the report	NSI	4 weeks
Commenting and further harmonising recommendations (to the extent possible)	Eurostat	4 weeks
Integrating comments	Peer review expert team	2 weeks
Formatting and language checking	Contractor	1 week
Approval of the report	NSI, Eurostat	2 weeks

The final agreement on the content of the report between Eurostat and the NSI is to be reached through consultation. When the report is finally approved, the final peer review report will be published on both Eurostat's and the NSI websites.

4.6 Improvement actions

4.6.1.Procedure for defining improvement actions

The procedure for defining improvement actions offers the possibility of involving other stakeholders. The term "stakeholders" can cover the NSI, the ONAs, the government, the parliament, a supervising authority, data providers and/or others which may be an owner of/be responsible for the implementation of an improvement action. A contractor should not be regarded as a stakeholder. If the fulfilment of an improvement action depends on more stakeholders than the NSI or ONA(s), the NSI or the ONA can decide to sub-divide a general improvement action into smaller improvement actions (sub-actions) reflecting the responsibility/ies per stakeholder. However, this possibility does not oblige the NSI or ONAs to involve other stakeholders in the improvement actions, especially if it would deteriorate their relationship with this particular stakeholder.

1. The NSIs shall define improvement actions, if relevant, in cooperation with the ONA(s) and in consultation with other stakeholders. The improvement actions shall:
    - be based on the recommendations in the final peer review report;
    - be SMART;
    - contain a realistic deadline for putting the improvement actions in place. The timeline for implementing improvement actions depends on many elements, such as the external environment, complexity of the action, actors involved, etc. Therefore, there is no rule specific to this. The latest deadline for implementing the improvement actions is set at the end of 2031.
    - indicate the responsibility of the improvement action (entirely in the remit of the NSI, of the ONAs, other stakeholders ….).

    It is possible that the fulfilment of an improvement action depends on more stakeholders and could remain open because the stakeholder(s) do(es) not or cannot fulfil its/their part in the action. To show progress made by all the different stakeholders and/or where the blocking part of the improvement action is situated, the improvement action involving more stakeholders could consist of:

    1. the general improvement action reflecting the final goal of the action;
    2. and several sub- actions for improvement - reflecting the responsibility/ies per stakeholder.

2. The NSIs sends improvement action(s) to Eurostat within 12 weeks from the reception of the final report. Eurostat can comment on the defined improvement actions and timeline, and, if necessary, indicate amendments within 3 weeks from the reception of the improvement actions. These amendments shall be agreed by the NSI. Once the improvement actions are agreed between the NSI and Eurostat, they will be published on Eurostat's website alongside with the peer review report as well as on the NSI's website.

4.6.2. Monitoring of the improvement actions

The NSIs shall report annually to Eurostat on the progress of implementation achieved by the end of the previous year. In case of delays, the NSIs, possibly with the input from ONA(s) and/or other stakeholders, shall explain reasons and set out an adjusted timeline for the action/s concerned. New improvement actions might be proposed by the NSIs, but to a limited extent, possibly with the input from ONA(s) and/or other stakeholders. Monitoring starts at the beginning of the year that follows the implementation of the peer review in a country. The last monitoring will be done for reference year 2031.

5 Communication

Continuous and targeted internal and external communication about the objectives of the peer reviews, the process and its results is of utmost importance to ensure acceptance of the results by the NSI, the ONAs and the relevant government authorities and for receiving support for the implementation of those recommendations that are beyond the responsibility of the NSI.

5.1 Internal communication in the NSS

The internal NSS communication has to be organised by NSIs targeting staff inside the NSIs, ONAs and decision-makers in the country. In preparing for the peer review, the already ongoing communication on the ES CoP should be reinforced by an active promotion campaign inside the NSIs and vis-à-vis ONAs to make their staff understand the ES CoP, its meaning and impact on their daily work. This could be done by organising internal workshops, presentations, publishing articles on the Intranet, creating a specific section on the Intranet for the peer review, etc.

Communication should continue throughout the entire peer review process. Filling in the SAQ, gathering of the relevant documentation and organisation of the peer review visit should be a collective exercise to involve as many staff as feasible/suitable and to inform them about the process. Junior staff should be informed in particular about the purpose of the peer review to prepare it for the specific meeting with the peer review expert team. This continuous communication on the peer review process will also serve the declared purpose of the peer review to encourage internal reflection and improvements.

After the finalisation of the peer review report, staff should be informed about the report through presentations and the Intranet and be – to the extent possible - involved in / informed about the design and discussions on the improvement actions.

A somewhat lighter communication approach, but with similar content, has to be applied to the participating ONAs to prepare them for their involvement in the peer review and, after the finalisation of the peer review report, provide them with feedback on the peer review results and follow-up.

5.2 External communication

External communication on the peer review process should be used to take a broader perspective and to:

- Promote the value of official statistics and raise awareness among certain target groups;
- Demonstrate the commitment of the NSS to the principles of the CoP;
- Demonstrate the importance of peer reviews in maintaining the quality, trustworthiness and usefulness of official statistics in Europe.

The communication materials produced for the ESS Peer reviews can be shared with the peer review countries and can be adjusted to their needs.

6 Indicative timetable of Peer Reviews

The peer reviews are expected to start in 2025 and continue until 2027 and the preliminary time schedule is as follows:

Albania	March/ April 2025		Armenia	May 2025
Georgia	September/October 2025		Kosovo	November/December 2025
Moldova	February 2026		Bosnia and Herzegovina	May 2026
Montenegro	June/July 2026		Azerbaijan	October 2026
North Macedonia	March 2027		Serbia	April/May 2027
Türkiye	September-November 2027		Ukraine	October/November 2027

Time period	Event/activity	ESTAT	NSI	ONA	Contractor	PR experts
2024	Methodology is endorsed	X	X			
2024	Exact timing of all peer reviews defined	X	X			
2024	The contractor identifies experts to be approved by ESTAT	X			X	
2024	ESTAT sends SAQs and guides with annexes to national peer review coordinators	X	X			
6-7 months before PR visit	ESTAT confirms to NSI specific date of visit, requests sending of completed SAQs, core documents, ONA selection (+ justification)	X	X			
5-6 months before PR visit	NSI sends information about participating ONAs + justification to ESTAT	X	X			
3 months before PR visit	National peer review coordinator submits completed SAQs (both NSI and ONAs) + supporting documents to contractor, with Eurostat in copy	X	X		X	
10 weeks before PR visit	Chair of PR team holds video conference with team members to discuss roles, answers to SAQs, potential issues					X
9 weeks before PR visit	Chair of PR team proposes elements of draft agenda to national coordinator + informs about roles in PR team		X			X
8 weeks before PR visit	Chair of PR team + national peer review coordinator agree on general agenda items + duration of visit		X			X
2-3 weeks before PR visit	Finalised detailed agenda sent by NSI to Chair of PR team + ESTAT; all stakeholders invited + confirmed presence	X	X			X
	PR Visit (5 days)	X	X	X		X
1 week after PR visit	Chair of PR team sends list of recommendations to NSI + ESTAT	X	X			X
4 weeks after PR visit	Chair of PR team sends draft report to national peer review coordinator and ESTAT for information	X	X		X	X
8 weeks after PR visit	NSI/ONAs to comment/check factual correctness and send response to ESTAT	X	X	X		
12 weeks after PR visit	ESTAT to comment/harmonise recommendations, revised version sent to contractor who forwards to PR team	X			X	X
14 weeks after PR visit	PR team to integrate comments, send to contractor	X	X		X	X
15 weeks after PR visit	Contractor does formatting and language checking and sends document to ESTAT/NSI	X	X		X	
17 weeks after PR visit	Final approval by ESTAT/NSI; publication of report on respective websites	X	X			
29 weeks after PR visit	NSI to develop improvement actions (in cooperation with ONAs) and send them to ESTAT	X	X	X		
32 weeks after PR visit	ESTAT to comment on improvement actions, indicate amendments if necessary to NSIs	X	X			
35 weeks after PR visit	ESTAT + NSI to agree on improvement actions, publication alongside reports on respective website	X	X			

7 Annexes

Annex A:	Procedure and criteria for the selection of ONAs to participate in the peer review;
Annex B:	The self-assessment questionnaire for the NSIs (SAQ NSIs);
Annex C:	The self-assessment questionnaire for the ONAs (SAQ ONAs);

Annex A: Procedure and criteria for the selection of ONAs to participate in the peer review

1. Selection of the ONAs

The participation of ONAs in the peer reviews has been considered extremely beneficial. On the one hand, it helps forging a closer cooperation within the NSSs and on the other hand, it helps raise the participating ONAs' awareness of the ES CoP and of the ONAs' role in the production of official statistics.

The final selection of the ONAs is the responsibility of the NSI based on the pre-defined criteria jointly developed by Eurostat and the NSIs. It is also the NSIs responsibility to decide on the number and character of the selection criteria used as well as on the decision method.

Countries with no more than five ONAs should have all ONAs participating in the peer review. Countries with more than five ONAs should select five ONAs to take part in the peer review. Where a country wants to propose a smaller number of ONAs, this choice should be duly justified.

Five to six months before the peer review visit, the NSI should send an explanatory note to Eurostat to:

- Inform Eurostat about the ONAs selected to participate in the peer review;
- Provide an explanation about the selection process and the application of the criteria below in its selection process as well as a justification for the selected ONAs.
- Provide additional explanations if the number of selected ONA is different from what is expected (all ONAs if a country has five ONAs or less, and five ONAs if a country has more than five ONAs).

1.1 Criteria

The following four criteria are the basis for the selection of the ONAs to participate in the peer review:

- C1: Importance for official statistics, measured by a percentage threshold or amounts of producing official statistics;
- C2: Importance for official statistics, measured by its significance or relevance;
- C3: Degree of compliance of the ONA with the CoP;
- C4: Perceived importance of an ONA from the perspective of the NSI.

The criteria can be applied in a flexible manner to take into account national set-ups and circumstances. Therefore, NSIs could choose between the four criteria or a combination of them for their decision-making procedure and will justify their choice in the above-mentioned explanatory note.

1.2 Use and number of the criteria

The criteria are recommended to guide the choice and selection procedure of the NSIs for identifying ONAs to participate in the peer review of the country. The use of the criteria and their number depends on the specific situation in the NSS. Therefore, it is up to each NSI to assess how much efforts will be deployed for the selection procedure and to decide which criteria will be used for the selection of ONAs. It is recommended but not mandatory that at least two of the criteria are used for the selection. Three or more criteria could be used if two criteria seem to be insufficient for the selection procedure. The criteria used can be all quantitative or all qualitative or be a mix of quantitative and qualitative. They could be applied individually or as a combination of several criteria.

1.3 Quantitative criteria

Some of the criteria, most notably C1 and C2, could possibly be approximated by quantitative metrics. C1 is related to output/production while C2 is thought to reflect/be based on input/resources. Therefore, the two criteria C1 and C2 could be co-related and it could be sufficient to use only one of the two depending on availability.

The following metrics could possibly be used:

Relevant to C1

- Volumes, meaning the total file size of the datasets transmitted to Eurostat;
- Number of datasets transmitted to Eurostat;
- Number of official statistical products in the ONA product portfolio;
- Number of variables produced in terms of official statistics;

Relevant to C2

- Financial resources invested for producing official statistics;
- Statisticians employed for producing official statistics.

The list above is not exhaustive and other metrics could be used if they could serve the purpose and are more readily available.

NSIs could also use proxies relevant to criteria C3 and/or C4 if considered more feasible.

Eurostat might provide an extract from EDAMIS containing the volumes and the number of transmissions of the various other national authorities for the past 12 months, but only if available and relevant.

1.4 Qualitative criteria

A value judgement by the NSI could be applied in those cases when the criteria cannot be approximated by quantitative metrics. A qualitative criteria-based selection could be performed with any criteria (C1 to C4) individually or as a combination of several criteria.

For **Criteria C4** the following aspect could be used to assess it:

- Ability to replace the activities of the ONA if it stops producing official statistics;

1.5 Selection method

It is the NSIs' responsibility to define the most appropriate and suitable selection method. The two illustrative examples of selection methods described below could be an option and are mentioned to illustrate a possible way to decide on the selection of the ONAs. The examples are called "Individual classification" and "Decision matrix". The NSI can however, use any other appropriate selection method. The selection method finally used by the NSI should be described in the explanatory note sent to Eurostat, informing Eurostat about the choice and the selected ONAs (see above).

i) Individual classification

- ONAs are classified for each of the criteria used (for illustrative purposes the example classifies the ONAs along criteria C1 and C2);
- Top-classified ONAs are selected. The selection should not necessarily be balanced among the criteria.

Example 1: Individual classification

C1	C2
ONA1	ONA8
ONA2	ONA5
ONA3	ONA6
ONA4	ONA1
ONA5	ONA2
ONA6	ONA3
ONA7	ONA7
ONA8	ONA4

ii) Decision matrix

- ONAs are distributed in a decision matrix as in the figure below (for illustrative purposes the example classifies the ONAs along criteria C1 and C4);
- ONAs falling in the blue zone are likely to be excluded from the selection;

- ONAs falling in the green zone are likely to be included in the selection;
- ONAs falling in the yellow zone are borderline cases.

Example 2: Decision matrix