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COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT

STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION - SYNOPSIS REPORT

Accompanying the document

Proposal for a

REGULATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL on European statistics on population and housing, amending Regulation (EC) No 862/2007 and repealing Regulations (EC) No 763/2008 and (EU) No 1260/2013

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1. Introduction

European statistics on population (ESOP) comprise demographic, migration[1], and population and housing census data. Eurostat currently collects these data from Member States separately, with different periodicities and according to different legal bases. The new initiative[2] included in the Commission's 2022 work programme[3] aims to ensure that population statistics remain relevant, coherent and comparable at EU and other levels in the face of demographic, migratory, social and economic changes in society.

This staff working document presents a **synopsis of the consultation activities** related to ESOP, as set out in the consultation strategy for the initiative and implemented during the **back-to-back evaluation and impact assessment**. It covers the consultation on the evaluation roadmap/inception impact assessment, the open public consultation, targeted consultations, as well as feedback received during workshops, interviews and expert group meetings. The stakeholder consultation took place from May 2021 to January 2022 inclusive. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used to analyse stakeholder input.

2. Consultation strategy

In line with the European Commission's Better Regulation guidelines, the consultation strategy aimed to gather input on the following issues:

- whether population statistics continue to provide the necessary evidence base for EU policies and other relevant use cases;
- if there are new and emerging data needs and potential obsolete data requirements;
- the cost and burden of statistics;
- the potential to improve efficiency and the potential for regulatory simplification.

Meeting the needs of the back-to-back evaluation and impact assessment involved **looking back** (exploring what works well and what works less well in the current legal base) and **looking forward** (at the impacts of the improvement options on all relevant stakeholder groups).

There were three **main stakeholder groups**:

Data providers fell into two categories: administrative data providers that are public administrations providing source data to statistical authorities for producing European statistics, and individual respondents who are individuals participating directly in data collection (sample survey, population and housing census enumeration).

Statistics producers were the national statistical institutes (NSIs) and other national authorities collecting, treating and transmitting to Eurostat statistics on population, demography, migration and censuses.

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[1] Asylum and managed migration statistics are not included under this initiative as they are out of scope due to the nature of the statistics and data sources used.

[2] https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/12958-Data-collection-European-statistics-on-population-ESOP-_en

[3] https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy-documents/commission-work-programme/commission-work-programme-2022_en, see Annex II: REFIT initiatives to simplify existing legislation.

Statistics users were a diverse group, including institutional users that are directly involved in EU policymaking. At EU level, these were the actual policymakers, while at international and national levels, they support policymaking and contribute to it. Institutional users include EU bodies, international organisations, national ministries and government research institutes.

Other professional users also contribute occasionally and indirectly to the policymaking process at EU level. These were universities, research institutes, professional organisations, advisory councils, NGOs, individual private companies and business associations. The media and the general public were also part of the users' group.

The strategy envisaged the use of different consultation activities per stakeholder, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Consultation activities per user group

Stakeholder group/Activity	Public consultation	Targeted consultations	Targeted workshops	Expert group consultations	Interviews
Administrative data providers	X				X
Individual respondents	X				
Statistics producers	X	X	X	X	X
Institutional users	X	X	X	X	X
Other professional users, incl. academia and research	X		X	X	X
Media	X		X		X
General public	X				

3. Methodology and tools used to process the results

A **mixed-methods approach** was chosen for the consultation. This included the following activities: public and targeted consultations, targeted workshops, expert group consultations, interviews with key stakeholders, and desk research.

To gather feedback for its evaluation roadmap/inception impact assessment consultation, open public consultation and targeted consultation with national statistics institutes, the Commission (Eurostat) used **online tools**, including EUSurvey questionnaires. For the open consultation, respondents also had the possibility to upload documents. Replies to the targeted consultation with statistical correspondents from the Commission departments were collected by **email**. All workshops, expert group meetings and interviews took place as **virtual meetings** due to health considerations and specific working arrangements related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The **evaluation roadmap/inception impact assessment consultation** and the **open public consultation**[4] ran via the Commission's *Have Your Say* website[5]. The open public consultation was available in all official EU languages. These consultations aimed to gather

[4] See the factual summary report on the open public consultation: https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/12958-Data-collection-European-statistics-on-population-ESOP-/F_en

[5] https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/12958-European-statistics-on-population-ESOP/public-consultation_en

information and feedback from the general public and all relevant stakeholder groups as input into the evaluation and impact assessment, as a step towards preparing a legislative proposal.

The open public consultation was promoted via different channels: *Have Your Say*, the Eurostat homepage and domain website, a dedicated news item on 30 September 2021, two social media campaigns and Eurostat email banners and emails to stakeholders. It was also promoted nationally by several NSIs. The questionnaire covered four sections, including mostly closed and a few open questions. Section 1 collected information about the respondent or organisation that the respondent represents. Section 2 collected feedback on how European statistics on population have performed until now, while Section 3 sought opinions on how to improve these statistics going forward. Section 4 included a few closing questions and an option to submit any documents.

The questionnaire sent for the purpose of the **targeted consultation with NSIs** asked statistics producers for more detailed opinions. The survey contained five mandatory sections. Section 1 asked for information about the organisation. Section 2 collected information about the national system of producing and releasing population statistics, while Section 3 collected feedback on how European statistics on population have performed until now. Section 4 sought opinions on some specific aspects of how to improve these statistics going forward, and Section 5 included a few closing questions.

The **targeted consultation with statistical correspondents from Commission departments** collected information on new and emerging statistical needs in different EU policy areas, but without the use of a structured questionnaire.

Interviews took one of two forms: scoping interviews and in-depth interviews. They had a semi-structured format. In total, five **workshops** were scheduled around the inception and impacts validation phases. The first two workshops, with participation of NSIs and statistics users, discussed the inception results of the evaluation and impact assessment. The remaining three workshops, with statistics users including EU institutional users and NSIs, focused on the draft study results including impact validation.

Consultation results were presented and discussed with Commission informal **expert groups**. These were mostly meetings of Eurostat-led expert groups with the participation of Member State experts, namely a dedicated task force, the Working Group on Population Statistics, the Working Group on Population and Housing Censuses, the Directors of Social Statistics and the European Statistical System Committee. There were 10 meetings in total. Eurostat also gave presentations at a meeting of the Statistical Correspondents Network within the Commission (10 May 2021), the Expert Sub-group on Equality Data to the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (8 October 2021) and the Commission High-Level Group on Non-Discrimination Equality and Diversity (22 November 2021).

The responses to consultation activities were carefully analysed. Analysis of the two targeted consultation surveys was straightforward as these mapped well onto specific user groups. To analyse the public consultation results, all replies were first mapped onto the key stakeholder groups and then assessed by each group. Where relevant, the synopsis report presents the diverging views of various groups of stakeholders on the same issue.

4. Stakeholder participation

The consultation activities mentioned above were implemented by Eurostat and/or by ICF SA Belgium, the contractor supporting Eurostat during the evaluation and impact assessment. Table 2 presents the timeline of key consultation actions.

Table 2 Timeline of key consultation actions

Consultation action	Timeline
Evaluation roadmap/inception impact assessment consultation	7 April until 5 May 2021
Open public consultation	30 September until 23 December 2021
Targeted consultation with statistical correspondents from the Commission	11 May until 11 June 2021
Targeted consultation with NSIs	11 May until 11 June 2021
Inception workshops	23 and 29 September 2021
Final workshops	19, 20 and 21 January 2022

In terms of the **level of participation**, 4 replies were received during the 4-week consultation on the evaluation roadmap/inception impact assessment, while the open public consultation resulted in 172 replies. The workshop attendance was from 8 to 54 registered participants depending on the event. While the public consultation also engaged several respondents who have not used European statistics on population published by Eurostat (21.5% of the total), other consultation activities involved mainly stakeholders who use these statistics regularly. Responses to the public consultation came from all Member States but one (Cyprus), with the number of contributions ranging from 1 to 20 per country. The number of replies did not correlate to the Member States' population size.

There were also 5 scoping and 47 in-depth interviews conducted (in total 182 people were contacted). The scoping interviews asked for the views of Commission institutional users (2), researchers (2) and the dissemination unit of Eurostat (1). The interviewed researchers also play specific roles within the European Statistical Advisory Committee and Population Europe, the network of Europe's leading demographic research centres. Since the study supporting the evaluation included case studies on the use of population definitions in statistics in 5 Member States, 18 of the 47 in-depth interviews were conducted in the participating countries (France – 4, Germany – 3, Spain – 4, the Netherlands – 3, Slovenia – 4). The in-depth interviews covered academia and research institutes (18), NGOs (6), public authorities and international organisations (14), media organisations (1) and business and other private institutions (2). To compensate for the lack of a wide response from the media, extra efforts were made to reach representatives from business organisations and engaged two prominent international market data providers.

The consultation ensured appropriate **stakeholder coverage** for statistics producers and several types of statistics users. The various consultation activities involved all EU Member State and EFTA country NSIs in charge of compiling European statistics on population and transmitting them to Eurostat. Institutional users from public authorities represented almost 20% of respondents to the open public consultation and took part in 14 out of 49 interviews in total. Professional statistics users from NGOs and academia and research took part the public consultation (13.4% and 9.3% of respondents respectively) and in 6 and 18 interviews respectively. Statistics users from the Commission were involved as well, directly or through

their statistical correspondents. EU citizens (86) provided half of the replies in the open public consultation, often identifying themselves as statistics users. Some 29 EU citizens identified themselves as respondents to population and housing census questionnaires. Business organisations, trade unions and non-EU citizens each represented less than 1% of the respondents in the open public consultation. Two interviews took place with companies as well. Limited feedback was obtained from administrative data providers (one reply to the open public consultation) and media organisations (one interview), despite attempts to involve them more extensively.

During the open public consultation, there was no input from national parliaments, although two local and three regional authorities submitted replies. Among EU bodies and agencies, the EU Fundamental Rights Agency contributed input on data needs in the areas of equality and non-discrimination of persons.

5. Main results of the stakeholder consultation

5.1. General feedback on current statistics

Statistics users widely acknowledged across consultation activities that the implementation of existing EU statistical regulations **led to improved harmonisation and higher quality of statistics**. EU institutional users were somewhat less satisfied than other user groups in general regarding the availability of statistics to meet their data needs. Nonetheless, a majority of respondents to the open public consultation across all stakeholder groups except statistics producers agreed that the existing legislation is **only 'somewhat' fit for purpose and overall does not adapt quickly to new data needs.**

According to the public and targeted consultations, workshops and interviews, both statistics producers and statistics users were of a view that **important areas persist for improvement** of statistics:

According to **statistics users**, these areas were:

- further harmonisation of statistics, including concepts and definitions;
- availability of data on subgroups at risk of inequality or discrimination (such as LGBTI groups and ethnic minorities);
- availability of data on EU internal and external migration;
- improvements in the detail, frequency, timeliness and geographical granularity of statistics.

In replies and position papers submitted to the open consultation, NGOs cited statistics gaps regarding:

- missing children;
- children in alternative care;
- employment, living conditions and social inclusion of young people;
- sex, gender identity and sexual orientation;
- disability; and
- Roma as an ethnic group.

In addition, professional users, particularly researchers, wanted improved metadata utility and user-friendliness of Eurostat's dissemination.

Statistics producers had similar views as users, with two exceptions. On the harmonisation of population definitions, NSIs were split between using a single common definition and maintaining the status quo. The majority of NSIs considered information on gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, race and disability important but too sensitive to be dealt with in population and housing censuses.

In the open public consultation, respondents aggregated over all stakeholder groups found the following existing statistics a **high priority for improvement** until 2030:

- migration within the EU (66% high priority);
- migration to and from the EU (62%);
- population census outputs (59%);
- population stock and balance (48%);
- housing census outputs (41%).

Overall, consultation activities showed that the top priority for institutional and other professional users was migration statistics. For statistics producers, the top priorities in the open public consultation were the outputs of the population and housing census, while at the final workshop with NSIs, the priority was migration statistics. EU institutional users, researchers and NGOs made very strong calls for improved availability of official statistics on population groups from equality and non-discrimination perspectives.

Statistics on fertility and mortality appeared as a **moderate priority** for improvement according to all stakeholder groups.

Respondents to the public consultation across all stakeholder groups except for statistics producers could not assess the priorities for statistics on divorces (77% 'don't know'), marriage (75%) and acquisition and loss of citizenship (45%). Thus, the three statistical domains were ranked with a lower priority than the other topics asked.

5.2. Harmonisation of statistics, their concepts and definitions

Except for statistics producers and researchers, statistics users typically were not aware that the EU-level comparability of population statistics is currently reduced by the prevailing **use of national population base definitions**. For example, in the institutional user group, around half of the respondents knew about this gap. The NSI survey and in-depth interviews highlighted that NSIs consider their national definitions to be adapted to national contexts and that the benefits of the current use of national definitions centre on meeting current national requirements. Most of the NSI survey respondents conceded that this status quo leads to reduced statistics utility at EU level, and acknowledged that the use of national definitions was a trade-off given the production costs involved in achieving harmonisation. On the other hand, a majority across all groups including statistics producers agreed, often even 'strongly', that harmonisation was important. Users also noted that they needed information on the exact definitions used. Some international partners of Eurostat also highlighted the need to ensure consistency between the EU's definition of population and the definitions used at international level, e.g. by the United Nations and OECD. In this regard, a definition based on the strict usual residence concept was generally deemed preferable.

Most often, professional users (EU and other) noted the **improved harmonisation of migration statistics** compared to the pre-EU regulation time, when all collected data were submitted voluntarily. At the same time, they saw the current completeness and comparability gaps as being most critical in the datasets on international migration, both from/to and within the EU.

5.3. Integration of statistical processes

At the targeted workshops, NSIs strongly favoured the integration between Eurostat and NSIs of data collection processes for demography, international migration and the population and housing census statistics, thus avoiding duplicate data collections and reducing costs. However, they were reluctant to support such integration when coupled with a major increase in statistical output. Users except for EU institutional users were rather indifferent regarding the integration of statistics processes.

Another element in the integration of statistical (production) processes is the extent to which the initiative can and should foster the setting up and maintenance of national statistical population registers by Member States. According to the targeted NSI survey, 13 Member States already have a national statistical population register and 9 more are planning one. The main reasons for not (yet) having one indicated by the 17 affected NSIs are the current national legal framework (mentioned 7 times) followed by historic context (mentioned 6 times).

5.4. Improving statistical output

5.4.1. Improvements in migration statistics

Existing migration statistics were mostly perceived as insufficient by key users of the data, who noted a complete lack of sub-national data on migration (stocks and flows). For instance, during the open public consultation large majorities in all stakeholder groups including statistics producers considered it a high priority to provide **migration data at regional level**. Similarly, large majorities in all stakeholder groups except statistics producers considered it a high priority to define migrant groups in more detail, while most of them, particularly NGOs, also called for including **socio-economic details of migrant groups**.

During the workshops, NSIs and users indicated that datasets on **intra- and extra-EU migration** are a priority for future improvements. In the NSI survey, 79% of NSIs reported migration from/to other EU Member States and from/to third countries as being among the types of data most requested. In the open public consultation, migration within and from/to the EU were ranked among the top priorities to be improved by 2030, with migration within the EU in particular posing increased challenges due to the freedom of movement leading to reduced availability of administrative information on such intra-EU movements. Moreover, the **quality of emigration data** may be limited and may underestimate the true scale of the phenomenon, as existing data collection processes may not be sufficiently sensitive to disaggregate emigration by detailed characteristics. At expert meetings, NSIs underlined that further improvements in migration statistics should take place, but that this would represent a major challenge. Therefore, they called for prioritisation and gradual implementation.

5.4.2. Information on specific population groups

In practically all consultation activities, statistics users identified a lack of complete information regarding the six Treaties grounds for discrimination (variables) that are relevant for non-discrimination policies at EU level: **sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age, and sexual orientation**. To date, European equality statistics in the area of population statistics exist for the basic demographic characteristics, sex[6] and age. In the opinion of respondents from professional user groups, the equality data ranked the lowest among all data topics regarding the sufficiency of currently available data (only 18% of the respondent group that expressed an opinion found the current data sufficient).

EU institutional users, researchers and NGOs noted the data gaps most often. They insisted that statistics should cover all grounds for discrimination. In consultation responses and interviews, including via position papers, NGOs asked for information on sexual orientation, gender identity and sex (with differentiation between 'sex' and 'sex at birth'), disability, and ethnicity (e.g. Roma population as the largest ethnic minority in the EU, Jewish population covered by the EU antisemitism strategy).

In the public consultation and in the impact validation workshop with non-NSIs, some participants (mainly NGOs) highlighted that a lack of data on equality characteristics hinders the effective combating of discrimination. However, in the impact validation workshop with NSIs, there was a strong view that the collection of data on self-declared characteristics (e.g. gender identity, sexual orientation) contravenes the Charter on Fundamental Rights.

According to expert group discussions and the final workshop with NSIs, statistics producers preferred to have data collection on gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity/race and disability implemented in sample surveys rather than in the population and housing census or population statistics. Their main reason was that such information should be based on the person's self-declaration and that this is typically missing in administrative records.

NGOs commented on other aspects such as the lack of or insufficient statistics on **missing children in migration, runaway children and children in healthcare**. These gaps may possibly be addressed outside of population statistics (e.g. asylum and managed migration, crime or health statistics).

5.4.3. Geographical granularity of statistics

In the open public consultation, respondents across all stakeholder groups cited insufficient geographic detail as the second most frequent critical gap (after insufficient detail of characteristics) for any statistical topic. Among respondents from professional user groups, only minorities found the data on **urban** (47%) **and rural** (44%) **populations** sufficient, which also ranked among the lowest scoring data topics.

Consequently, majorities of respondents across almost all stakeholder groups (typically except statistics producers) assigned high priority to a future initiative that would (i) add mandatory **regional detail to annual demographic and migration statistics**; and (ii) provide **functional typologies (degree of urbanisation, cities, functional areas) and 1 km square**

[6] The currently prevailing statistical concept of 'sex' at European and international levels is linked to (binary) biological sex at birth, whereas equality and non-discrimination policies typically require data evidence on self-identified (non-binary) gender.

grid data annually. This was in line with the findings from the targeted consultation of Commission statistical correspondents.

5.4.4. Other

Housing was the second lowest rated data topic (after equality data) from professional users among open public consultation respondents (only 24% of the respondent group that expressed an opinion found the current data sufficient). Also during the consultation of Commission statistical correspondents, a need was cited for more frequent and timelier housing data, including appropriate variables to capture energy efficiency of housing and other aspects relevant to EU Green Deal monitoring. In expert group meetings, NSIs mentioned a certain degree of availability of related information in national administrative sources, but thought that this data request fell outside the scope of population statistics.

NGOs found statistics on **legally induced abortions** and **infant mortality** important, contrary to the NSIs' view on their declining relevance.

According to the open public consultation, 46% of respondents have used European weekly deaths and excess mortality statistics established as a voluntary data collection in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Half of the respondents in the public consultation expressed a positive opinion on the potential regular availability of **monthly data** on population, births, deaths and migration.

In the public consultation, both users and producers supported an improvement in the **timeliness** of statistics, as well as splitting the current decennial EU census outputs into annual and decennial parts in the future.

While the majority of users across all groups were in favour of **transforming the voluntary data requirements into mandatory ones**, statistics producers opposed this.

Individual statistics users requested availability of specific **age breakdowns** complementing the currently prevalent 5-year age bands to categorise children, young people and elderly groups more accurately.

5.5. Flexibility of the legal framework

In the open public consultation, large majorities in almost all stakeholder groups (all except statistics producers) assigned high priority to introducing flexibility, including regulatory mechanisms in a new legal framework. One third of respondents aggregated over all stakeholder groups – mostly users – supported the inclusion of effective mechanisms to adapt statistics more quickly and efficiently (e.g. to meet emerging user needs, exploit new data sources or methods), where the administrative cost and burden are proportionate to the added value for the EU. At expert meetings, statistics producers also expressed cautious support, while mentioning that safeguards are needed to keep the burden on NSIs under control.

6. Conclusions

The stakeholder consultation was implemented in line with the Commission's Better Regulation guidelines. It successfully reached the intended stakeholder groups, except for

administrative data providers and media organisations. Given the subject's technical nature, the respondents' overall engagement was considered sufficient to support the back-to-back evaluation and impact assessment of European statistics on population.

The consultation supported the ongoing Commission initiative on ESOP and acknowledged significant improvements since the previous policy intervention in demography, international migration and population, and housing census statistics. However, the consultation also pointed to the existence of statistical gaps and the emergence of new statistical needs that cannot be satisfied within the current legal framework.

All stakeholders confirmed the need to plan statistical improvements, although they did not always agree on the level of ambition regarding such improvements. Statistics producers were somewhat more conservative than statistics users regarding changes.

Statistical topics that gathered support across all stakeholder groups as priority topics were improved migration statistics, more detailed geographical detail and more timely and frequent statistics. While all stakeholders acknowledged the issue of harmonising the population base as very important, some statistical producers opposed a change.

The main statistical topics where producer and user views parted concerned equality data and making existing voluntary data collection mandatory. To a lesser extent, producers and users had different views regarding statistics on housing, legally induced abortions and infant mortality.