eurostat

High-Level Meeting on simplification and burden reduction in European official statistics

Dublin 3-4 September 2026

Discussion paper

1. INTRODUCTION

The European Council launched in 2024 a "simplification revolution" and since then has repeatedly called on all EU institutions, Member States and stakeholders to simplify rules and reduce administrative, regulatory and reporting burdens at EU, national and regional level to boost the EU's long-term competitiveness.

Simplification and burden reduction are a top priority for the European Commission. In her political guidelines for the 2024-2029 Commission, President von der Leyen underlined the need for each Commissioner to deliver concretely on burden reduction in their portfolios. The 'Simpler and Faster Europe' Communication[1] published in February 2025 set out the Commission's 'vision for an implementation and simplification agenda that delivers fast and visible improvements for people and business, for a more prosperous, decarbonised and resilient EU'. The Communication included specific targets for reducing administrative burden, announcement of new simplification measures, stress testing of EU legislation, a simpler, more focused and more impactful EU budget, reality checks and others.

On 28 April 2026, the Commission adopted the Communication 'From rules to results: A simpler, clearer and better enforced EU rulebook', which aims to modernise how laws are designed, implemented and enforced, and to ensure they are clear, agile and fit for purpose[2].

Simplification has been a long-term objective for statistical authorities in the context of constrained budgets, falling response rates and improvements to national administrative data collections, and the European Statistical System (ESS) has embarked on several prioritisation and simplification actions over the past decades. In 2025, the ESS Committee (ESSC) started to discuss how to further improve European statistics' effectiveness and efficiency, to ensure that the scarce ESS resources are used for providing the relevant European statistics while reducing the administrative burden on businesses. By implementing actions for making European statistics more efficient and effective, the ESS is also contributing to achieving the Commission's goal to reduce the reporting burden on EU businesses caused by EU legislation by at least 25% and at least 35% for SMEs.

The purpose of this document is to provide a contribution to the discussions at the High-Level Meeting of the Presidents and Directors-General of the National Statistical Institutes on 'Simplification and Burden Reduction' organised by the Irish Presidency of the Council of the EU in Dublin on 3-4 September 2026.

It provides an overview of the progress achieved so far and identifies the major strands of action to be implemented with different time horizons. Furthermore, it outlines a way forward with a particular focus on rapid progress to be made on an omnibus initiative covering a set of implementing and delegated acts for simplifying and reducing administrative burden in European official statistics. The proposed way forward is based on outcomes of the stress-testing of the EU *acquis* for European statistics, the two Implementation dialogues on European business and

[1] A simpler and faster Europe: Communication on implementation and simplification: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legaI-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:52025DC0047

[2] From rules to results: A simpler, clearer and better enforced EU rulebook: https://commission.europa.eu/publica tions/simp!er-clearer-a nd-better-enforced-eu-rulebook_en

agricultural statistics hosted by Commissioner Dombrovskis, as well as the surveys addressed to the ESS Directors' Groups and the discussions held at their June meetings.

It is to be underlined at the outset that the simplification and burden reduction in official European statistics can aim at both: i) **simplifying the reporting requirements and reducing the burden on respondents, especially on EU businesses** and ii) **lowering the costs implied for national statistical authorities belonging to the European statistical system.** It is also worth recalling that while the ESS should strive for an ambitious simplification agenda, the actions to be undertaken should not undermine the relevance, comparability and quality of European official statistics that are needed for EU policies. In that respect, it should be stressed that European statistics are defined according to the Treaty as those statistics necessary for the performance of the activities of the Union and therefore are, by essence, designed to serve the EU's needs.

2. BACKGROUND AND CONSULTATION PROCESS

In October 2025, the ESSC supported Eurostat's proposal to start stress-testing sector-specific legal frameworks with **reality checks** within the ESS expert and Directors' Groups. The reality checks, described in the 'Simpler and Faster Europe' Communication, are one form of targeted consultations, alongside others in the Commission's toolbox, such as implementation dialogues organised at Commissioner's level, workshops or conference. They were introduced in 2025 with the objective to better understand from relevant actors and practitioners implementing or directly affected by EU law how it works on the ground, identify good practices, unintended consequences, possible support measures, implementation obstacles and opportunities to ensure that regulatory objectives re met in an efficient manner, including by identifying opportunities for potential burden reduction.

At the ESSC in May 2026, Eurostat reported on the outcomes of the reality checks in business, transport, agricultural, waste and energy statistics conducted by the relevant ESS expert and Directors' groups.

The reality checks and implementation dialogues carried out since 2025 have provided valuable insights into the fitness-for-purpose of existing EU statistical legislation. They acknowledged the progress achieved by the ESS in burden reduction through moving away from direct surveys to an increased use of administrative and privately held data sources. The reality checks have also confirmed the relevance of the overall strategic direction to intensify the reusing of already collected data and implementing the principle of collecting data only once and using them for different purposes including for compiling official statistics. However, they did not allow to specifically identify which data and statistics, including breakdowns and variables, are becoming less relevant for users and as such are candidates for discontinuation or scaling down.

Therefore, in view of the High-level meeting in Dublin, the ESSC in May 2026 agreed that Eurostat should seek additional inputs through a **coordinated exercise involving all ESS Directors' Groups,** by means of a questionnaire and dedicated meetings to gather feedback on the most burdensome and costly elements of statistical reporting (from the NSIs' point of view), the least used disseminated products, and concrete proposals for simplification of the EU *acquis* across the statistical domains.

The outcomes of these consultations are summarised in **Annexes 1-4** for all major statistical domains, including lists of the simplifications proposals received.

In 2025 and 2026, Commissioner Dombrovskis hosted two **implementation dialogues** on European official statistics. The first Implementation Dialogue **'Towards relevant, simplified and cost-efficient European official statistics',** held in Brussels on 27 June 2025, featured an open and fruitful exchange with the EU business community and representatives of national statistical authorities. The participants expressed strong support for stepping up efforts towards simplification and burden reduction in the production of European official statistics, while continuing to ensure the relevance of these statistics. They called for increased digitalisation of the entire statistical process, including through data collection tools extracting data directly from businesses' accounting systems and supported the full implementation of a collect 'once only' principle across all statistical domains by wider re-use of already available administrative data. They also suggested investigating the possibility of collecting data of enterprises from group heads of multinational enterprise groups that they belong to. Participants also agreed to identify and prioritise re-use of privately held data with the most promising potential in terms of burden reduction. They encouraged further harmonisation of statistical concepts across various statistical domains and their better alignment to concepts that are easy to understand by businesses. From users' perspectives, the timeliness of European official statistics could be improved, and efforts should be made to reduce the high number of confidential data cells within the boundaries of statistical confidentiality.

A second Implementation Dialogue on **'agricultural farm statistics'** took place on 24 March 2026. It featured an open discussion with farmers' representatives, agricultural businesses and business associations, social partners and national statistical authorities. The aim was to gather stakeholder feedback on opportunities to simplify data collections and reduce administrative burden while maintaining the quality and relevance of agricultural farm statistics. The discussions highlighted the need for better data interoperability to facilitate the re-use of existing data for statistical purposes and for sustainable partnerships between data holders and statistical authorities. The principle of 'collecting once and using multiple times' was stressed to avoid overlaps in data collections, along with the need to better define the scope of the data collection, guarantee the use of harmonised definitions, and properly communicate new requirements. The participants called for the future legal framework to include enablers and supporting mechanisms for using new sources like farm machinery data and digital technologies. The stakeholders suggested that seamless data flows and interoperability can be supported by using unique farm identifiers that allow the interlinkage of existing data in separate administrative registers. This should be combined with efforts for wider re-use of such data to compile European statistics by the public authorities in the EU countries and at European level. The feedback received during this implementation dialogue has been taken into account in the preparation of the forthcoming Commission proposal on integrated farm statistics (IFS).

Overall, the following themes for potential simplification and burden reduction appeared in almost all statistical domains during the ESS consultations:

- removing overlaps and inconsistencies across data collections and legal acts;
- reducing current reporting requirements relating to coverage, content, breakdown, and/or granularity, as well as frequency where change in the phenomena is slow;
- simplifying and burden reduction of quality and metadata reporting;
- reinforcing the greater use of administrative, and potentially - privately-held data in line with the "once-only principle";

- building simplification into new legislation from the outset;
- increasing automation, data sharing, interoperability as well as improving data production and transmission processes.

It also appeared that the simplification and burden reduction actions should be pursued with different time horizons, starting with those with immediate/short-term effect, such as the reduction of current reporting requirements through an omnibus package of delegated and implementing acts.

The discussions showed a consensus that the ESS should remain user-oriented and European statistics should remain relevant and capable of addressing emerging new data and statistical needs linked to the design, monitoring and evaluation of European policies. The main function of these statistics is to underpin EU policies. All stakeholders, including policy DGs of the Commission must therefore be consulted before any simplification is introduced, in line with better regulation.

3. SIMPLIFICATION AND BURDEN REDUCTION: POSSIBLE WAY FORWARD

To move ahead with simplification and burden reduction, the following main strands of future work can be pursued. Each of these strands is further described in subsections below:

- Simplifying and reducing reporting requirements in EU statistical legislation through preparing an omnibus package of delegated and implementing acts by the end of the first quarter 2027
- Simplifying and reducing burden of quality and metadata reporting
- Reinforcing the implementation of the "only-once principle" in European official statistics
- Simplification by design in the preparation of EU statistical legislation
- Non-legislative actions to simplify processes and facilitate statistical reporting

3.1. Omnibus package of delegated and implementing acts (Ql 2027)

The EU statistical *acquis* under Eurostat's responsibility comprises two broad categories of legislative acts: i) horizontal basic statistical regulations such as Regulation (EC) 223/2009 on European statistics, NACE and CPA Regulations and the statistical confidentiality Regulation and
ii) sectoral legislation that concerns specific statistical domain (e.g. business statistics).

Sectoral legislation reflects and implements the principles and provisions laid down in the horizontal statistical regulations. In the last 15 years, sectoral legislation has followed a consistent approach to its design. Namely, for each statistical domain a basic (framework) regulation was prepared and adopted. Basic regulations specify the definitions and concepts, scope, topics and detailed topics that are covered as well as the data requirements (data that must be transmitted to Eurostat by the Member States including deadlines and periodicity of data submissions). They also describe data sources and methods that could be used, following the principle of output harmonisation that ensures flexibility for the Member States to choose the data sources and methods to be applied for compiling the data and statistics required if statistics produced meet the quality criteria specified by the Regulation. The basic acts are supplemented by delegated and

implementing acts. The latter specify the list of variables and breakdowns to be provided for each detailed topic of the basic act, technical formats for data transmissions, as well as content and technical modalities for quality and meta data reports that should accompany data transmissions. Delegated acts usually empower the Commission to amend the list of topics and detailed topics without imposing significant reporting burden on the Member States or to organise ad-hoc data collections to meet emerging new data needs.

The stress testing of the EU statistical legal architecture initiated by Eurostat triggered a reflection whether - to achieve quick wins that will alleviate the burden and related costs without delay - priority should be given to limiting and simplifying the delegated and implementing acts first. In practice, this means preparing a simplification omnibus proposal comprising amendments of a set of delegated and implementing regulations covering several statistical domains. The targeted deadline for preparing the proposal is the end of the first quarter of 2027. This would allow to adopt the proposal in the first half of 2027 with a view to start implementing changes in the course of 2028 or at the latest in 2029.

The reality checks, surveys, and dedicate discussions at the ESS expert and Directors' groups held in the first half of 2026 identified key elements around which the simplification could be centered as well as the potential scope of delegated and implementing regulations to be covered in each statistical domain. This section outlines these elements for the key statistical domains.

It is worth mentioning at the outset that while the simplification omnibus initiative will focus on delegated and implementing acts, during the process it might tum out that to achieve tangible simplification and burden reduction the sectoral basic regulations must be amended as well. The specific road maps and potential scope of these amendments could be elaborated at a second stage.

As suggested in the non-paper - response to the Council's conclusions on EU statistics, stress-testing and the simplification of statistical legislation by the Netherlands and Czechia and supported by Estonia, Denmark, Latvia and Slovakia, the focus should be on statistical domains with the most potential for reducing the burden on business and the greatest potential benefits for businesses. Therefore, reviewing the regulation on European business statistics should remain a central element in the simplification package, since a major part of the reporting burden and compliance costs on enterprises comes from this regulation, including its related delegated and implementing acts.

Social statistics

The following key topics for simplification omnibus package of delegated and implementing acts can be derived from the proposals gathered through the questionnaire and exchange of views with the NSI experts (for more details on the proposals as well as for the list of delegated and implementing act to be potentially included in the omnibus simplification package, see Annex 2 on social statistics):

- **Removing overlaps across the surveys prioritising the domain of education and training, and health;** In the **area of education** the review is suggested to include Adult Educational Survey (next round scheduled for 2028), Labour Force Survey and Continuing Vocational Training Survey (next wave scheduled for 2030). Regarding the latter, if clear use is demonstrated, a possibility to streamline the content and integrate a small set of key variables (participants, paid training time, total cost) into an existing enterprise survey as a

three-year module should be considered as well, instead of the current extensive standalone data collection. An important element in reducing overlaps between the Adult Education and labour Force Survey is to resolve the coherence issue so that the 12-month participation measure in training. which is also used to measure the progress towards the EU 2030 adult-learning target of at least 60% of adults participate in training every year, has a single authoritative source.

- **Review and suggest variables for discontinuation** where they are not published, not used or are of low quality **in the EU Labour Force Survey and the EU-SILC data collection** which in tum is also a prerequisite for maintaining response rates which ensure robust quality of the survey results. This part includes also simplification of the over-detailed answer categories and reducing frequency where change in the phenomena is slow.
- Prepare an issue paper that weighs the documented quality concerns against the strong user demand for the **monthly unemployment rate.** This paper can then serve as a basis to consider options for the future of this indicator covered by the Implementing Regulation (EU) 2019/2241 on monthly unemployment time series including for consultations with key institutional users.
- Simplify and reduce burden relating to data collections on the **ICT usage in households and by individuals focusing on annually issued delegated and implementing acts:** introduce a biennial design for stable or saturated indicators and retain a limited annual core for genuinely fast-moving areas such as AI; review the Digital Skills Index variable set with users to enable topic rotation; shorten and streamline the model questionnaire through removing items that are close to saturation and reduce multiple-choice option lists; and identify alternative data sources for parts of the content and evaluate imputation models for years without direct collection.
- **Reduce the technical production burden:** through move to a single transmission per data year with longitudinal weights and simplifying the household grid so it can be constructed from registers; consider an optional household component for countries that sample persons.
- **Simplify quality and metadata reporting:** This cross-domain subject is covered in the next section. Specific for the social statistics domain is the proposal coming from the experts' consultations to increase flexibility in the follow-up rules and remove mode-of-collection requirements for EU-SILC, allowing NSIs to choose interview or registers for each variable (Implementing Regulation (EU) 2019/2242).

Business and trade statistics

Unlike other statistical domains, the list of implementing and delegated acts in business and trade statistics is rather limited. It includes:

- Regulation 2020/1197: General Implementing act which contains the detailed data requirements for most business and trade statistics as well as definitions of variables
- Regulation 2020/1470: Geo-nomenclature (GEONOM) and geographical breakdown
- Regulation 2021/1225: Arrangements for the data exchanges (ITGS)

- Regulation 2022/918: Global value chains statistics detailed data requirements
- Regulation 2022/1092: Innovation statistics detailed data requirements
- Regulation 2022/2552: PRODCOM list

For ICT for enterprise statistics a new implementing act is adopted every year to define the detailed data requirements. As discussion and legal procedure for this implementing act follow a well-established process, it is proposed that possible changes are taken into account with the update for the reference year 2028 (and later) and that amendments are not part of the Omnibus implementing act.

The concrete proposals collected so far are presented in Annex 1. They could be grouped in the following key topics that would become elements for simplification omnibus package of delegated and implementing acts:

- **discontinuation of the collection of certain variables** (e.g. multi-annual variables for structural business statistics);
- **simplification or discontinuation of breakdowns** (e.g. simplification of employment size class data in structural business statistics; discontinuation of legal form breakdown in business demography statistics) and harmonisation of classifications used (e.g. Combined Nomenclature-based product breakdown instead of PRODCOM list for PRODCOM);
- **reduction of the coverage in terms of economic activities** (e.g. collection of only a few structural business statistics variables for the NACE Rev.2.1 Section L (without further activity breakdown) and its exclusion from inward FATS).

In addition to a simplification of the statistical data requirements and the related quality and metadata reporting, discussions in the BSDG Directors' Group as well in the joint session with the DMES Directors' Group identified the simplification of **the implementation of statistical units** in **business statistics** as a possible simplification action with a potential significant short-term impact on the cost of producing European statistics. Over the last decades, Member States have done significant efforts to improve the implementation of statistical units in business statistics after the 21st century legal organisation of enterprise groups (in terms of legal units) did not reflect sufficiently well their economic organisation anymore. European profiling of the largest multinational enterprise groups (MNE) as well as automatic profiling of smaller groups intended to improve quality and especially the comparability across Member States of business statistics on enterprises (most business statistics domains) as well as on kind-of-activity units (KAUs) (short-term business statistics and PRODCOM).

Whereas the European profiling of large MNE groups as well as the work of the Large Case Units proved to significantly improve the quality and especially the coherence of the statistics covering the large MNEs over different statistical domains of business statistics and also national accounts, automatic profiling was implemented in diverging ways in the Member States. This also raises questions regarding the comparability of the resulting business statistics across countries. From discussions in the BSDG and also in the joint DMES-BSDG meeting in June 2026, it transpired that all Member States business statisticians continued to provide their national accounts colleagues with data based on the legal unit and most of them continued publishing their national business statistics on the basis of the legal unit. Business statistics on enterprises and KAUs are therefore only compiled for the business statistics data series sent to Eurostat.

Moreover, **the profiling processes** are reported to be very time-consuming and are preventing Member States to speed up the transmission of their business statistics to Eurostat thereby responding to a long-standing user request for timelier business statistics. In the current context of limited resources in ESS, **a more pragmatic and simpler approach allowing the use of the legal unit as a proxy for more enterprises** than is currently the case could result in a significant cost reduction for producing business statistics in the national statistical authorities.

In the short run, this approach could be implemented by changing the operational rules for the implementation of the respective statistical units agreed by DMES and BSDG in June 2015 after the relevant discussions in the business registers and business statistics domains working groups. In the longer run an amendment of Council Regulation No 696/93 on statistical units or an integration of the statistical units definitions in the Regulation on European Business Statistics (EBS) could be considered.

Agricultural, environmental and other sectoral statistics

In the area of **agricultural statistics,** two key possible elements for the simplification omnibus emerged related to reducing reporting requirements in:

- animal production statistics under Commission implementing regulation (EU) 2023/2745
- crop production statistics under Commission Implementing regulation (EU) 2023/1538

In these domains, it is suggested to **reduce details in the breakdowns, to review relevance of certain variables and thresholds, to analyse overlaps with DG AGRI data collections, as well as to reduce frequency for some data sets.** A strong emphasis was put on re-using data available from other sources and to align variables with existing administrative data sources, including those available at EU level. It was suggested to use novel sources such as remote sensing to reduce the administrative burden and (e.g. for breakdown of grassland by categories) improve the quality of data for the grassland statistics.

The call for simplifying the quality and metadata reporting for agricultural statistics and the economic accounts of agriculture also appeared prominently and therefore should be considered as another potential key elements for the simplification omnibus of delegated and implementing acts to be prepared by the end of the first quarter of 2027.

Concerning **energy statistics,** the simplification proposals collected are included in Annex 3. However, due to the fact Regulation (EC) No 1099/2008 on energy statistics has not yet been Lisbonised, the applicable procedure is the regulatory procedure with scrutiny following the established steps for delegated acts. Therefore, legislative changes aiming for simplification in energy statistics will follow the same timeline - preparation and adoption in the first half of 2027
- but will follow its own procedural path and will not be part of the simplification omnibus of delegated and implementing acts.

Regarding **environmental-economic accounts,** discussions at the DIMESA Directors' Group indicated that it is necessary to reflect further how to approach the simplification, having in mind that the new module on ecosystem accounts under Regulation (EU) 691/2011 will start to be implemented in late 2026 only. A possible first round of compiling and transmitting the accounts to Eurostat could be conducted, in order to have a practical experience with the costs and burden associated with their compilation, before proceeding with their simplification. In this respect, it is

also to be mentioned that a big share of the proposals was of non-legislative character, aiming mainly at improving learning and methodological guidelines, automatic tools, exchange of practices rather than going straight forward to the reduction of the statistics and accounts.

The DIMESA could be invited to provide a more detailed action plan on next steps of simplification and facilitation of economic-environmental accounts compilation and reporting to Eurostat, involving also user perspective and learning from the first applications of the new accounts.

Macroeconomic statistics

During the survey in the DMES Directors' Group, replies were received from 21 countries. A large majority of the comments received related to national accounts (ESA; both on the existing ESA 2010 and on proposals under development for ESA 2030), with fewer comments on balance of payments, EDP and price statistics. The detailed proposals for simplification collected are presented in Annex 4.

In preparation of the Commission's forthcoming proposals for **ESA 2030** and an amended **Balance of Payments Regulation,** simplification principles were carefully taken into account as Eurostat engaged in extensive discussions with both producers and users to identify the most appropriate balance between resource burden and user needs. The wide range of additions to the new international standards (2025 SNA and BPM7) were analysed and prioritised into a significantly smaller set to become applicable for the EU. Several rounds of written questionnaires were undertaken, and there were dedicated discussions on transmission requirements in the relevant technical groups and in the DMES Directors' Group. Opportunities for better aligning reporting requirements with other data sets were successfully realised (notably with the ECB with regard to financial accounts and Balance of Payments).

Given that the preparation processes for the Commission's ESA 2030 proposal is far advanced and Eurostat has already considered the simplification perspective during the preparation of the proposal, it is suggested that the proposals made by countries during the questionnaire are considered in the next steps of the negotiation on the Commission proposal on the ESA 2010 update, to avoid jeopardising the timetable of whole process.

Regarding the proposal to simplify and reduce the reporting burden of quality and metadata reporting for national accounts, there are two possible ways forward. The implementing regulation relating to quality reporting in the context of ESA 2010 could be simplified through an omnibus act to reduce the level of detail currently required in the reporting. As an alternative or in addition to the previous approach, simplification could be addressed under ESA 2030, since an equivalent implementing act would need to be prepared before implementation of ESA 2030.

The proposals for simplification and burden reduction with regard to the **Harmonised Indices of Consumer Prices** (HICP) and for replacing traditional data collection with use of transaction data **in Purchasing Power Parities** (PPP) joint programme with OECD have more longer-term impact and therefore should be further discussed in the coming months. The same refers to the "horizontal" proposals as listed in Annex 4.

3.2. Simplifying and reducing burden of quality and metadata reporting for European official statistics

At the discussions held by the ESS Directors' groups in June 2026, quality and metadata reporting was mentioned as one of the most burdensome areas for the NSIs, despite of the fact that many basic EU statistical legal acts state that quality reporting should not add significant additional burden.

The quality and metadata reporting for European official statistics is based on the Single Integrated Metadata Standard (SIMS), endorsed by the ESSC and recommended by the Commission[3]. It is the SDMX compatible ESS standard designed to organise, standardise, exchange and disseminate metadata and quality reports across the ESS in line with the European Statistics Code of Practice in which it is grounded. Based on concepts defined in the Code, SIMS allows for Member States to report relevant information to Eurostat in a structured way and for Eurostat to validate the data received from Member States and report to users on data quality. The standard aims at harmonising metadata and quality reporting practices, providing more clarity and transparency for users of European statistics. It also contributes to reducing the burden and increasing efficiency for statistical authorities, by avoiding multiple overlapping requests and formats and facilitating the exchange and reuse of information. National metadata are transmitted to Eurostat through the Metadata Handler as agreed, while quality reporting obligations are generally enshrined in legal acts. National and European metadata are disseminated by Eurostat as appropriate after validation.

To implement SIMS, while preserving alignment with it, statistical domains have developed agreed practices or legislation specifying the detailed structure, content, periodicity or alignment of deadlines relevant for quality and metadata reporting. A review of the metadata transmitted by Member States to Eurostat relating to the years 2023 to 2025 showed that overall, the total volume of metadata delivered to Eurostat has not changed substantially over the recent years. Only few (10%) of the metadata concepts are actually changed from one year to another. At the same time, large differences can be observed across statistical domains, some of which introduce a high number of non-standard (i.e. non-SIMS) metadata fields.

Within the ambition to achieve tangible simplification results in short-run, priority could be given to the reviews of metadata and quality reporting (e.g. structure, contents and periodicity of quality and metadata reports) in each statistical domain. Under the leadership of Directors' Groups, the relevant working groups could review and make concrete proposals for simplification of quality and metadata reporting in their domain by the end of February 2027. The proposals which require legislative changes could be then included in the omnibus simplification package to be prepared by the end of first quarter of 2027.

The simplification actions could also include streamlining of the number and content of the implementing regulations on quality reports in the domain. As a general principle, simplification should not undermine the importance of quality reports and metadata for the trustworthiness of European statistics and should preserve their key benefits for their users.

[3] Commission Recommendation(EU) 2023/397 of 17 February 2023 on reference meta data and quality reports for the European Statistical System.

In the discussions so far, the experts suggested to centralise at Eurostat the production of derived variables and selected quality indicators from transmitted microdata and remove these tasks from NSI obligations. This proposal must be considered carefully, having also in mind that quality reports provide evidence on the quality of data provided by the Member States and Eurostat uses these reports for data validation and quality assurance. In other words, Eurostat cannot replace Member States in this allocation of tasks.

During the quality and metadata reporting review process by the ESS working groups, proposals for simplification of the SIMS standard could be collected as well. These proposals, if made available by the end of February 2027, could serve as a timely input to the review of the SIMS standard by the ESS working group on Quality. In the course of2027 this group can work on the simplification of SIMS in addition to reviewing its suitability and the potential changes needed to make it fit for the dissemination of European statistics in an AI age. The review process should also take into account the update of the European Statistics Code of Practice: When the potential areas for updating the Code will have been specified, presumably by the end of 2027, and any potential margin for SIMS simplification or adaptation could be derived, the SIMS standard could be proposed for amendment to the ESSC.

In line with the discussions held at the May 2026 ESSC meeting, the revision of SIMS standard with the view to simplify and reduce the burden on national statistical authorities should include other strategic developments related to the official statistics landscape, such as the European Data Spaces, and the amendments to Regulation (EC) No 223/2009 which improves the possibilities for the use of privately held data and the exchange of data within the ESS. The outcome of this gap analysis could be presented to the DIME before the end of2027 in view of subsequent endorsement of the ESSC thereafter.

3.3. Applying the "only-once principle" in European official statistics

The key element in the ESS approach to reduce the response burden is the wider implementation of the "once-only" principle and **re-use to the maximum extent possible existing administrative or privately held data** for the compilation of European official statistics. The steady decline in statistical survey response rates is a widespread phenomenon that is likely to persist in the long term, despite the variety of measures aimed at addressing this issue (e.g. improved survey design or targeted incentives). In this context, the reuse of administrative data or of other readily available data should increasingly represent the preferred data source for the production of European official statistics. This trend is also supported by the continuous emergence of new administrative data and registers, particularly at the European level, over the past few years.

The recent amendments of Regulation (EC) 223/2009 created a solid basis for the practical implementation of this approach. While there is consensus in the ESS that **shift from surveys to administrative sources will significantly reduce the statistical reporting burden,** the expert discussions recalled that the impact on the costs for NSIs is less straightforward. Nevertheless, one could expect a possible reduction of NSIs resources needed for compiling official statistics as there would be no need to develop and test the questionnaires, no staff would be needed to answer respondents' questions or otherwise support them in completing the questionnaires, replies received would not need to edited, no missing information would need to be imputed (administrative data are generally more exhaustive than sample surveys).

Against this background, efforts should therefore continue to identify more and new possibilities with respect to alternatives to survey data sources for compilation of European official statistics.

In this direction, actions could be planned with different time horizons:

First, the planned **simplification package/omnibus** of delegated and implementing acts for the spring of 2027 could be used **as a vehicle to enable and encourage the use of administrative data** in **the current data collections** to the extent that it is possible without opening the framework statistical regulations. For example, several countries suggested allowing unrestricted imputation of labour market or other variables in social statistics from administrative registers which in tum would also improve the quality of statistics and address non-response related issues.

Second, special attention and efforts could be devoted to **reinforcing the "once-only" principle** in **the forthcoming revisions of the EU framework regulations** - both statistical and non-statistical. The immediate candidates are the upcoming update of the Integrated Farm Statistics (IFS) regulation, the revision of the Regulation (EU) 692/2011 on European tourism statistics and the Regulation (EU) 2019/2152 on European business statistics. The principle to collect data only once could be reflected in the amended Regulations by establishing a clear priority in the use of data sources for the compilation of required statistics, with the objective to minimise the administrative burden on respondents. The Regulations will remain output-oriented leaving the choice of data sources to the Member States. The use of surveys will be still possible, but it should only be considered if no other primary data source is available. To support the Member States in the prioritised use of alternative-to-surveys data sources the amendments should also aim to reinforce the provisions ensuring sustainable access and role of NSIs in the design and possible amendments of the administrative data sources. At the same time, the amendment should also reassess the relevance of the data requirements, especially those that may jeopardise the shift to alternative-to-survey data sources.

In addition, following the examples of the recent drafts Commission proposals amending statistical basic acts (e.g. EFAS draft proposal) it could be considered to **systematically include in the updated framework regulations a non-exhaustive list of the currently available administrative data sources or privately held sources** which will become available under already adopted EU non-statistical regulations and directives. For example, Regulation (EU) 2024/1028 on data collection and sharing relating to short-term accommodation rental services will make reporting by platforms on short stay rental and passenger transport services obligatory as of 1 July 2028. Moreover, if deemed useful, the forthcoming amendments of framework regulations could foresee implementing or delegated acts to further specify the administrative data sources and the relating details that national authorities are expected to make available to the NSIs for the sake of compiling European official statistics. The current provisions (Article 5 and Annexes V and VI) of Regulation (EU) 2019/2152 regarding administrative data to be provided by national Tax and Customs Authorities could serve as inspiration.

The amended framework regulations could apply the same principle - to list privately held data sources useful for the compilation of European official statistics (e.g. accommodation platforms, mobile network operators; credit card companies; smart meters for electricity) considering at the same time the different challenges, potential costs and risks associated with this type of data. In this regard, the revision could also include the possibility for a gradual introduction of those sources for enhancing quality of the existing statistics or for producing new statistics for which the compilation is conditional to access the privately held data source. NSIs could be asked to regularly report on the progress made regarding privately held data sources. Like the case of administrative sources, the amendments should allow for a flexible way (by delegated act) to amend the list of possible privately held sources and add potential new sources in the future.

Third, the ESS should not only monitor new administrative sources, but it also needs to **keep track of changes to existing administrative sources** with a possible impact on the data available for compiling European statistics and for further reducing the reporting burden on respondents. There are currently two prominent cases at EU level which deserve the ESS attention: i) Union Customs Code (UCC) reform and setting up of EU Customs Data Hub (EUCDH)and ii) Data from the VAT in the Digital Age (ViDA Initiative).

The Union Customs Code reform will have a significant impact on the way customs data which are currently used for compiling extra-EU trade in goods statistics will be made available to the ESS in the future. The **EU Customs Data Hub** (EUCDH) is being designed as a central data hub/database which will replace the existing separate IT systems across the Member States. The co-legislators have reached an agreement on the regulation (basic act) amending the UCC, but it has not yet been formally adopted. The compromise includes a provision giving the ESS access to the data hub for the purpose of producing statistics.

This data will replace the data from customs declarations currently provided by the Customs Authorities to the national statistical authorities producing extra-EU trade in goods statistics in accordance with Annex VI of Regulation (EU) 2019/2152 on European business statistics. The current timeline for the EUCDH to be hosted by the future EU Customs Authority is:

- 1 July 2028: e-commerce consignments handled in EUCDH (EU e-commerce hub)
- 1 March 2031: voluntary use of EUCDH
- 1 March 2034: mandatory use of EUCDH

The stepwise implementation means that part of information needed for extra-EU International trade in goods statistics will be available with EUCDH, part with national customs during a transition period.

Under the **VIDA initiative,** Digital Reporting Requirements (DRR) will replace recapitulative statements of the VAT Information Exchange System ('VIES') as of mid-2030. E-invoicing will become the default for issuing invoices in intra-EU transactions, Businesses will need to report harmonised set of data elements ('DRR data') to national tax authorities who upload them to the new Central VAT Information Exchange System ('VIES'). The amended VAT Directive only foresees the mandatory use of e-invoicing for intra-EU transactions (some Member States already implement or will implement e-invoicing also for domestic transactions). The use of the (amended) data from the Tax Authorities therefore mostly impacts international trade in goods and services statistics. Ad-hoc ViDA groups were set up both for ITGS and ITSS to assess the new data source.

Even though the implementing act specifying the invoicing elements to be covered in DRR has not yet been adopted, the amended VAT Directive does not list certain elements needed for statistical purposes. This implies that ViDA initiative can constitute a useful new data source (as is demonstrated by the current use of VAT data for ITGS by ISTAT), it can only partially substitute the surveys currently used for collecting data on intra-EU trade in goods.

A more viable approach using the ViDA data seems to be the direct collection by national statistical authorities of e-invoice(based) data from businesses. E-invoicing data with ITGS/ITSS-relevant data elements according to EN 16931 standard (current version) could already be used, but further improvements to the standard (e.g. optional statistical module) could be needed.

How the national statistical authorities can then obtain information from the invoicing still needs to be determined. For ITGS, national statistical authorities were already invited to investigate, in Q3-Q4/2026, with businesses/business associations what type of technical arrangements would be needed, and which cost implications the technical implementation would have for national statistical authorities. For ITSS opportunities for using e-invoicing will be further investigated and information on statistical burden stemming from the relevant survey will be collected to assess the possible impact of using the new data source.

3.4. Simplification by design in the preparation of EU statistical legislation

While this strand overlaps in some elements with the strand of applying the "only-once" principle in data collection, it will be broader in scope. For example, it can comprise actions aimed at **promoting digital data collection tools** including the **automatic extraction of data** from the company's financial statements, bookkeeping or other business information systems. The need to **make business surveys more business-centric** has come up in recent Business Statistics Directors' Group (BSDG) discussions as well as during the Implementation dialogue with representatives of European businesses hosted by Commissioner Dombrovskis. Several Member States have already explored and implemented ways of automated data extraction from companies' business information systems. This often involves cooperating with the providers of accounting software. The overview of the actions already undertaken at Member State level should be completed by the BSDG with a view to identifying best practices and sharing experiences. The possibility for developing common ESS-wide tools was considered limited because of the existence of national Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAPs) in the Member States (the use of International Financial Reporting Standards is only mandatory for listed companies)

and the different Community languages. The possibility of using the Technical Support Instrument for the development of this approach in the NSIs could be considered.

European business and trade statistics is a very rich source of relevant information on European businesses. Its use (and relevance) is, however, often hampered by the many **confidential data.** This is often a source of frustration for the users of European business statistics, especially regarding some variables/indicators that are readily available in the public domain for individual companies. Lack of European statistics makes users, including policy makers, tum to other sources, often commercial ones. While statistical confidentiality is an important principle that should be applied rigorously to ensure the trust of respondents in the ESS, it should be investigated whether it is excessively used in some instances and whether it is not possible to use innovative approaches (such as methods of perturbation) to make more data available.

A workshop promoting the use of perturbation methods for structural business statistics was organised in June 2026. Such approaches would not only significantly increase the use of business and trade statistics, but it has also the potential to reduce the cost of their production and dissemination (e.g. currently special aggregates of NACE categories are collected for SBS to provide policymakers with data needed; once data the NACE components are publicly available, there is no need to collect such special aggregates).

In reflecting on what simplification by design may entail, the **possibility of introducing 'sunset clauses'** into statistical legislation could also be considered, albeit only in very specific cases, to avoid obsolescence and, more generally, to encourage the legislator to regularly review the relevance, effectiveness and proportionality of current regulations. Alternatively, more detailed review clauses could be introduced in statistical legislation, which would serve a similar purpose whilst presenting a lower risk of legal lacunae.

Finally, the simplification by design can include both legislative and non-legislative actions. The upcoming revision of the Regulation (EU) 2019/2152 on European business statistics should include the necessary legal provisions that would enable further simplification and reducing reporting burden on European enterprises.

3.5. Non-legislative actions to simplify the processes and facilitate statistical reporting

During the discussions at expert level, several non-legislative proposals for simplification were put forward. They include among others more webinars to exchange of best practices, more SDMX-based data transmissions and elimination of the transmission formats, improving transmission and validation tools. The implementation of these proposals, establishing concrete roadmaps and mechanisms for monitoring the progress made could be assigned to the relevant Directors' and expert groups. A summary report on the progress made and results achieved in terms of simplification and improved efficiency of data transmissions and quality assurance processes could be submitted to the ESSC in October 2027.

Microdata exchange of intra-EU exports of goods among the NSIs was one of the main novelties introduced by the Regulation (EU) 2019/2152 on European business statistics. Whereas Member States are increasingly using this data source to improve the quality of their data (also reducing the asymmetries) as well as to (partially) replace data they used to collect by means of surveys on intra-EU import of goods, there is still great potential to lead to further significant reduction of the burden on enterprises (especially SMEs, as relatively more SMEs are engaged in

importing than exporting of goods activities). How to promote the broader adoption of the single-flow approach for intra-EU goods trade statistics, which uses partner-country export data to estimate imports, thereby eliminating the need for separate data collection for imports is a question that deserves discussion at the level of the Heads of NSIs of the ESS and Eurostat. The success of this new data source also opens the door for a discussion on wider implementation of the microdata exchange, possibly including other statistics on cross-border transactions and phenomena.

4. NEXT STEPS

The next steps for advancing the work on simplification and burden reduction in European official statistics could be structured for each of the five working strands presented above.

To be able to prepare a simplification omnibus of delegated and implementing regulations by the end of the first quarter of 2027 and its adoption in the first half of 2027, the concrete proposals described in sections 3.1 and 3.2 of this paper should be further reviewed, consolidated and translated into a list of amendments of the legal acts concerned by the end of 2026. Eurostat could prepare the draft of these amendments (i.e. the very first draft of the simplification package), assisted in each of the domains by a dedicated Task Force if deemed useful. In early 2027, the ESS Directors' groups could be consulted on the draft followed by consultations with key institutional users at EU level.

In terms of procedure, the omnibus proposal will amend existing implementing or delegated acts using the same procedure by which they were initially adopted (i.e. comitology procedure with a vote of the ESSC or involvement of the Expert Group 'National Statistical Institutes of the European Statistical System' for delegated acts).

The timing of the effective implementation of the proposed changes will also need to take into account the requirements set out in the relevant basic acts, with some of them including a provision that prescribes a minimum time span between the adoption of an implementing or delegated act and the start or end of the corresponding reference period. Such a provision usually aims to give the statistical authorities sufficient time to adapt the data collection to new requirements. However, when simplification changes are introduced, the pertinence of this rule could be reconsidered; alternatively, the basic act could be changed in advance.

Regarding the measurement of the burden reduction to be expected from the proposed simplification changes, a tentative quantification of the cost savings will be made by Eurostat using the Commission's administrative burden calculator based on the EU standard cost model.

The established roadmap for the revision (recast) of the Integrated Farm Statistics (IFS) regulation, the revision of the Regulation (EU) 692/2011 on European tourism statistics, the Regulation (EU) 2019/2152 on European business statistics and update of the ESA 2010 and Balance of Payments regulations will be followed.

Regarding the actions described in section 3.3 for a wider use of administrative sources that are under construction at EU level (i.e. EU customs data hub and ViDA initiative), a more detailed roadmap could be discussed at a dedicated meeting organised back-to-back with the February 2027 ESSC meeting or in a High-Level Meeting hosted by a next Presidency of the Council of the EU.

Eurostat is looking forward to the views of the ESS members on the proposed work strands and next steps as put forward in this discussion paper.