

Good Practice Advisory Committee

9th Report

December 2022

INTRODUCTION

The Good Practice Advisory Committee (GPAC), hereinafter referred to as the Committee, was established under the provisions of Article 4 of the Hellenic Statistical Law (no. 3832 of 9 March 2010, as amended). The Law stipulated that the Committee should be comprised of five members as follows:

- a) One member nominated by the Hellenic Parliament;
- b) One member nominated by the European Statistical Office (Eurostat);
- c) One member nominated by the European Statistical Governance Advisory Board (ESGAB);
- d) One member nominated by the European Statistical System Committee (ESSC); and
- e) One member nominated by the Hellenic Data Protection Authority.

The President of the Hellenic Statistical Authority (ELSTAT) is entitled to participate in the Committee on a non-voting basis.

The task of the Committee, as stipulated in the Law, is to prepare an annual report on the implementation of Principles 1 to 6 of the European Statistics Code of Practice in the Hellenic Statistical System. The report is to be submitted to the Hellenic Parliament, having informed the European Statistical Governance Advisory Board (ESGAB) accordingly, and shall be made public following submission to Parliament.

In accordance with the Law, and having consulted with the various nominating bodies, the Minister of Finance issued a Decision (Ref. No. Δ6A1001384EΞ2013, as amended) in January 2013, convening the Committee and appointing five members for the two-year period 2013-2014 inclusive. In accordance with its mandate, the original Committee produced two annual reports in September 2013¹ and December 2014 respectively over the course of its term of office, which terminated at the end of 2014. In line with the Law as then applying, the future of the Committee was reviewed by the Greek Authorities and it was decided that the Law should be amended to establish GPAC as a permanent advisory committee, with members appointed by the Minister to serve for two-year terms. The Law was duly amended in July 2015 and the Minister of Finance issued a Decision (Ref. No. 0002491EΞ2016) in March 2016 appointing new members for the period 2016-2017 inclusive. This Committee produced two annual reports in December 2016 and December 2017 respectively over the course of its term of office, which terminated at the end of 2017. Similarly, the Minister of Finance issued subsequent decisions in March 2018, April 2020 and March 2022 appointing new members of the Committee for two-year terms. Details of the composition of the current Committee are given in Appendix 1. Ms. Katerina Kalioti from ELSTAT was appointed Secretary to the

¹ All GPAC reports can be accessed at [Good Practice Advisory Committee \(GPAC\) - ELSTAT \(statistics.gr\)](https://www.statistics.gr/en/gpac)

Committee. Mr. Athanasios C. Thanopoulos, President of ELSTAT, participates in GPAC meetings in accordance with Article 4.5 of the Law.

The first meeting of GPAC in its current composition took place on 30 May 2022. Mr Michail Skaliotis, former Head of Unit of Eurostat, was unanimously elected as chairperson of the Committee. The agenda of the meeting was devoted to (i) an update on recent developments (in particular the population and housing census, human resources, issues related to ELSTAT's reputation, and compliance with EU regulations), (ii) the work-program of GPAC for 2022-2023, and (iii) the coordination of the 2022 report with the in-depth Peer Review taking place at the same period. At its second meeting, held on 13-14 October 2022, GPAC had the opportunity to interview a number of stakeholders including Academia, Other National Authorities producing statistics (ONAs), holders of administrative data, the Advisory Committee of the Hellenic Statistical System (SYEPELSS) and the Media (detailed Agenda in Appendix 2).

The specificity of this report is that it overlaps with the full-fledged Peer Review of the Hellenic Statistical System, which took place on 17-21 October 2022 in the context of the third round of the European Statistical System Peer Reviews. For this reason, there has been a strong coordination between the PR-Team and GPAC. The chairperson of GPAC has been interviewed by the PR-Team and the summary conclusions of the two assessments have been shared and discussed within the two teams.

In view of the similar objectives of the two exercises and taking into account the larger scope and depth of the PR, it was decided to produce a 'lighter' GPAC report for 2022, focusing on selected strategic and recurring issues, while ensuring synergies and complementarities with the PR exercise. Furthermore, GPAC agreed that its next report could pay special attention to the Action Plan that will be developed by ELSTAT as a follow-up of the Peer Review recommendations.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Box 1. ELSTAT at a glance

- The Hellenic Statistical Authority (ELSTAT) is an Independent Authority established by Law 3832/2010 (Greek Statistical Law).
- The Hellenic Statistical System (ELSS) consists of ELSTAT and the other Agencies of the ELSS. Currently there are 22 agencies of the ELSS, 10 of which are ONAs (Other National Authorities).
- ELSTAT coordinates all activities of the other ELSS agencies pertaining to the development, production and dissemination of official statistics, as well as to the implementation of the national quality assurance framework of statistics.
- The mission of ELSTAT is the systematic development, production and dissemination of the country's official statistics, as well as the assurance and continuous improvement of quality of ELSS statistics.
- ELSTAT has 49 Regional Offices, located in the respective Regional Units of Greece.

While the history of official statistics in Greece goes back to [1828](#), the Hellenic Statistical System was established in its current form by legislation in 2010. The [Greek Statistical Law](#) and the [Commitment on Confidence in Statistics](#) represent the two most important legal foundations of official statistics in Greece. Complemented with additional relevant Regulations, Decrees, Laws and Decisions, they constitute a comprehensive [Legal Framework](#).

Along with the strong statutory framework and the commitment of top management to European standards, and the progress achieved in recent years, some challenges persist from the past, while new ones have emerged. The areas, which are addressed in the recommendations of GPAC, relate to *the Commitment on Confidence in Statistics, the strengthening of the statistical system, expanding the use of administrative sources, human resources, and the strategy for the future development of official statistics in Greece.*

Recommendations

1. Notwithstanding the support of the Greek Government to the Hellenic Statistical System, GPAC believes that the credibility of, and public confidence in official statistics will be strengthened if the Government, where appropriate, provide answers regarding criticisms against official statistics in the context of the Hellenic Parliamentary control procedures. To the knowledge of GPAC, such criticisms were expressed by some members of the Parliament against the operations of the 2021 Population and Housing Census. (Recommendation addressed to the Government as it relates to the Commitment on Confidence in Statistics).

2. In future revisions of relevant laws of ONAs, dedicated statistical divisions/sections/units/offices could be created in order to earmark the distinct core business of the ONA and strengthen the integration of the Hellenic Statistical System. (Recommendation addressed to the relevant Ministries / ONAs).
3. GPAC encourages ELSTAT and the ELSS Agencies to develop initiatives, which facilitate the enhancement of the coherence, maturity and common culture of the statistical system. Such initiatives may include the adoption of a common logo for official statistics, common training programmes covering also the needs of ONAs, common development roadmap and further methodological support to ONAs.
4. GPAC acknowledges recent progress regarding the use of an increasing number of administrative sources for the production of official statistics, as well as experimentation with a few privately held data in the context of Eurostat initiatives (AIS, tourism platforms, etc). It encourages ELSTAT to expand the use of administrative data, and further explore the potential of privately held data for official statistics by developing a comprehensive long-term strategy and a multi-annual action plan including sustainable partnerships with holders of new data sources and other stakeholders.
5. GPAC recommends that the relevant bodies responsible for the recruitment of officials in the public administration ensure much shorter delays in the entire procedure .
6. GPAC recommends that ELSTAT undertakes actions exploring the possibility of aligning the remuneration of its personnel to that of other independent authorities.
7. In order to attract and retain qualified staff, ELSTAT could formalise the current practice of providing non-financial incentives to its personnel under the overall job-offer package. Such incentives may include (but are not limited to) the allocation of a certain part of working time to research activities in official statistics, attendance of university courses, teaching, and participation in international conferences and international groups. ELSTAT may also offer, where possible, flexible working arrangements, including remote working.
8. In view of the near-future recruitment of 115 staff members, ELSTAT is advised to analyse the overall HR development policy including mapping skills to future requirements, future training needs, and the optimisation of the regional workforce. Initial results of such an analysis could be presented at the autumn meeting of GPAC in 2023.
9. GPAC encourages ELSTAT to implement improvements regarding governance issues related to Quality, which were underlined in the 8th report of GPAC and, respectively, in the recent Peer Review recommendations.
10. GPAC believes that there is a need for ELSTAT, together with the ELSS Agencies (in consultation with SYEPELSS), to develop an overarching Strategy for Official Statistics for the

next five to ten years. Such a strategy would provide the necessary vision and legitimacy for an action plan towards the development of the Hellenic Statistical System in the next decade.

REVIEW OF PROGRESS AND ISSUES IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EUROPEAN STATISTICS CODE OF PRACTICE IN THE HELLENIC STATISTICAL SYSTEM

Box 2. Progress during the last years

- Reduction of compliance issues with EU statistical regulations
- Innovative practices deployed at the 2021 Population and Housing Census
- ASEP competition for recruitment of 115 officials
- Public confidence and trust in official statistics
- Growth in the use of administrative sources

The most significant improvements since the previous GPAC report include the speeding-up of the process for recruiting 115 staff members for ELSTAT, the use of additional administrative sources and linking of non-anonymised micro data from various registers for statistical purposes, the achievement of high self-enumeration rates (70%) and application of innovative actions in the 2021 Population and Housing Census. In particular, the direct matching of census data with administrative records, thanks to the use of common unique identifiers, enabled the immediate identification of errors (“dummy” records, double recording, etc.), ensuring the quality and reliability of census results. The exhaustiveness of the collected data allowed, for the first time, the creation of a structured and comprehensive Statistical Population Register. In turn, this constitutes a legacy and challenge for ELSTAT in terms of developing a dynamic statistical population register for the years ahead.

It is also worth noting that in 2022, ELSTAT proceeded to the automation and unification of resources-intensive statistical works, such as the compilation of the Structural Business Statistics and the Statistical Business Register.

Furthermore, the creation of a dedicated webpage with questions asked by Members of the Hellenic Parliament and the corresponding answers provided by ELSTAT constitutes a good step in strengthening communication with users and in maintaining trust in official statistics.

At the meeting (videoconference) held between Eurostat and GPAC on 14 October 2022, Eurostat confirmed that there has been a continuous, steady and substantial progress in terms of compliance with EU statistical regulations. It was noted that Greece is not anymore an exception to other countries in this respect. ELSTAT is committed to reduce compliance issues in the remaining areas, namely those regarding National Accounts and GNI. Finally, ELSTAT will strengthen coordination with the Ministry of Migration in order to reduce the long

delays observed in the submission of migration and international protection statistics (compiled by the Ministry).

GPAC welcomes ELSTAT's multifaceted communication and dissemination policy which is continuously enriched. Examples include the above-mentioned creation of a dedicated webpage with parliamentary questions concerning statistics and the corresponding answers provided by ELSTAT, and a selection of public interventions / interviews by ELSTAT's President to leading Greek media. GPAC believes that ELSTAT could build on this good practice and develop a statistical literacy strategy targeted to journalists and policy makers, including the members of the Hellenic Parliament.

Regarding the remaining GPAC recommendations from the 8th report which have not been implemented yet, it should be noted that recipient(s) of some recommendations is not ELSTAT (but Government, Ministry of Finance). Furthermore, some other recommendations relate to issues which require a longer-term perspective (i.e., the implications of the Data Act, and the Data Governance Act, centralised vs decentralised quality governance, and the assessment of technical assistance programmes / JOSGAP).

ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Box 3. Issues for recommendations

- Commitment on confidence in statistics
- Strengthening of the statistical system
- Extending the use of administrative and privately held data sources
- Human Resources
- Long-term strategy
- Growth in the use of administrative sources

In this report, the recommendations are grouped in to the following five categories: (i) Commitment on Confidence in Statistics, (ii) Strengthening of the statistical system, (iii) Extending the use of Administrative and privately held data sources (iv) Human Resources, and (v) Long-term Strategy. Additionally, GPAC believes that ELSTAT should strengthen its quality monitoring procedures along the lines of the recommendations of the previous report as well as the recommendations coming from the Peer Review round 2021-2023.

Commitment on Confidence in Statistics

All recent reports by GPAC confirm that ELSTAT has established itself in the public mind as an independent statistical authority, free from any political influence, enjoying high levels of credibility, trust and reputation. All major stakeholders whom GPAC interviewed during the preparation of this report have witnessed this as well. Maintaining trust in official statistics is a collective endeavour requiring continuous actions by all members of the Hellenic Statistical System and, where appropriate, the responsible Government bodies. In this regard, GPAC has observed a situation, which could potentially undermine the credibility of official statistics if it is not addressed properly. It relates to criticisms to Official Statistics, which are expressed, occasionally, in discussions in the Hellenic Parliament. GPAC is of the opinion that statistical questions asked within the Hellenic Parliament should not remain unanswered because such a situation could potentially cast doubts about the quality and credibility of official statistics.

Recommendation 1: Notwithstanding the support of the Greek Government to the Hellenic Statistical System, GPAC believes that the credibility of, and public confidence in official statistics will be strengthened if the Government, where appropriate, provide answers regarding criticisms against official statistics in the context of the Hellenic Parliamentary control procedures. To the knowledge of GPAC, such criticisms were expressed by some members of the Parliament against the operations of the 2021 Population and Housing Census. (Recommendation addressed to the Government as it relates to the Commitment on Confidence in Statistics).

Strengthening of the statistical system

GPAC has analysed the self-assessment questionnaires of the three ONAs that participated in the Peer Review exercise and has interviewed a 4th ONA, namely the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. Some additional analysis was also carried out for the remaining ONAs based on information that is publicly available on their respective websites. It is very clear that there is a large heterogeneity amongst ONAs regarding their adherence to the ESCoP, and their degree of integration within the Hellenic Statistical System. GPAC believes that the current fragmentation of the statistical system could be addressed with a roadmap of appropriate actions led by ELSTAT, ONAs, and enabled, where appropriate, by legislative provisions.

The appointment of ‘statistical heads’ for the ONAs in the recent past constitutes a major step in enhancing the integration and quality of the Hellenic Statistical System. However, very often, ONAs do not have a dedicated statistical division or section or unit or office and their (statistical) work is difficult to be separated from other work that they carry out for their ministry or administration. To improve this situation, GPAC believes that there is scope for introducing certain organisational changes in the functioning of some ONAs.

Recommendation 2: In future revisions of relevant laws of ONAs, dedicated statistical divisions/sections/units/offices could be created in order to earmark the distinct core business of the ONA and strengthen the integration of the Hellenic Statistical System (Recommendation addressed to the relevant Ministries and ONAs).

Despite the continuous progress made in the development of the statistical system in Greece, GPAC believes that the system lags behind in terms of a common statistical culture. Recognising that building such a culture is a long-term, multifaceted and multi-stakeholder endeavour, GPAC encourages ELSTAT and ONAs to formally address this issue by initiating a number of concrete actions in this regard.

Recommendation 3: GPAC encourages ELSTAT and the ELSS Agencies to develop initiatives, which facilitate the enhancement of the coherence, maturity and common culture of the statistical system. Such initiatives may include the adoption of a common logo for official statistics, common training programmes covering also the needs of ONAs, common development roadmap and further methodological support to ONAs.

Extending the use of administrative and privately held data sources

GPAC has noted substantial progress in the use of administrative data sources and believes that there is a momentum to expand and mainstream this approach in a systematic manner. Recent successful experimentation with the National Single Entity for Social Security (EFKA) as well as other initiatives using administrative sources have had an overall positive impact on issues regarding access and use of such data for the production of official statistics. Initial results have already demonstrated the potential of administrative data in enhancing the quality of official statistics, extending their coverage, timeliness and granularity, and expanding statistical production to new areas of policy interest. However, the situation regarding the use of privately held data by ELSTAT is at the beginning of a long trajectory and remains an ambitious target. Therefore, GPAC believes that ELSTAT should develop internal data science capabilities and undertake concrete actions regarding access and use of privately held data.

Recommendation 4: GPAC acknowledges recent progress regarding the use of an increasing number of administrative sources for the production of official statistics, as well as experimentation with a few privately held data in the context of Eurostat initiatives (AIS, tourism platforms, etc). It encourages ELSTAT to expand the use of administrative data, and further explore the potential of privately held data for official statistics by developing a comprehensive long-term strategy and a multi-annual action plan including sustainable partnerships with holders of new data sources and other stakeholders.

Human Resources

The review and analysis of human resources issues has always been a central item on the agenda of GPAC. At the end of 2022, the number of ELSTAT permanent staff, excluding staff on secondment, amounted to 634 (435 in Central Service and 199 in the Regional Statistical Offices), compared to 669 employees (465 in Central Service and 204 in the Regional Offices) in 2021.

The overarching issues for ELSTAT regarding human resources are, on the one hand the extremely long delays in the recruitment procedures, and, on the other hand, the difficulties in attracting and maintaining qualified staff. Recent progress with regard to the procedure for recruiting 115 new staff members (ongoing) is certainly a very positive development, but it does not provide guarantees that there will be a sustainable solution to the long recruitment delays. For the record, it is noted that the current recruitment procedure of the 115 employees started in 2020. In order to address the HR issues of ELSTAT, GPAC recommends the following:

Recommendation 5: GPAC recommends that the relevant bodies responsible for the recruitment of officials in the public administration ensure much shorter delays in the entire procedure.

It has been brought to the attention of GPAC that remuneration of employees in other independent authorities in Greece is significantly higher than that of ELSTAT. There is therefore a good basis for ELSTAT to argue for a pay increase for its staff.

Recommendation 6: GPAC recommends that ELSTAT undertakes actions exploring the possibility of aligning the remuneration of its personnel to that of other independent authorities.

Notwithstanding the fact that financial incentives play an important role in the decisions of individuals to accept a job offer and stay within an organisation, GPAC believes that non-financial rewards can also influence these decisions. ELSTAT has already a good practice of non-financial incentives in place. In a period where competition for attracting and retaining talents becomes more intense, ELSTAT has an opportunity to make a difference by formalising and complementing their job-offer package with innovative non-financial options.

Recommendation 7: In order to attract and retain qualified staff, ELSTAT could formalise the current practice of providing non-financial incentives to its personnel under the overall job-offer package. Such incentives may include (but are not limited to) the allocation of a certain part of working time to research activities in official statistics, attendance of university courses, teaching, and participation in international conferences and international groups. ELSTAT may also offer, where possible, flexible working arrangements, including remote working.

GPAC was informed that the announcement (No 4K/2022) for hiring the 115 permanent employees was published in the Government Gazette on 28/06/2022. The deadline for submitting online applications ended on 28/07/2022 and the evaluation by ASEP is pending. GPAC believes that this large-scale recruitment operation represents a unique opportunity for ELSTAT to re-visit its staff allocation needs and skills profiles over and beyond the current horizon.

Recommendation 8: In view of the near-future recruitment of 115 staff members, ELSTAT is advised to analyse the overall HR development policy including mapping skills to future requirements, future training needs, and the optimisation of the regional workforce. Initial results of such an analysis could be presented at the autumn meeting of GPAC in 2023.

Quality monitoring (*Recurring issue*)

The recent Peer Review exercise has analysed quality issues in depth. Moreover, GPAC has observed that there has not been any change (progress) in this regard since the previous report. It is, therefore, suggested that ELSTAT undertakes appropriate actions as a follow-up to the PR recommendations as well as GPAC's recommendations from the 8th report.

Recommendation 9: GPAC encourages ELSTAT to implement improvements regarding governance issues related to Quality, which were underlined in the 8th report of GPAC and, respectively, in the recent Peer Review recommendations.

Long-term strategy

The Hellenic Statistical System, like many other statistical systems, is at the crossroads of important developments, namely a changing data landscape with a multitude of new data sources, the revisiting of EU statistical legislation, the implications of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the forthcoming Data Act, the need for new statistical methodologies and new skills, the development of sustainable partnerships with holders of administrative and private data sources, etc. While the above recommendations help to address some of the emerging challenges, GPAC believes that there is a need for ELSTAT to develop a strategy stating the mission, vision and the ways in which ELSTAT and the statistical system will meet the near future challenges. Such a strategy should be comprehensive, actionable, complemented with mid-term evaluations and, if necessary, with adjustments.

Recommendation 10: GPAC believes that there is a need for ELSTAT, together with the ELSS Agencies (in consultation with SYEPELSS), to develop an overarching Strategy for Official Statistics for the next five to ten years. Such a strategy would provide the necessary vision and legitimacy for an action plan towards the development of the Hellenic Statistical System in the next decade.

Appendix 1

Information on the members of the Good Practice Advisory Committee

- Michail Skaliotis, former Head of the Task Force – Big Data, Eurostat, nominee of the European Statistical Office (Eurostat), Chairman of GPAC
- Eleni Bitrou, Head of the Parliament Members Support Division of the Hellenic Parliament, nominee of the Hellenic Parliament, Member of GPAC;
- Marjo Bruun, former Director General of Statistics Finland, nominee of the European Statistical Governance Advisory Board (ESGAB), Member of GPAC;
- Marina Gandolfo, Head of International Affairs of the Italian National Institute of Statistics , nominee of the European Statistical System Committee (ESSC), Member of GPAC;
- Konstantinos Lambrinoudakis, Professor, Department of Digital Systems, University of Piraeus, nominee of the Hellenic Data Protection Authority, Member of GPAC

Appendix 2

List of stakeholders invited to the GPAC

EFKA (National Single Entity for Social Security)

- Directorate General for Contributions
- Directorate General for Informatics and Communications
- Directorate General for Strategy and Development

Advisory Committee of the Hellenic Statistical System - SYEPELSS

- Labour Institute of the Greek General Confederation of Labour -IN.E.G.S.E.E.
- Hellenic Federation of Enterprises – SEV

ONAs

Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs

- Statistics Department

Accademia

- Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (AUTH)

Media

- Reuters