



EFTA STATISTICAL COOPERATION

▼ Why are statistics important?

Impartial and reliable statistical data produced by professionally independent statistical agencies are widely considered a prerequisite for modern democratic societies and a necessary condition for the smooth running of competitive market economies in an increasingly complex global context.

Statistics are crucial for understanding the society around us, and in a globalised world comparable statistics across countries and regions are necessary. In practice, statistics are an indispensable tool to underpin good policy making and to monitor the effects of policies.

The development of statistics should ideally reflect developments in the real world. The European Free Trade Association (EFTA) and its member states, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland, actively participate in international work in the field of statistics, and currently there are important ongoing debates focusing on how to complement traditional statistics typically focusing on economic performance by addressing fundamental issues such as environmental sustainability, social progress and the well being of people.

▼ EFTA and the European Statistical System (ESS)

Statistics in Europe are in large part organised through the ESS, which is a network led by Eurostat comprising EU Member States and EFTA countries. The EFTA Statistical Office (ESO) cooperates closely with Eurostat in the field of statistics and this cooperation takes place in different ways such as providing training courses for statisticians from ESS member countries.

EFTA and the EU have acknowledged a common interest in assisting neighbourhood countries of the enlarged European Economic Area to develop their statistical capacity and to harmonise statistical methods and standards with international norms through technical cooperation. This cooperation is based on a memorandum of understanding between EFTA and Eurostat and gives priority to countries that have concluded declarations on cooperation or free trade agreements with EFTA, i.e. countries in the Western Balkans, the Mediterranean region and the eastern boundary of the enlarged EEA.

Providing technical assistance to help countries build good statistical systems is of mutual interest to both the benefiting countries and the EFTA countries. A reliable statistical system is not only important for supporting democratic development in countries; in trade relationships it is also fundamental for investors to have access to reliable and relevant information about key economic data of trade partner countries. Therefore, cooperation with trade partners in the field of statistics is a priority at EFTA.

An important part of the functioning of the ESS is the meetings in Eurostat of statistical experts from ESS member countries. Each year around 200 meetings at different levels take place in Eurostat to discuss the way forward for statistics in Europe. It is vital for EFTA countries to participate in these meetings in order to influence the development of statistics. ESO informs EFTA national statistical institutes (NSI) about meetings organised within the framework of the ESS and announces EFTA participation to Eurostat. ESO itself also participates in a number of meetings in Eurostat.

▼ The EEA Agreement in the field of statistics

The European Economic Area (EEA) Agreement recognises the importance of statistics in order to monitor progress in the internal market and other flanking and horizontal areas. One of ESO's duties is to assess EEA relevance of new legal acts from the European Commission in the field of statistics, and to initiate and follow up the EEA legislative procedure for the successful inclusion into the EEA Agreement of those legal acts found relevant.



As part of the EEA Agreement the three EEA EFTA countries, (IS, LI, NO,) are obliged to provide national experts to Eurostat. ESO is an important contact point between Eurostat and the EEA EFTA countries, including responsibility for the recruitment of seconded national experts to Eurostat.

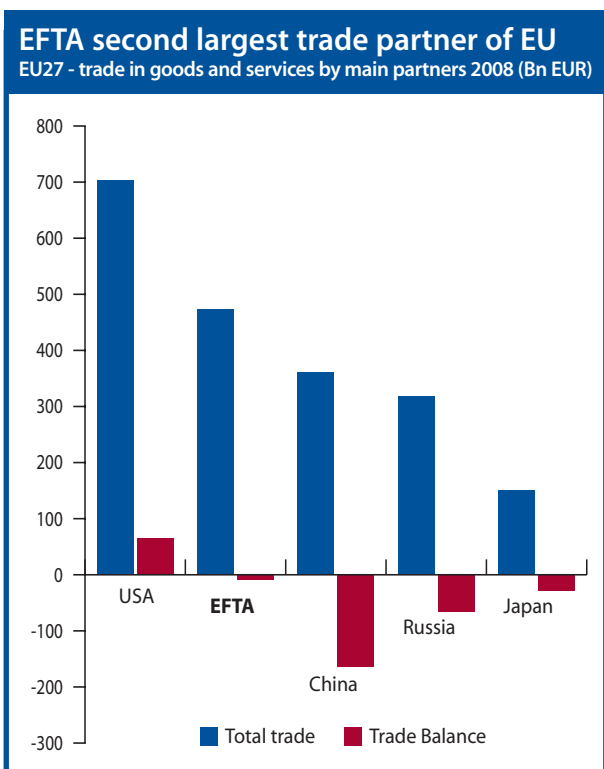
Through the EEA Agreement, EEA EFTA countries are required to transmit statistical data to Eurostat. Similarly, Eurostat is obliged to publish statistics from EEA EFTA countries. One important role of ESO is to monitor the inclusion of EFTA data in Eurostat publications.

The provisions of the statistical cooperation between Switzerland and the EU are governed by a bilateral agreement. The Agreement entered into force on 1 January 2007 and foresees, as for the other EFTA countries, the full participation of Switzerland in the ESS, including the production and dissemination of harmonised statistics at European level.

▼ The Working Group of the Directors of national statistical institutes of EFTA countries

ESO is continuously in close contact with the EFTA NSIs One formally established contact is the Working Group of the Heads, consisting of the directors of the EFTA NSIs with ESO as its secretariat. The Working Group of the Heads meets regularly to discuss important statistical matters. For statistical issues pertaining to the EEA Agreement the mandate of the Working Group is to assist Subcommittee IV. The Working Group also discusses statistical issues outside the EEA Agreement, such as technical assistance, with 3rd countries.

▼ ESO – EFTA's statistical office



The EFTA Statistical Office, located on the premises of Eurostat in Luxembourg, was created in 1991 as a liaison office between Eurostat and the NSIs of EFTA's Member States.

ESO's main objective is to sustain the integration of the EFTA States in the ESS, and thus provide harmonised and comparable statistics supporting the general cooperation process between EFTA and the EU within and outside the framework of the EEA Agreement.

As the statistical office of an intergovernmental organisation, ESO also provides statistical information for internal needs and uses within EFTA.

▼ **Contacting ESO**

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