



EFTA: A PARTNER IN EUROPEAN STATISTICS

The importance of official statistics

Official statistics is a genuinely international affair – whether it concerns estimates of economic growth or energy consumption, migration figures, data on greenhouse gas emissions or any other aspect of modern society. It needs to adhere to common practices and methodologies in order to ensure comparability across countries and be useful for policy making, economic analysis and society at large. Official statistics is an indispensable tool to underpin good policy making and to monitor the effects of adopted policies.

EFTA and the European Statistical System

The European Free Trade Association (EFTA) and its member states (Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland) are active participants in the [European Statistical System](#) (ESS) and beyond.

The ESS is a partnership between [Eurostat](#) – the Statistical Office of the European Union – and the National Statistical Institutes (NSIs) of the 32 EU and EFTA States. While the NSIs collect data and compile statistics at national level, Eurostat's primary role is to lead the way in harmonising statistics in close cooperation with its ESS partners. Eurostat also plays an important role in the publication of European statistics.

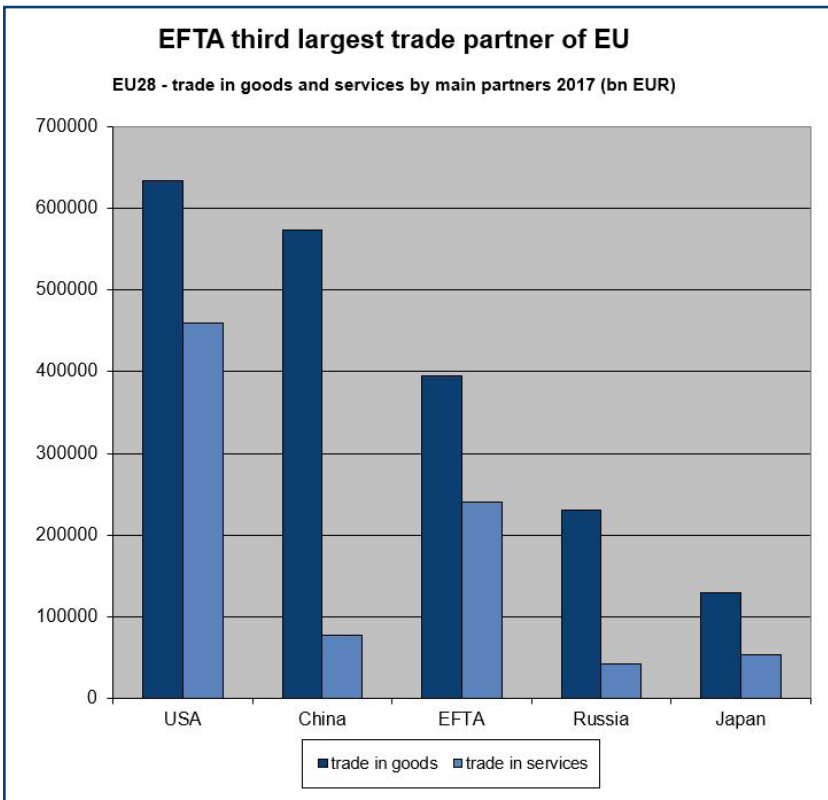
The European Statistical System Committee (ESSC) consists of representatives of Eurostat and the ESS NSIs. The four EFTA States participate in the ESSC on an equal footing with the EU Member States, but without voting rights. The Commission consults the ESSC on measures it intends to take regarding the development, production and dissemination of European statistics, on multiannual and annual work programmes, on issues concerning response burden, confidentiality and the Code of Practice, and on methodology. For the EFTA States, this means that the ESSC provides an opportunity to influence forthcoming European legislation and other Commission initiatives.

Statistics in the EEA and Swiss-EU Agreements

The purpose of statistical cooperation in the European Economic Area (EEA) is to provide comparable and reliable statistical information in order to describe and monitor all fields of cooperation covered by the EEA Agreement.

The multiannual European Statistical Programme (ESP) constitutes the framework for the EEA statistical actions to be carried out. While all main fields of the ESP are open for full participation by the three EEA EFTA States – Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway – the actual work programme is established on an annual basis in a process involving the EEA EFTA NSIs, the EFTA Statistical Office and Eurostat. In practice, the EEA Annual Work Programme is closely aligned with Eurostat's Annual Work Programme.

Most legal acts in the field of statistics are incorporated into the EEA Agreement, although adaptations are sometimes required. The EEA EFTA States contribute financially to the ESP and are eligible for Eurostat grants. In addition to the financial contribution, the EEA EFTA States provide Eurostat with statistical expertise in the form of four long-term seconded national experts. Two additional experts are provided by EFTA.



Although legally and institutionally different, the Swiss-EU Agreement on statistics provides for many of the same rights and obligations as the EEA Agreement. Like the EEA EFTA States, Switzerland contributes financially to the ESP and sends long-term experts to Eurostat. Hence, all four EFTA States have the opportunity to participate in Eurostat working groups and task forces and contribute to the process of “decision shaping” on a par with the EU Member States. Unlike the EEA Agreement, the Swiss-EU Agreement is a bilateral arrangement with no formal role for EFTA.

The EFTA Statistical Office

The EFTA Statistical Office (ESO) is a central bridging body between the EFTA NSIs and Eurostat. At the core of ESO’s activities are monitoring new

EU legislation in the field of statistics, assisting NSIs in evaluating the EEA relevance of new legal acts and incorporating them into the EEA Agreement. Furthermore, ESO works closely with Eurostat on the development of the EEA Annual Work Programme and monitors the inclusion of EFTA data in Eurostat publications. As part of its cooperation with Eurostat and the EFTA NSIs, ESO also co-organises courses for statisticians in the framework of the European Statistical Training Programme and supports statistical training and capacity building in third countries, primarily in Europe’s border regions to the east and south. ESO is located at the same premises as Eurostat in Luxembourg.

The European Free Trade Association (EFTA) is an intergovernmental organisation set up for the promotion of free trade and economic integration to the benefit of its four Member States – Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland – and the benefit of their trading partners around the globe. The main tasks of EFTA are:

- ▶ Maintaining and developing the EFTA Convention, which regulates economic relations between the EFTA States
- ▶ Managing the Agreement of the European Economic Area (EEA Agreement), which brings together the EU Member States and three of the EFTA States – Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway – in a single market, also referred to as the “Internal Market”
- ▶ Developing EFTA’s network of free trade agreements.