

Dialogue with users in defining the official statistics

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Abstract

The CNIS is one of the bodies of the French Official Statistical System. It ensures dialogue between producers and users of official statistics. It highlights new needs, using a forward-looking approach. In this way, it helps to ensure that each year a statistical work and surveys programme is drawn up in line with the needs of those involved in understanding society in the social and economic spheres.

Every 5 years, the CNIS carries out a prospective analysis of medium-term needs and the changes to be made to the information system in the medium term. A year-long process of gathering requirements from different users and producers' projects on the 2024-2028 medium term agenda (MTA) has led to the desired guidelines for the five-year programming of official statistics work and surveys.

This paper aims to present the process for designing the 2024-2028 MTA that will both guide the future statistical work and frame the forthcoming consultations in the CNIS committees over the next five years. It will focus on how user needs have been gathered, how they have steered the recommendations in the various committees and how they will be implemented in the future CNIS activities in various ways (committees' agendas, setting up of working groups, organizing seminars or conferences). In a second part the paper will show how this programme fits in with the CNIS's annual activities and how users also interact between two medium-term programmes. Finally, based on the 2018-2023 MTA experience, the paper will assess the extent to which the user needs influence the official statistics works.

1. Introduction

The Cnis, or National Council for Statistical Information, is a vital component of the French Official Statistical system, alongside the Public Statistics Authority and the Public Statistical Service (see appendix 1). It aims to foster dialogue between statistical producers and users suggesting improvements to the statistical work program (see appendix 2) and pursues three main objectives:

- Publicly presenting existing statistical data and their production methods.
- Soliciting and addressing users' expectations and emerging needs.
- Validating new statistical projects for their relevance to the public interest and utility.

Users, spanning institutional users like national and local public authorities, civil society groups, academia, and the general public, play a pivotal role in Cnis operations. They have ample opportunities to voice their needs and evaluate the produced statistics, especially in the preparation of the Cnis medium-term agenda (MTA) that structures the Cnis activities for a five-year period.

This paper aims to outline user involvement in the recent preparation of the medium-term agenda (MTA) and how their input influenced the 2024-2028 MTA recommendations. Additionally, it seeks

to analyse the MTA's interaction with annual CNIS activities and how this will impact producer efforts over the next five years.

2. Process for designing the 2024-2028 MTA

2.1 A short but intensive process

The drafting of the 2024-2028 Cnis MTA occurred in three overlapping stages: assessing the previous 2019-2023 MTA, gathering user needs and producer concerns and prioritising themes and drafting the recommendations. Throughout this process, the different Cnis bodies (see appendix 2) were informed and consulted to cover a large field of statistical demands. It started in October 2022 with a project presentation to the seven thematic committees (TC) and concluded with official endorsement by the Council on January 23, 2024.

2.2 Carried out activities

The assessment of the 2019-2023 MTA and gathering user needs and producer concerns aimed to identify topics for inclusion in the 2024-2028 CNIS MTA.

2.2.1 Assessment of the 2019-2023 MTA

This involved reviewing TC work and analysing conclusions from working groups and meetings (e.g., seminars, conferences).

The TC typically met twice annually, except in 2020 due to the health crisis, each addressing one of MTA recommendations. The evaluation was mainly meant at identifying the topics to be included in the next MTA.

During the 2019-2023 period, five working groups were set up, three of which addressed themes featured in the 2024-2028 MTA: use of administrative data and data matching, measuring discriminations, impact of the new economic classification (NAF) on business statistics.

Simultaneously, the Cnis organised four events laying the groundwork for themes further developed in the 2024-2028 MTA: Statistical panels and cohorts, Individual data matching, Population census questionnaire and data dissemination, Measuring ecological transition.

2.2.2 Users' consultation

The second pillar of the 2024-2028 MTA preparation focused on user consultation, employing various methods to engage a broad audience. Regular participants in CNIS activities, including Council members and thematic committee followers, were interviewed. Twenty-two users representing all statistical domains covered by the TC were included, demonstrating strong familiarity with official statistics and their respective areas of interest, enabling precise needs formulation for the upcoming MTA.

A public consultation was conducted to involve a broad audience, regardless of their familiarity with official statistics. Ultimately, 150 usable responses were gathered, reflecting both producers'

TC meeting, where a preliminary list was compiled. This list, accounting for the current economic and social context, was subsequently validated by the executive committee. Once each committee had its list of around 10 themes, user consultations and producer feedback were utilized to refine the specific angles for addressing the issues.

3. How the MTA interacts with CNIS annual activities

The MTA organizes Cnis operations over a 5-year span, accommodating the lengthy statistical production process while also addressing urgent matters. The Cnis operates in such a way as to allow flexibility in dealing with issues.

3.1 How the MTA will be implemented

The 2024-2028 MTA comprises eleven general recommendations and 69 TC recommendations (the structure of which is outlined in Appendix 4). These thematic recommendations will be discussed across various CNIS forums and events, including TC meetings, ad hoc working groups, and special events like seminars or conferences. “organised user”, including public or private decision-makers, non-profits, academia, and unions, are invited to share their perspectives, concerns, and needs during these gatherings.

3.1.1 One recommendation treated during each committee meeting

The 69 recommendations align with the agendas of thematic committees, which convene biannually, fostering exchange, dialogue, and the expression of viewpoints and interests. Each session centres on exploring one MTA recommendation. Producers typically draw an overview of data sources and present recent work and methodological challenges. Users, including academia, and researchers, share their experiences and task constraints. Sessions culminate in assessments of next steps for the specific subject, promoting collaborative problem-solving.

3.1.2 Setting up working or consultation groups

Certain topics require a focused approach, either due to the absence of a developed conceptual framework or the need to engage various well-informed stakeholders and data producers. They will convene for a brief duration and generate recommendations meant for ongoing implementation, serving to inform and inspire producers in their future endeavours. While not always initiated by a recommendation, their outputs influence committee work on MTA topics. For instance, the newly established working group on abuse of vulnerable persons will be reported in the “demography and social issues” committee.

3.1.3 Organising conferences, meetings or seminars

The CNIS organises at least one or two events per year to present the conclusions and recommendations of working groups (for example, the 2024 seminar on the new French economic classification NAF2025) or to take stock of a major topic (such as the ecological transition emphasized in a 2023 seminar. Such debates usually take place upstream and feed the thematic

committees works. The seminar on measuring economic perspectives of ecological transition was a source of inspiration in drawing recommendations on ecological transition.

3.2 How users can interact between two MTAs?

3.2.1 TC meeting, conferences and seminar are open to public

TC meetings are open to the public, welcoming targeted users who are invited to share their perspectives on the subject of recommendations. Dates are publicly announced on the CNIS website and social media platforms like LinkedIn. Registration is the sole requirement for attendance. Participants, including registered individuals, have the opportunity to voice their opinions during these sessions, fostering an inclusive environment for collaborative discussion and input.

3.2.2 Institutional and “organized” users contribute to working groups

Users are invited to join working groups based on their expertise for focused exploration of topics. These groups serve various purposes: delving into new phenomena requiring methodological work like defining scope and identifying relevant sources, or facilitating collaboration among diverse perspectives and institutions. Chaired by a personality chosen outside the public statistical service recommended by the CNIS chairperson, each group includes rapporteurs from the official statistical service. The chair ensures representation of all user components and encourages productive user-producer discussions.

3.2.3 Cnis can initiate a working group under Institutional users request

On January 1st, 2024, CNIS established a working group in response to the formation of "France Travail," which assumed the roles of Pôle Emploi with new responsibilities, this change potentially affecting job-seeker statistics. This initiative was prompted by the Public Statistics Authority chair. Similarly, in 2022, a working group was launched to address "measuring discriminations," initiated by the Defender of Rights.

4. To which extent the Medium-term agenda influences the official statistics works

Although the recommendations aren't binding for official statistics producers, they're treated as guidelines and are largely adhered to across different aspects.

4.1 A mutual interaction process...that also includes European concerns

Producers' concerns and projects are considered in MTA preparation. They discuss upcoming themes and development plans, most often aligned with user needs and integrating themes of the EU multi-annual plan. This mutual interaction ensures shared priorities in the 2024-2028 agenda and a large producers' adherence to the MTA.

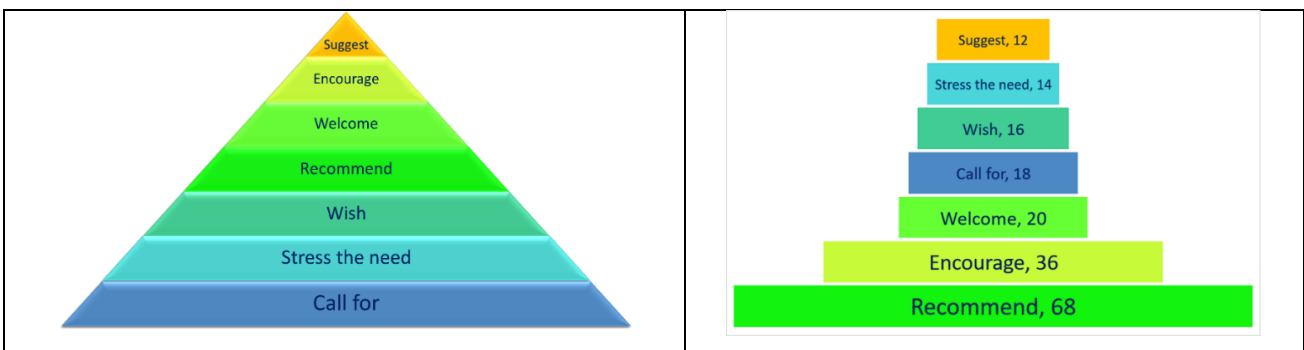
4.2 Recommendations drafting

Recommendations follow standardised layouts and formats. Drafting ensures recommendations are producer-friendly for easier implementation.

4.2.1 The art of persuasion without pressure

Recommendations prioritize a non-coercive approach, providing an overview of the theme followed by one or two requests initiated by "The Council" with varying levels of urgency indicated by verbs. According to figures 2 and 3, the verb most often used (recommend) is not the most compelling while stronger verbs, like call for and stress the need, are less common.

Figures 2 and 3: Verbs most often used according to a gradation of intensity (figure 2) and number of occurrences in the 2024-2028 MTA (figure 3)



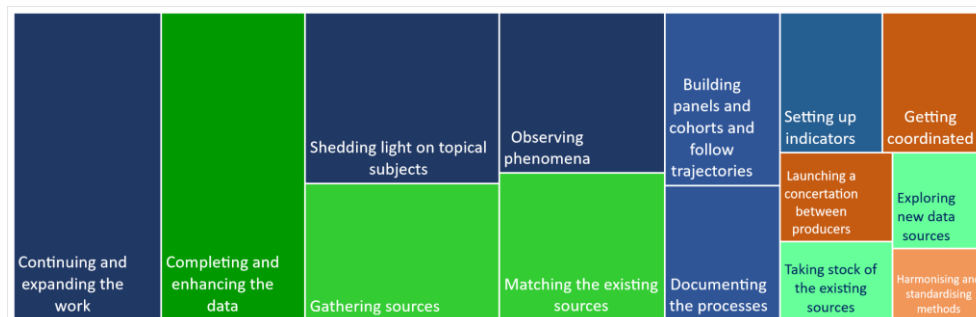
4.2.2 The way to approach an issue

Recommendations avoid mandating specific operations for producers, such as conducting surveys or dictating source usage. They remain broad and align with three categories reflecting the data life cycle stages: data production, utilisation, and inter-producer relationships.

Figure 4 summarises most frequent suggestions included in the recommendations. It mirrors the cutting-edge of statistics in the MTA-covered areas: Information sources are abundant for most recommended subjects. The emphasis lies on enhancing source quality through various means, like broadening coverage or adding new questions, rationalising their use when several sources deal with the same subject, and, to achieve this, fostering constructive dialogue among producers. However, this doesn't dismiss the need of exploring new data sources, including private ones.

Further down the line, the goal is to enhance the value and relevance of sources, shedding light on economic and social phenomena. Improved sources offer new usage prospects, like panel data for trajectory monitoring. The recommendations aim to bolster the overall quality and utility of statistical data throughout its life cycle.

Figure 4: specific suggestions included in the recommendations



4.3 The Council’s annual guidelines: a process for adapting the MTA

Five years is significant in the face of rapid events. The 2019-2023 MTA was disrupted by the 2020 health crisis, followed by other impactful events such as Ukraine war, affecting supplies and inflation.

Meanwhile, statistics constantly evolve, demanding rapid adaptation for the benefit of producers, users, and respondents.

Such events make it impractical to stick rigidly to a 5-year plan, necessitating flexibility in addressing new statistical needs. The Council's annual guidelines typically become relevant after the first two years of MTA implementation, with drafting beginning in year three to accommodate emerging concerns or developments not fully addressed during initial preparations.

Appendix 5 outlines themes from the Council's annual guidelines spanning 2021 to 2023. These themes were chosen for their relevance to contemporary issues not addressed in the 2019-2023 MTA and for the methodological advancements required in the Official Statistical System. Many of these themes are reflected in the 2024-2028 MTA. Other guidelines aimed to enhance aspects of the 2019-2023 MTA, such as widening statistics dissemination. In 2021, several guidelines focused on the impacts of the health crisis on statistical production and dissemination, highlighting the need for CNIS flexibility.

4.4 How to assess the implementation of MTA recommendations

Evaluating the implementation of MTA recommendations is inherently subjective, but certain principles can enhance objectivity in assessment.

4.4.1 Principles

- Simply addressing a recommendation topic in a TC meeting isn't adequate to determine if it has been sufficiently covered by producers. It's crucial to gather post-meeting data, such as publications, new or enhanced surveys, and workshops, to gauge effectiveness.
- Themes recurring in consecutive MTAs don't necessarily indicate insufficient prior treatment. Statistics is an ongoing process with room for continual development. Lack of

addressing a topic can be determined if it appears in two consecutive MTAs, remains untouched in thematic committee meetings, and is drafted identically.

- Recommendations not explicitly discussed in a TC meeting can still be deemed addressed if progress is evident. TC agendas often feature sessions on evaluating new or revamped surveys and administrative data usage, providing opportunities to showcase progress related to MTA recommendations.
- It is crucial to take a long-term perspective when assessing MTA implementation. The process from decision to implementation of a new statistical operation, like a survey, can span several years. For instance, a survey on homeless people, presented in a thematic committee in 2022, may not be conducted until 2025, with results expected in 2026. Introducing new data sources, such as the Nominative Social Declaration established in 2012, can have long-term impacts, some of which may still be emerging in 2024.

4.4.2 Method and checking sources

Evaluating the implementation of MTA recommendations involves gathering information from the many available sources.

- After each TC meeting, verbatim minutes are produced. The Cnis website offers additional valuable resources from the meetings, including presentation slides and a source inventory, which is particularly significant for users seeking information. The minutes feature a section titled "MTA recommendation follow-up," summarizing discussion points and proposing steps forward.
- At year-end, producers, including those of official statistics and others, must draft activity plans for the upcoming year and review the past year's activities. They are asked to assign planned or completed tasks to MTA recommendations during this process.
- Producers websites give updated information on the latest publications and events (seminars, workshops, conferences) that can cover MTA topics.
- Minutes of Cnis events (seminars, conferences...) are also a source of information.

5. Conclusion

Using the aforementioned assessment methodology, it can be concluded that 78% of the 2019-2023 MTA recommendations were discussed in thematic committees' meetings. Additionally, 65% of all themes, whether discussed in meetings or not, were adequately addressed by producers.

This success is noteworthy, especially considering the disruption caused by the health crisis, which led to the cancellation of spring 2020 meetings. Furthermore, topics not initially included in the program were covered, resulting in significant achievements for official statistics and user satisfaction. Progress and experimentation in statistics, including new operations during the crisis, were presented in most thematic committees. Other important topics were also addressed, such

as economic environmental accounts that mark a significant advancement in monitoring the ecological transition and are the subject of several 2024-2028 MTA recommendations.

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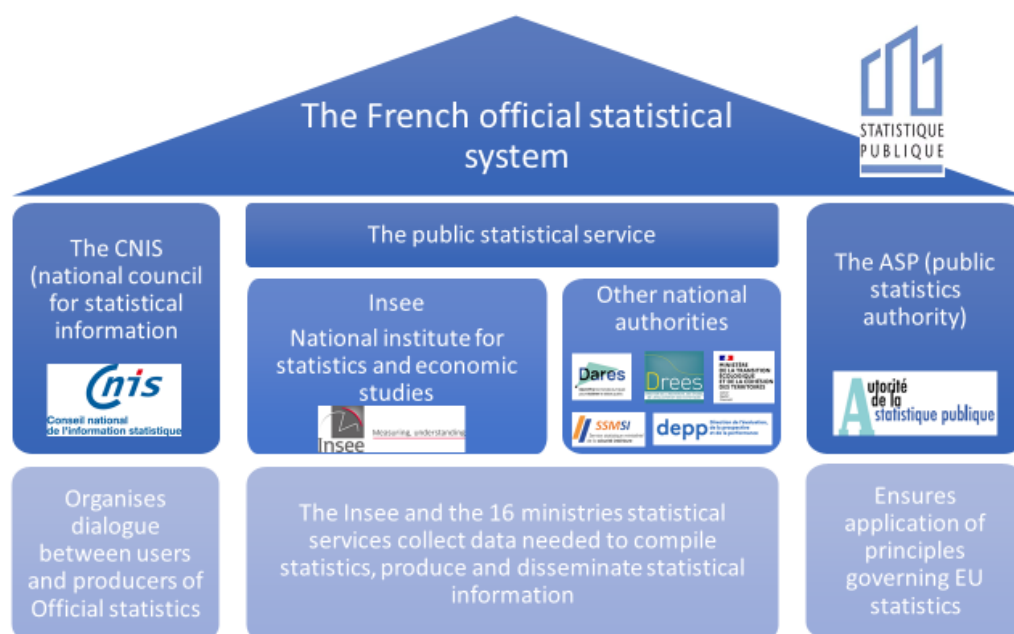
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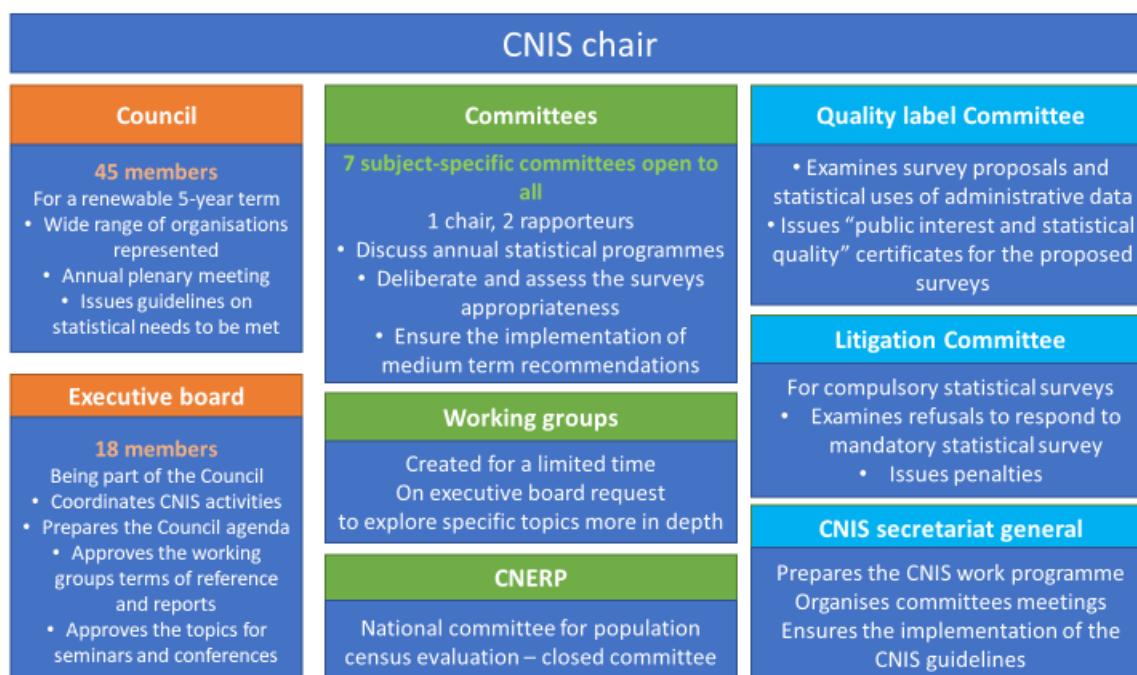
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Appendix 1: The French Official Statistical System



Appendix 2: The CNIS organization and bodies



Appendix 3: Who answered the public consultation

Represented Organisation	Statistics producer	Statistics producer and user	Statistics user	Total
INSEE and ONAs	9	23	12	44
Public administration (outside ONAs)		14	16	30
Non-profit, federation, Union		14	13	27
University, research lab		7	15	22
Other (incl. Private individual, business, journalist)	1	6	20	27
Total	10	64	76	150

Appendix 4: Structure of the 2024-2028 MTA

The themes chosen for the 2024-2028 MTA can be categorized based on various dimensions, often overlapping with each other.

- **Themes to be further explored**

This category encompasses themes previously addressed and requiring further development in new dimensions. For instance, the statistical observation of inequalities, present in the last three MTAs, delved into social, income, health, and gender inequalities. In the 2019-2023 MTA, progress was made in exploring gender disparities, extreme poverty, inadequate housing, and labor market integration for underprivileged individuals. New surveys, like one on food aid in 2021, were planned to complete information in these areas.

In the 2024-2028 MTA, inequality will be scrutinized with a focus on access to public services, healthcare, and digital resources. Additionally, the compounding and intergenerational reproduction of inequalities will be examined.

Another theme for exploration is the documentation of public service quality. Despite its inclusion in previous MTAs, this topic was not addressed at all. Quality of public services, increasingly relevant during crises like the recent health crisis, is impacted by digital transformations affecting citizen-government interactions. Concerns about public service quality extend to both national and local levels, but creating a dashboard to encompass all services poses challenges. This theme is included in the 2024-2028 MTA due to its importance to users.

- **Topical issues**

The current economic and social climate has brought attention to topics relevant to both consumers and producers, including ecological transition, inflation, and health. While ecological transition is relatively new, inflation and health have long been studied. However, there are emerging questions about the individual impact of inflation on living standards and the environment's effect on health that require further exploration.

- **New subjects**

Certain recommendations introduce previously unexplored topics into CNIS activities, shedding light on emerging phenomena like the widespread adoption of teleworking during the health crisis. Additionally, longstanding phenomena are gaining newfound attention, notably in the

preparation of the MTA, such as the integration of the blue economy, driven by a pressing demand from institutional users.

- **Themes that are included in the EU 2021-2027 multi-annual programme**

The 2021-2027 European Statistical Programme aims at enhancing the quality, availability, and accessibility of European statistics. It defines statistical areas to be developed, provides the programming framework for the development, production and dissemination of European statistics. As such, it serves as a strong guidance for European national statistical authorities to the extent that the areas and approaches developed within this framework may later become binding on European NSIs and ONAs. Several themes on which statistics need to be developed in the 2021-2027 EU MAP correspond to national statistical concerns or have been integrated in the 2024-2028 MTA. That includes, for example: develop and test indicators for regional public investment, develop indicators to assess the size and/or structure of the Blue Economy, measuring the digital economy, digital transformation and technological progress of the EU economy and society, promote the use of official statistics for climate change information purposes, support the production of more regional and local data, further develop data collections on police and security statistics as well as crime and criminal justice statistics.

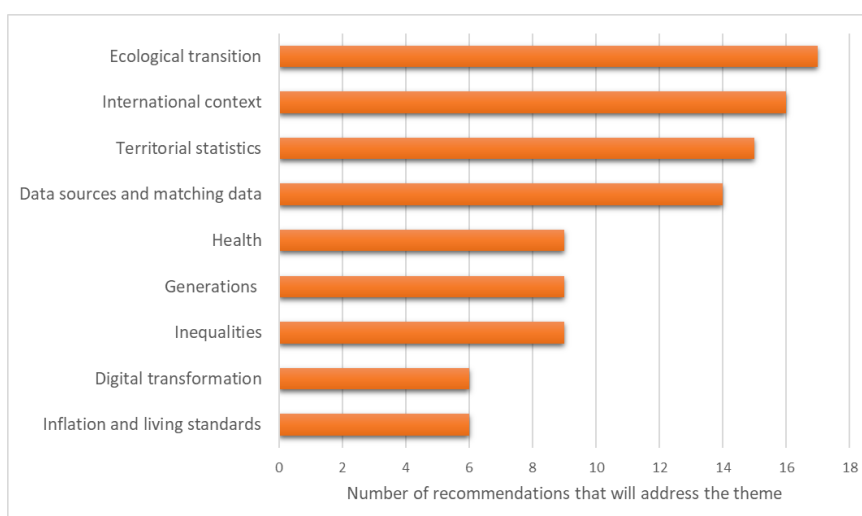
- **Themes that bring together the concerns of several committees**

The predominant themes favoured by most committees revolve around cross-cutting issues, notably incorporating the territorial dimension into statistical analyses, whether at infra-national levels or within an international context.

Another significant focus area pertains to data utilization: leveraging new data sources, both administrative and private, and conducting comparisons and matching between them. Substantial advancements have been achieved in this realm over the past decade. Notable developments include the simplification of company social declarations in 2017 through the introduction of the Nominative Social Declaration, streamlining processes for companies while also expanding statistical opportunities regarding employment and income activity. These transformations naturally influence the 2024-2028 Multiannual Statistical Program (MTA), as their full impact on future statistical practices is yet to be fully understood.

Additionally, prevalent among committee recommendations is the examination of the ecological transition's effects.

Most popular themes in the committees' recommendations



Appendix 5: Selection of the themes included in the annual guidelines between 2021 and 2023 to complete the 2019-2023 MTA

Year	Number of recommendations in the annual guidelines	Annual guidelines examples
2021	4	Learning lessons from the health crisis about innovative statistical work and the role of official health statistics
2022 and 2023	5 and 7	Contribute to the development of statistical uses of private data, in consultation with stakeholders
2022 and 2023	5 and 7	Increasing the visibility of statistics based on administrative data and matching between such sources
2023	7	Setting statistical priorities for measuring the ecological transition
2023	7	Work on expressing current social needs in terms of health