



# FINAL REPORT

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# Executive Summary

## Background

This final report consolidates the findings and recommendations from an independent assessment of the ECASStats portal, a flagship statistical platform developed by the African Centre for Statistics (ACS) under the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA). The assessment evaluated the portal's performance against five key dimensions: coverage, relevance, timeliness, comparability, and user-friendliness, to determine its effectiveness as a continental data resource and identify areas for improvement.

Coverage refers to whether the data cover the required scope, number of countries, and time periods. Relevance assesses whether the available data are tailored to solve the continent's unique challenges. Timeliness refers to whether the available data are recent enough to make decisions. Comparability assesses whether data users can compare indicators across countries and years. User-friendliness refers to the extent to which users from diverse backgrounds can easily access and utilise the portal.

## Key Findings

*Coverage:* ECASStats offers extensive breadth, spanning 25 thematic areas, over five decades of data (1970–2025), and up to 55 African countries. Core domains, such as agriculture, national accounts, and population, exhibit extensive historical coverage and high completeness. However, gaps persist in areas such as science, technology, innovation, tourism, and financial indicators.

*Relevance:* The portal aligns well with global frameworks such as the SDGs but lacks first-class integration of Africa-centric priorities, notably Agenda 2063 indicators and critical measures of vulnerability, inequality, and youth development. This omission reduces its utility for continental policy agendas.

*Timeliness:* While some sectors (e.g. population, education, and national accounts) are updated through 2024–2025, others lag behind, with financial and energy data ending as early as 2015–2020. This unevenness undermines the portal's ability to support real-time decision-making and responsiveness to emerging crises.

*Comparability:* Inconsistent country coverage and insufficient methodological guidance create challenges in making comparisons.

*User-friendliness:* The absence of a detailed help page and missing definitions for some indicators constrain accessibility for both non-specialists and advanced users.

It is also important to note that some issues stem from the portal's reliance on data collected or computed from national statistical offices and other agencies, meaning that addressing these particular limitations lies beyond the ECA's direct control. Improvements in these areas are largely dependent on the willingness and capacity to enhance statistical systems on the continent underscoring the need for stronger collaboration, enhanced harmonisation standards, and significant investments in national data infrastructures.

In summary, the portal demonstrates extensive data coverage across several thematic areas and over five decades, with strengths in agriculture, national accounts, and demographic statistics. However, some gaps, as noted above, remain.

## **Recommendations**

To address the identified gaps, the report recommends expanding thematic coverage through strategic partnerships and data quality protocols, prominently featuring Africa-centric priorities aligned with continental and sub-regional agendas, enhancing timeliness via standardised update cycles and real-time data integration, improving comparability through increased coverage and detailed documentation, and boosting user-friendliness with comprehensive user guidance.

## **Conclusions**

ECAStats is a strong foundational repository for African socioeconomic data, offering wide thematic and geographic coverage. To evolve into a dynamic, Africa-centric decision-support platform, the portal requires modernisation through important areas such as the first-class integration of Agenda 2063 and emerging data sources, enhanced coverage timeliness and methodological transparency, advanced visualisation tools and external API capabilities, and improved user experience through guidance resources. By implementing these targeted system recommendations, options, and enhancement proposals, ECAStats can evolve into a dynamic, accessible, and policy-relevant platform that supports informed decision-making and maximises the development impact across Africa.

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## Background

The African Centre for Statistics (ACS), part of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), plays a key role in ensuring that decisions about Africa's future are based on solid evidence. To support this mission, the ACS created the ECA Statistical Data Portal (ECAStats), an online platform that brings together socioeconomic data from across the continent.

ECAStats is designed to be more than a database. It is a "living" repository, meaning that it is constantly updated as current information becomes available from both national and international sources. This ensures that policymakers, researchers, journalists, and the public can access the latest insights into Africa's economic and social development issues. Through ECAStats, users can find a wide range of indicators, from GDP growth and trade statistics to health, education, and gender data. By centralising this information, the portal aims to reduce fragmentation and provide a single, trusted hub for African statistics.

However, feedback from stakeholders shows that the portal is not yet perfect. Some users have pointed out gaps in coverage (missing countries or sectors), usability issues (difficulty in navigating or interpreting data), and challenges with integration (linking ECAStats to other systems or sources). Because of these shortcomings, certain users still turn to alternative platforms for their data needs.

Recognising these challenges, the ACS has made improving the ECAStats a priority. The Commission is committed to ensuring that the portal meets the growing demand for technology-enabled and high-quality statistical products. To achieve this, both internal and external audits are being conducted to establish baselines for the available content and the portal's functionality, assess performance against international standards of quality, accessibility, and credibility, and provide a roadmap with measurable targets to strengthen relevance, usability, interoperability, and adoption across Africa.

## Objectives

This report aims to provide information to answer the following questions:

1. Does the data cover the required scope, number of countries, and time periods?
2. Are the data relevant to the continent's problems?
3. Is the data timely enough to act upon?
4. Can users compare data across countries and years?
5. Can users easily access and understand the data?

## Measures

The audit focuses on five key areas summarised below which together provide a comprehensive framework for evaluating how well the platform functions as a continental data resource, highlighting not only the breadth and quality of the information it contains but also how accessible, current, and analytically useful it is for a wide range of users.

| Theme             | Coverage                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Relevance                                                                                                                                                                              | Timeliness                                                                                                                            | Comparability                                                                                                                                                                                            | User-friendliness                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Definition        | The breadth and depth of data available across countries, sectors, and themes.                                                                                                                            | The extent to which the data and indicators provided by the portal align with the needs of policymakers, researchers, and development practitioners.                                   | The degree to which data is updated regularly and made available within a timeframe that allows it to inform decisions effectively.   | The extent to which data from the portal can be reliably compared across countries, regions, and time periods.                                                                                           | How easily diverse types of users (policy analysts, journalists, students, civil society) can access, navigate, and interpret the portal's data.                                                                          |
| Measurement focus | <p>Geographic scope (number of African countries represented).</p> <p>Sectoral scope (economic, social, environmental, governance indicators).</p> <p>Level of disaggregation (national, subnational,</p> | <p>Does the portal provide information that directly supports evidence-based decision-making for development priorities?</p> <p>Are the datasets tailored to regional and national</p> | <p>Lag time between data collection and publication.</p> <p>Responsiveness to emerging issues (e.g., economic shocks, pandemics).</p> | <p>Use of standardized definitions, classifications, and methodologies.</p> <p>Consistency of indicators across datasets.</p> <p>Ability to benchmark countries against regional or global averages.</p> | <p>Intuitive interface and search functions.</p> <p>Availability of visualizations (charts, maps, dashboards).</p> <p>Accessibility features (language options, mobile compatibility).</p> <p>Clarity of metadata and</p> |

| Theme | Coverage                                                                                       | Relevance                                                                                                                              | Timeliness | Comparability                                                         | User-friendliness                      |
|-------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
|       | gender, age, rural/urban).<br><br>Completeness of datasets (few gaps vs. many missing values). | contexts, rather than generic or outdated?<br><br>How well do the indicators reflect current policy agendas (e.g., SDGs, Agenda 2063)? |            | Transparency about differences in data sources or collection methods. | documentation to guide interpretation. |

## Identification of gaps

### Coverage

This section discusses the breadth of the countries, sectors and topics represented.

#### *Breadth of indicators available*

Table 1 offers a panoramic view of the scale, depth, and completeness of the data available on the 25 topics areas. The dataset spans more than five decades (1970–2025) and covers up to 54 African countries, with most thematic areas achieving full or near-complete coverage. Several domains stand out because of their sheer volume of indicators and data points.

Agriculture, forestry, and fisheries is the largest traditional statistical domain, with 691 indicators and over 729,000 data points, reflecting the long-standing importance of agricultural statistics and the availability of annual time series data across most countries. Similarly, National Accounts and Population each exceed 200,000 data points, with high data points per indicator ratios (2,682 and 2,829, respectively), indicating consistent annual reporting and deep historical coverage.

The SDGs category dwarfs all others with 4,800 indicators and nearly one million data points, which is expected given the breadth of the SDG framework. However, the average of 203 data points per indicator suggests that many SDG indicators are sparsely populated, reflecting uneven reporting across the targets and years.

Other domains show strong depth despite having fewer indicators. For example, banking, insurance, and financial statistics have only five indicators, but each has more than 3,000 data points, indicating long time series across nearly all countries. International trade also shows high density, with 3,400 data points per indicator, which likely reflects monthly or quarterly reporting.

However, some areas have clear data gaps. Science, technology, and innovation include only one indicator, cover only 27 countries, and have 67% coverage, highlighting a major weakness in continental data availability. Tourism, the Balance of Payments, and Mining, manufacturing, and construction also show reduced country coverage or shorter time spans, suggesting structural challenges in data collection.

The time periods vary significantly across the domains. Some began in 1970 (e.g. agriculture, education, and labour), while others started much later, Balance of Payments and International Trade began in 2000, and Science and Innovation only in 1996. The end years also differ: Energy stops at 2020, whereas most others extend to 2024 or 2025. This variation complicates cross-domain comparisons and limits the ability to construct harmonised long-term trends.

The breadth and depth of the dataset create strong opportunities for long-term trend analysis, cross-country comparisons and evidence-based policymaking. However, the uneven distribution of indicators, data points, and country coverage across the domains requires careful interpretation. Africa-wide aggregates may reflect different subsets of countries depending on the indicator, and comparisons across themes may be distorted by differences in time periods or reporting frequency. Sparse domains highlight areas where statistical systems may require targeted investments to improve their coverage and consistency. Given the diversity of indicators and reporting periods, clear metadata and methodological documentation are essential to ensure that users can accurately interpret the data and avoid misinterpretations. Overall, the table underscores both the strengths of the dataset and the challenges arising from its uneven availability across thematic areas.

Table 1: Snapshot of topics in ECASStats

|    | Topic                                    | Indicators | Data points | Data points per indicator | Earliest | Latest | Range (years) | Countries | Coverage |
|----|------------------------------------------|------------|-------------|---------------------------|----------|--------|---------------|-----------|----------|
| 1  | Agriculture, forestry, fisheries         | 691        | 729,684     | 1,056                     | 1970     | 2023   | 53            | 54        | 100%     |
| 2  | Balance of payments                      | 373        | 235,481     | 631                       | 2000     | 2025   | 25            | 50        | 93%      |
| 3  | Banking, insurance, financial statistics | 5          | 15,387      | 3,077                     | 1970     | 2024   | 54            | 54        | 100%     |
| 4  | Climate change                           | 154        | 94,855      | 616                       | 1980     | 2024   | 44            | 54        | 100%     |
| 5  | Development indicators                   | 9          | 5,391       | 599                       | 1990     | 2024   | 34            | 54        | 100%     |
| 6  | Education                                | 66         | 82,422      | 1,249                     | 1970     | 2025   | 55            | 54        | 100%     |
| 7  | Energy                                   | 122        | 32,913      | 270                       | 1980     | 2020   | 40            | 54        | 100%     |
| 8  | Environment                              | 21         | 19,164      | 913                       | 1970     | 2022   | 52            | 54        | 100%     |
| 9  | Gender statistics                        | 64         | 29,962      | 468                       | 1970     | 2024   | 54            | 54        | 100%     |
| 10 | Government finance statistics            | 52         | 29,031      | 558                       | 1970     | 2025   | 55            | 54        | 100%     |
| 11 | Health                                   | 27         | 47,040      | 1,742                     | 1990     | 2024   | 34            | 54        | 100%     |
| 12 | Information society and digitization     | 70         | 30,989      | 443                       | 1970     | 2024   | 54            | 54        | 100%     |
| 13 | International trade - main indicators    | 24         | 81,589      | 3,400                     | 2000     | 2024   | 24            | 54        | 100%     |

|    | Topic                                                      | Indicators | Data points | Data points per indicator | Earliest | Latest | Range (years) | Countries | Coverage |
|----|------------------------------------------------------------|------------|-------------|---------------------------|----------|--------|---------------|-----------|----------|
| 14 | Labour                                                     | 41         | 64,679      | 1,578                     | 1970     | 2025   | 55            | 54        | 100%     |
| 15 | Living conditions, poverty and cross-cutting social issues | 17         | 2,917       | 172                       | 1980     | 2023   | 43            | 54        | 100%     |
| 16 | Migration                                                  | 157        | 85,961      | 548                       | 1970     | 2025   | 55            | 54        | 100%     |
| 17 | Mining, manufacturing and construction                     | 153        | 21,993      | 144                       | 1990     | 2021   | 31            | 54        | 100%     |
| 18 | National accounts                                          | 79         | 211,864     | 2,682                     | 1970     | 2025   | 55            | 54        | 100%     |
| 19 | Population                                                 | 74         | 209,341     | 2,829                     | 1970     | 2025   | 55            | 54        | 100%     |
| 20 | Prices                                                     | 40         | 77,442      | 1,936                     | 1980     | 2025   | 45            | 54        | 100%     |
| 21 | Science, technology and innovation                         | 1          | 233         | 233                       | 1996     | 2023   | 27            | 36        | 67%      |
| 22 | SDGs                                                       | 4,800      | 972,469     | 203                       | 1970     | 2025   | 55            | 54        | 100%     |
| 23 | Social protection                                          | 54         | 22,052      | 408                       | 1985     | 2025   | 40            | 54        | 100%     |
| 24 | Tourism                                                    | 16         | 15,008      | 938                       | 1988     | 2024   | 36            | 53        | 98%      |
| 25 | Transport                                                  | 7          | 2,339       | 334                       | 1980     | 2023   | 43            | 54        | 100%     |

As a case study, Table 2 further drills down one topic, banking, insurance, financial statistics, which has five indicators. This table shows a stark contrast in the data availability across the five monetary and financial indicators. Exchange rates are by far the most complete series, with 14,104 data points covering all 54 countries continuously from 1970 to 2024, making it one of the most robust long-term- financial datasets available. In contrast, the four interest rate indicators, namely, deposit, discount, lending, and central bank rates, are far more limited. They cover much shorter periods (mostly 2005–2015) and have significantly lower country coverage. Deposit rates include 507 data points across 49 countries, whereas discount rates cover only 29 countries. Lending rates reach 40 countries, and central bank policy rates are the sparsest, with only 84 data points across nine countries, representing only a 17% coverage rate. This unevenness highlights the substantial gaps in the available data on these topics.

Table 2: Snapshot of the Banking, insurance, financial statistics

|   | Topic                            | Data points | Earliest | Latest | Data period | Countries | Coverage |
|---|----------------------------------|-------------|----------|--------|-------------|-----------|----------|
| 1 | Exchange rate, period average    | 14,104      | 1970     | 2024   | 54          | 54        | 100%     |
| 2 | Deposit rate (%)                 | 507         | 2005     | 2015   | 10          | 49        | 91%      |
| 3 | Discount rate (%)                | 431         | 2000     | 2015   | 15          | 29        | 54%      |
| 4 | Interest rate - lending (%)      | 351         | 2005     | 2015   | 10          | 40        | 74%      |
| 5 | Interest rate - Central Bank (%) | 84          | 2005     | 2015   | 10          | 9         | 17%      |

### Scope

Table 1 indicates that the database provides information on 25 topics with a wide range of indicators. The statistics presented cover all categories under the UNSD classification, except for statistical infrastructure and methodology, and strategic and managerial activities. In terms of sectoral coverage, relevant indicators that are not available include measures of governance, justice and security, housing and urban development, and disaster risk and resilience.

### Relevance

This section discusses how well ECASStats aligns with the continent’s pressing development needs, such as rapid population growth, learning poverty, gender inequality, the demographic dividend, and Agenda 2063, and how it impacts the design and evaluation of policies targeting the resolution of these issues.

### *Policy and impact*

ECASStats is a strong foundation for African socio-economic data, but it remains primarily a repository rather than a full-spectrum decision-support platform. The database performs strongly in the early stages of the data value chain, that is, data collection and dissemination, but shows gaps in the later stages, such as policy integration and impact tracking. The table below summarises the strengths and limitations across the four stages.

| Stage                                             | Strengths:                                                                                                                                                       | Limitations:                                                                                                                                                                             | Summary                                                          |
|---------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Data collection and aggregation</b>            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Pulls from national statistical offices and international sources.</li><li>• Covers a wide range of indicators</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Quality and frequency of updates depend on national capacity.</li><li>• Some indicators are missing or outdated for certain countries.</li></ul> | Strong foundation, but uneven coverage across regions            |
| <b>Statistical processing and standardization</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Indicators are categorised and structured for easy access</li></ul>                                                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Methodological notes are often brief.</li><li>• Limited documentation on statistical adjustments or imputation methods.</li></ul>                | Moderate completeness; needs deeper methodological transparency. |
| <b>Policy integration and decision support</b>    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Data aligns with SDGs, and Agenda 2063.</li><li>• Can inform planning and monitoring frameworks.</li></ul>               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• No built-in policy simulation or scenario modelling tools.</li><li>• Not directly linked to national dashboards or</li></ul>                     | Partial integration; not yet a full policy support platform.     |

| Stage                                 | Strengths:                                                                                                | Limitations:                                                                                                                                                                     | Summary                                      |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|
|                                       |                                                                                                           | planning systems.                                                                                                                                                                |                                              |
| <b>Impact monitoring and feedback</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Time series data allows for tracking progress over time</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No tools for evaluating policy outcomes or feedback loops.</li> <li>Lacks visualisation of impact pathways or causal analysis.</li> </ul> | Limited functionality for impact evaluation. |

The portal serves as a regional statistical portal designed to provide socio-economic data on African nations. It performs strongly as a central repository, bringing together a wide range of indicators from multiple sources, making it a valuable entry point for accessing continental statistics. However, the portal's functionality remains largely limited to static data presentation, with few interactive features that allow users to customise or analyse the information in depth. Data management practices also indicate areas for improvement. Update cycles are not always timely, documentation is inconsistent, and integration with emerging data sources, such as satellite imagery, mobile data, or real-time economic indicators, is absent.

#### *Limited API for external users*

The ECASStats portal uses API for internal operations but currently has limited support for API use by external users. This feature could increase the usage of the portal by more advanced users and for a wider variety of purposes, as using APIs over manually downloading data offers significant advantages in terms of automation, efficiency and accuracy.

#### *Lack of first-class integration of Agenda 2063*

An Agenda 2063 dashboard is available under data products but is not featured on the main page as a topic, nor are the indicators provided on the country pages. its current positioning does not

provide the same level of visibility or integration as the SDGs. This raises an important question about whether the platform can truly position itself as Africa-centric. Agenda 2063 is the African Union's flagship framework for continental transformation, and its indicators reflect priorities that are uniquely rooted in Africa's development vision, ranging from regional integration and governance to cultural renaissance and shared prosperity. When these indicators are not featured prominently, the platform risks appearing to be aligned primarily with global agendas, such as the SDGs, rather than with Africa's strategic commitments.

### *Data to monitor and address continent-specific challenges*

Given the continent's unique demographic and economic challenges and the opportunity to harness the demographic dividend, useful indicators such as vulnerability, inequality, pre-primary education, foundational learning, youth not in education, employment, or training, morbidity and mortality of the working-age population, savings behaviour, irregular migration, and forced displacement are also not available. These indicators are central to understanding whether Africa is on track to convert its rapidly growing youth population into a productive and resilient workforce. Without them, policymakers lack the ability to diagnose the structural barriers facing young people, monitor human capital-formation, and anticipate pressures on labour markets, social protection systems, and public services. The limited availability of this data also weakens the continent's capacity to respond to emerging risks, from climate-driven displacement to rising inequality, and limit the ability to design integrated policies that address the root causes of vulnerability. The absence of these indicators means that some of the most urgent and transformative dimensions of Africa's development story remain statistically invisible, undermining both strategic planning and the continent's long-term-aspirations.

In addition, there is population data on the age group 15-24 years which aligns with the global definition of youth; however, there is no category for 15-35 years, which aligns with the continent's definition of youth. This omission has important implications for analysis and policymaking. The African Union and many national governments frame youth-focused-strategies, employment programmes, education reforms, and demographic dividend planning around the 15-35 definition because it better reflects the continent's social and economic realities, including longer school-to-work transitions and delayed entry into stable employment. Without data aligned to this continental definition, users are forced to approximate or manually reconstruct the 15-35 cohort, which introduces inconsistencies and reduces the accuracy of youth-related indicators in the data. This also limits the platform's relevance for AU-aligned monitoring frameworks and makes it harder for policymakers to design interventions that target the full spectrum of Africa's youth population.

### *Data sources*

The ECASStats portal relies on data collected and provided by external institutions. As such, the platform is currently overly focused on traditional, survey-based-, and administrative datasets, that is widely available. However, this portal limits its ability to address rapidly moving- or newly emerging policy challenges. Repopulating it with emerging data sources, such as satellite imagery, citizen data, mobility data, fintech transaction data, social media analytics, and high-frequency price or climate observations, would make it far more responsive to contemporary needs than it currently is. Integrating these sources alongside conventional statistics would allow users to explore how the two types of data complement each other, for example, using satellite-derived crop estimates to validate agricultural production figures or mobility data to enrich migration and labour market analysis. To make this shift effective, the platform would also need to provide clear guidance, tooltips, and use case- examples that show users when and how emerging data can fill gaps, improve timeliness, or offer early warning forecasts. This combination of new data streams and practical guidance would transform the platform into a more dynamic, future-oriented resource capable of supporting evidence-based responses to evolving African policy issues.

### *Levels of disaggregation*

The portal is also limited with respect to disaggregated data, offering breakdowns mainly by sex. This narrow approach significantly restricts the depth of analysis that users can perform. In modern statistical practice, meaningful insights often come from examining how outcomes differ across multiple dimensions, such as age, geographic location, income level, disability status, education, urban–rural residence, and other socio-economic characteristics. When disaggregation is limited, significant inequalities may remain hidden. For example, national averages may mask large disparities between rural and urban populations or among different age groups. Without disaggregated data, policymakers cannot accurately identify the most vulnerable communities or areas where interventions should be targeted.

### *Data for decision-making*

The data provide abundant information that can be used for decision making. On the landing page, some statistics are provided, and a list of the topics at a glance is tailored for users who come to the database for specific indicators. However, a dynamic space on the webpage reflecting emerging issues and policy areas of focus, such as the AU theme for the year or the focus of global convenings, such as COP30, would provide information to make the platform feel more current

and responsive, helping less technical users quickly connect the available data to real-time continental debates and policy agendas.

### *Utilisation for policy and planning*

When data points used for decision-making come from different time periods, as is the case for some indicators in the database, it becomes challenging to create coherent or synergistic policies. Policymakers may end up comparing indicators that do not reflect the same economic, social, or environmental realities, leading to mismatched priorities and fragmented interventions. For example, designing an employment strategy using 2024 labour data alongside 2018 energy statistics or 2015 financial indicators means that the evidence base is fundamentally misaligned; one dataset reflects current conditions, while the others describe a world that may no longer exist. This temporal inconsistency undermines the ability to accurately diagnose problems, coordinate actions across sectors, and evaluate the impact of reforms. Ultimately, without synchronised and up-to-date data, policies risk working at cross purposes-, wasting resources, and failing to address the challenges they are meant to solve.

Furthermore, issues related to timeliness, comparability, and user-friendliness which are discussed in subsequent sections, require attention to maximise the use of the portal's data by policymakers and planners who are not technical users.

## **Timeliness**

This section discusses whether the portal delivers updates quickly enough to inform urgent policy decisions.

### *Data recency*

The portal relies on data provided by external agencies which influences the portal's data recency. Table 1 reveals that the timeliness of data across thematic areas is highly uneven, with some domains updated through 2024–2025 and others lagging significantly behind. Core areas such as population, national accounts, government finance, labour, education, and exchange rates show strong, up-to-date coverage, making them suitable for current policy analysis. In contrast, several sectors, including energy, environment, manufacturing, and especially monetary and financial indicators, have data that end between 2015 and 2022, limiting their usefulness for understanding present-day conditions. The interest rate series are particularly outdated, with most indicators ending in 2015 and covering only a fraction of the countries, which severely constrains their value for macroeconomic monitoring and regional comparisons. This uneven timeliness means that

cross-sectoral analysis can be misleading, as “latest year” values often refer to different points in time, and users must carefully verify how current each indicator is before drawing conclusions.

While not related to indicators per se, the page that is supposed to list the websites of the national statistical officers does not have the list and the description *“Most of African countries have official websites where country data are published. The compiled list of web addresses area available in this group. Angola, DRC, South Sudan and Somalia do not have functioning website at the moment. Last update: 23 April 2019.”* This implies that the information is not timely which undermines the credibility and usefulness of the portal by signalling that even basic reference pages are outdated and not actively maintained, raising concerns about the overall reliability and currency of the platform’s content.

### *Responsiveness*

The lack of recent data for several indicators and some countries suggests that the portal has limited capacity to respond to emerging issues such as economic shocks, pandemics, natural disasters, or sudden policy shifts. When data are outdated by several years, they cannot capture rapid changes in socioeconomic conditions or provide timely insights during crises. For example, during events such as COVID-19, food price spikes, or currency devaluations, policymakers and analysts need up-to-date information to understand the impacts, allocate resources, and design targeted and effective interventions. If the portal relies on infrequent updates or long lags in data reporting, it becomes less useful as a real-time decision-support tool. Instead of helping users monitor evolving trends or assess the immediate effects of shocks, it offers only a historical snapshot that may no longer reflect current realities. This undermines its relevance for governments, researchers, and development partners who depend on timely evidence to guide their responses to emerging or fast-evolving challenges.

## **Comparability**

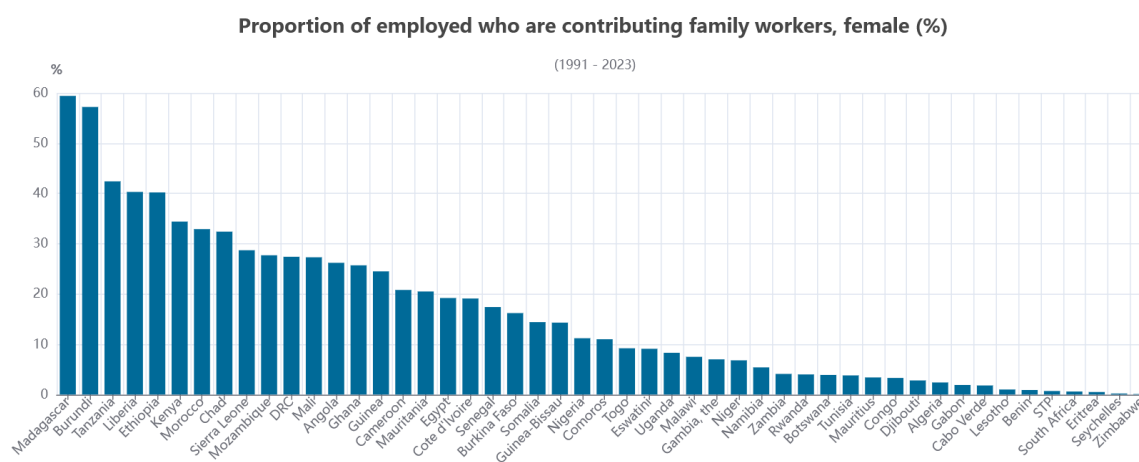
This section examines how well users can compare indicators across countries and track trends over time.

### *Comparison of aggregated indicators*

The aggregation of indicators raises questions about how to interpret differences across aggregated indicators computed using different numbers or sets of countries. For instance, what

caveat is required for comparing trends in the “share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector (%)” based on 37 countries and the “educational attainment (minimum lower secondary) of the population aged 25 and older, female (%)” based on 41 countries? When two indicators aggregate data for Africa, but each is calculated from a distinct set of countries because of missing data, the resulting trends are difficult to interpret. Changes over time may reflect shifts in the countries included rather than real movements in the underlying indicators. For example, if one year’s average includes several large economies and the next year excludes them because of missing data, the trend line may rise or fall simply because the composition of countries has changed. This could create a moving denominator problem if the “Africa-wide” trend does not measure the same population from one period to the next. This also means that the two indicators cannot be directly compared because each reflects a different subset of the continent with potentially different economic structures, population sizes, or regional patterns. As a result, any apparent divergence or convergence between the indicators may be an artefact of inconsistent country coverage, rather than a genuine policy-relevant trend.

### *Comparison of data from different time periods*



Comparing countries in a bar chart when their data points come from different years, as shown in the figure above, introduces a fundamental problem of comparability. A bar chart assumes that each bar represents the same point in time, but if one country’s figure is from 1991 and another’s from 2023, the visual comparison can be misleading because the underlying conditions, population size, economic structure, and policy environment may have changed dramatically over that period. Differences in data collection cycles, methodological updates, and the impact of shocks such as pandemics or recessions further distort the picture, making it unclear whether the observed differences reflect actual cross-country variations or simply the timing of measurement.

Consequently, the chart risks overstating or understating disparities and can lead policymakers to draw inaccurate conclusions unless the time lags- are explicitly addressed or harmonised.

#### *Benchmarking for country-specific comparisons*

The limited interactivity features prevent countries from comparing themselves with a tailored set of peers, such as nations with similar population sizes, income levels, geographic conditions, or development challenges. Instead, the portal's default bar charts and maps automatically compare each country to the entire continent, producing broad comparisons that may obscure more relevant patterns. This is not always analytically meaningful or useful for users who require more specific benchmarks. For example, a smaller island state may find little value in being compared with larger economies, whereas a landlocked country may benefit more from benchmarking against nations with similar structural constraints. Without the ability to filter, group, or customise comparison sets, users cannot conduct nuanced analyses or generate insights that reflect specific policy questions. This limitation reduces the portal's usefulness for evidence-based planning, peer learning, and regional benchmarking.

#### *Documentation gaps*

Some indicators lack detailed methodological notes, and this absence creates significant challenges for anyone attempting to make meaningful cross-country comparisons using data reported by national statistical offices. Even when countries report the same indicator, they may use different definitions, data collection methods, sampling frames, reference periods, or estimation techniques. Without clear methodological documentation, users cannot easily determine whether variations in the numbers reflect real differences in socio-economic conditions or simply differences in how the data were generated.

For example, poverty estimates may be based on different national poverty lines, labour force indicators may use varying age brackets or survey designs, and education statistics may rely on administrative data in one country and household surveys in another. When methodological notes are missing or incomplete, these discrepancies remain invisible, leading to misleading comparisons and potentially flawed policy conclusions.

Detailed metadata are essential for ensuring transparency, interpretability, and analytical rigor. Without it, the portal risks presenting data that appear comparable on the surface but are not harmonised in practice, limiting its usefulness for regional analysis, benchmarking, and evidence-based decision-making across Africa.

### *Alignment of international and national data sources*

Under the country profiles, the data presented are from various sources. The data source is not presented on the page with the statistics, but it is revealed once the user clicks on the tab and is taken to the page which has data visualisation for all countries presented. Data presented from international sources may differ from the official statistics of national statistical offices. For instance, the official 2025 projected population figure from the Ghana Statistical Service is 33,742,380, while the ECASStats figure from the UN Population Division is 35,064,272.50, a difference of approximately 1.3 million people. A discrepancy of this magnitude between Ghana's own projections and the ECASStats figures would create a very specific set of challenges for national policymakers who would want to use the ECASStats portal. Such discrepancies may limit the use of ECASStats indicators by certain data users create inconsistencies across institutions that rely on different data sources. It may also require national data producers to reconcile national data with international statistics, thereby reducing the incentive to use ECASStats.

## **User-friendliness**

This section discusses the portal's interface, visualisation tools, accessibility features, and usage by various users.

### *Definition and measurement of indicators*

Definitions are not consistently provided for all indicators. When the database fails to provide definitions or measurement notes for some indicators, it creates a major usability problem, even if the definitions are stable over time. Users may not be able to confidently interpret or compare indicators when they do not know exactly what is being measured, how it was constructed, or what assumptions underlie them. This may require users to make assumptions about the methodology or search for external documentation from the original data source, undermining efficiency. The absence of definitions for only some indicators is especially confusing because it creates an inconsistent user experience; some data points feel transparent and reliable, whereas others feel incomplete or ambiguous.

Presumably, the variables without notes may have names that appear to be self-explanatory, but they may not be straightforward for all nontechnical users. Some indicators may be ambiguous, even for technical users. For instance, without clear information on what the denominator is, the indicator "proportion of employed who are contributing family workers, female (%)" could either

be interpreted as *female contributing family workers/all contributing family workers* or as *female contributing family workers/all female workers*.

#### *Guidance of interpretation of aggregated indicators*

The aggregation of data for indicators with incomplete coverage also requires methodological guidance. In the case of aggregations with missing countries, it is unclear what the rule is in computing the aggregation; that is, are they weighted averages for representativeness, or is the missing data extrapolated. Aggregated statistics might rise or fall simply because countries with high or low rates drop out of the dataset in certain years. This creates a moving denominator problem, as trends may reflect shifting country compositions, rather than genuine changes in development indicators.

#### *Guidance on representativeness of aggregated data*

The aggregation of data from different countries that represent only a subset of the continent raises important questions about how representative these figures are and how they should be interpreted. When regional or continental averages are calculated using incomplete coverage, the resulting numbers may reflect the characteristics of the countries with available data rather than the realities of Africa as a whole. For example, if larger or more statistically capable countries dominate the dataset, the aggregate may skew toward their economic or social profiles, masking the experiences of smaller, fragile, or data-poor- states. Conversely, if only a handful of countries report on a particular indicator in a given year, the “continental” figure may be little more than a partial snapshot rather than a meaningful benchmark for comparison purposes. This inconsistency makes it difficult for users to compare indicators across themes, track progress over time, or confidently draw policy conclusions from the data. Ultimately, without clarity on which countries are included and how gaps affect the results, aggregated figures risk being misinterpreted or overstated, undermining their value for evidence-based decision-making.

Furthermore, the map is the only option that provides information on which countries have missing data however, this is not an efficient way to determine the composition of the aggregate figure. Users who want to understand exactly which countries contribute to the reported totals must manually cross-check the map, which can be time-consuming and prone to error. A more transparent solution would be to provide a clear list or table of countries included in each aggregate, alongside an indication of those excluded because of missing data points. This will allow users to interpret the figures with greater confidence, ensure comparability across regions, and reduce the risk of misinterpretation.

### *Hierarchy for searching in the topics page*

The search function allows searches by topic first under the Topics tab. Indicators can then be searched once a topic is selected. This requires that users have knowledge of the indicator and the topic that it falls under which may not necessarily be the case. The search function is structured in a way that requires users to begin by selecting a topic before they can search for specific indicators, which assumes a level of prior knowledge that many users may not possess. This design works well for experts who already understand how indicators are classified, but it creates barriers for students, policymakers, journalists, or casual users who may know what they want to find but not where to find it. Casual users, in particular, may find the sheer volume of indicators intimidating. Without clear guidance, it can be difficult to know where to begin. The link to the page that makes it possible to search by indicator and topic is at the bottom of the webpage, making it more likely that the topics page which has the hierarchical search function, would be the more frequently used option.

### *Searching in population pyramid page*

The Population Pyramid page under Data Products presents pyramids alphabetically by country. However, the interface does not currently provide a search or filter function, which means users must manually scroll through the full list to locate a specific country.

### *Searching in data products page*

Under the Data Products page, clicking on the profile for the options presents takes the user to the list of countries, requiring the user to further manually search for the indicator instead of being linked directly to the profile of the thematic area that was selected.

### *Ordering of indicators*

The arrangement of indicators within topics is also unclear and not user-friendly. For instance, under population, life expectancy at birth - female is the second indicator on the list, while life expectancy at birth - male and life expectancy at birth - total are the 27th and 28th indicators on the list, respectively. Similar indicators should be grouped for ease of reference. This scattered placement forces users to scroll through long lists, search manually, and piece together related indicators that should logically appear next to each other on a list. When similar or complementary indicators are not grouped together, it increases the risk of overlooking important variables and

makes comparisons unnecessarily cumbersome. Organising indicators into coherent clusters, such as grouping all life expectancy measures, would significantly improve usability and help users quickly identify the full set of relevant data points within a topic.

The SDG tab features 4,800 indicators which are listed without subcategories, making the dataset difficult to navigate and forcing users to manually sift through a lengthy list to find thematically related indicators, ultimately reducing usability.

### *Help page and resources*

The site lacks a dedicated help or FAQs page, and this absence significantly limits its accessibility for non-specialists. Without clear guidance, step-by-step tutorials, or introductory explanations, many users may struggle to understand how the portal is structured, how indicators are organised, or how to navigate the search functions effectively. Workshops and training sessions could help, but these are not always available or accessible, meaning that users are left to figure out the system independently. This creates a steep learning curve and risks excluding the audiences who would benefit most from easy-to-use, reliable data. A well-designed help section with FAQs, short video walkthroughs, and practical examples would dramatically improve usability and ensure that the platform serves a broader and more diverse community of users.

Explanations are also needed to provide basic information on what the summary statistics – indicators, aggregates, and data points – represent. For instance, in the case of indicators, a definition is required to explain what an indicator is. The number of indicators under the SDGs (4,800) is substantially higher than the number of indicators in the SDG framework which could cause some confusion.

### *Data visualisation tools*

While the portal provides useful visualisations, such as charts, tables, and maps, it does not yet offer advanced analytics or customisable dashboards under topics, which limits its ability to support deeper, user-driven exploration of the data. Many modern data platforms allow users to filter indicators dynamically, build comparative views across countries or regions, or create time-series analyses.

The population pyramids do not include either data labels or x-axis labels. While the overall shape of the pyramid is informative, the lack of labels reduces the clarity and usability of the charts, making it difficult for users to interpret precise values or compare age groups across countries. Without numerical references, readers are left to approximate proportions visually, which can lead

to misinterpretation or limit the analytical value of the visualisation. This limitation is particularly significant in contexts where accurate demographic insights are required for policy planning, academic research, or program evaluation. Enhancing the visualisations with interactive features such as tooltips, hover-over data points, or filter options would improve their utility and allow users to extract more meaningful insights from the data.

#### *Features for advanced users*

Alternatively, some audiences might find the platform too simplistic for their needs. For instance, researchers who require access to microdata, such as household-level survey files, anonymised census records, labour force data, or geocoded information, will find that the portal does not provide the depth or granularity necessary for advanced statistical analysis. These users often require raw, disaggregated data to run econometric models, conduct impact evaluations, or explore spatial and distributional patterns that cannot be captured using aggregated indicators alone. Without links to microdata repositories, metadata documentation, or guidance on how to access underlying datasets from national statistical offices or regional data hubs, the platform risks being perceived as a high-level reference tool rather than a comprehensive resource for rigorous academic or policy research.

#### *Limited storytelling*

The portal provides numerical indicators, but it does not always offer plain language explanations or contextual information that many users need to interpret the numbers meaningfully. This gap is even more significant in the context of low statistical literacy, which remains a challenge across much of the continent. When users are presented with raw figures, percentages, ratios, indices, or time-series trends, without clear explanations of what they mean, how they were calculated, or why they matter, the data become far less accessible. Many people may not understand the difference between nominal and real values, per capita measures, or how to interpret changes over time. Without guidance, even well-intentioned users can misread trends, draw incorrect conclusions, or overlook important nuances.

#### *Language*

The portal has English and French versions, which are the official ECA languages. However, this restricts its usage by millions of Africans in nations where neither of these languages is the official language. By excluding these linguistic groups, the platform unintentionally narrows its reach and

reduces its usefulness for policymakers, researchers, students, journalists, and civil society actors operating in non-Anglophone and non-Francophone contexts. This language gap also undermines the goal of creating a truly inclusive, continent-wide data resource.

## Recommendations

This section translates the findings discussed above into recommendations organised by area of focus. The following system recommendations, options, and enhancement proposals are provided to strengthen ECASStats in the areas of coverage, relevance, timeliness, comparability, and user-friendliness and to maximise its usage and policy impact across Africa. In terms of prioritisation, providing methodological documentation and guidance and a comprehensive help page are recommended as immediate next steps. Then the addition of more data storytelling and interactive visualisations can follow. Infrastructural and system changes which would require more intensive investments can be longer-term targets.

### Expanding Coverage and Thematic Scope

#### *Systems Recommendations*

- Prioritise underrepresented domains, such as science, technology, innovation, tourism, and financial indicators, by allocating dedicated resources and expertise, and collaborating with relevant data producers.
- Establish strategic partnerships with African universities, research centres, ministries, and international agencies to leverage existing data and research capabilities to increase data coverage.
- Implement targeted strategies to address missing data for specific countries and years, including outreach to national statistical offices and the use of emerging data sources.
- Establish data quality assurance protocols to systematically identify and fill temporal and geographic data gaps.

#### *Options*

- Utilise imputation techniques and model-based estimates to address missing data for certain countries and years where direct data collection is challenging.

- Introduce reliability flags and completeness indicators for countries and time period for indicators.
- Develop partnerships with regional data hubs to share and harmonize data, reducing gaps caused by inconsistent reporting.

#### *Enhancement Proposals*

- Implement capacity-building programs focused on data collection and reporting for national statistical offices.
- Develop a centralised missing data monitoring dashboard to track data availability by country and year.
- Promote open data initiatives for instance through a multi-stakeholder advisory group (with members from government, academia, civil society, private sector) and platforms to facilitate research, transparency, and data sharing among data producers for instance through a centralized repository where datasets can be easily accessed and downloaded.
- Encourage the use of emerging data sources, such as citizen data, administrative records, and big data analytics, to supplement traditional datasets and reduce missing data issues.

### **Increasing Relevance for Policymaking and Integrating Africa-Centric Priorities**

#### *Systems Recommendations*

- Position the portal as Africa-centric by prominently featuring AU flagship metrics alongside the SDGs, ensuring alignment with continental priorities. In addition, sub-regional development priorities, such as the ECOWAS 2050 Vision, can be incorporated.
- Collaborate closely with the African Union, regional economic communities, and national governments to select and harmonise indicators reflecting Africa-centric priorities.
- Add continent-relevant topic areas such as vulnerability, inequality, youth development and empowerment, and demographic dividend to support targeted policy interventions.
- Introduce API capabilities to allow automated data retrieval for integration with national systems, research tools, and media platforms.

- Develop interactive data stories and visualisation tools that highlight Africa-specific priorities, vulnerabilities, and progress towards key goals. For instance, a focus on the AU thematic area for the year, in this case water and sanitation for 2026, or feature statistics on commemorative days to raise awareness such as International Day of the African Child,
- Integrate mechanisms to regularly review and update indicators based on emerging policy challenges and continental priorities.

### *Options*

- Create real-time data stories to highlight emerging issues (for example, AU theme of the year, global summits) on the landing page to connect the data with current issues and debates. Include plain-language explanations and visual narratives to make the indicators meaningful for diverse audiences.
- Explore the integration of geospatial data, satellite imagery, qualitative data, citizen data, and other emerging data sources to complement quantitative indicators.

### *Enhancement Proposals*

- Publish regular statistical briefs on priority development indicators and key sectors using ECASStats data.
- Organise capacity-building webinars and forums to build data literacy and promote the use of the portal.
- Expand the range of disaggregated variables available in the database.

## **Increasing Timeliness and Responsiveness**

### *Systems Recommendations*

- Define standardised update cycles synchronised with international reporting timelines to ensure timely data availability.
- Establish formal partnerships and data-sharing agreements with national statistical offices and key data providers to enable real-time or near-real-time data feeds.
- Introduce mechanisms to identify and address missing data for specific countries and years promptly, including outreach and technical support to data providers.

### *Options*

- Utilize APIs and web services to integrate continuous data flows from partner agencies and international organizations.
- Employ proxy indicators, satellite data, and big data analytics to supplement traditional data sources and fill temporal gaps in the data.
- Clearly communicate update schedules and data release timelines to both the data providers and users.
- Integrate early warning systems and real-time monitoring tools to provide policymakers with timely data for decision-making during crises.

### *Enhancement Proposals*

- Publish regular update frequency reports and maintain dashboards displaying the last update dates for all datasets.
- Collaborate with regional statistical bodies and data hubs to harmonise update practices and share best practices.

## **Enhancing Comparability**

### *Systems Recommendations*

- Enhance interactivity, such as allowing users to select comparator countries, create custom groups, or apply filters. Allow filtering by countries, regions, and time periods in interactive charts.
- Publish detailed documentation on indicator construction, data sources, limitations, and statistical adjustments.
- Clearly explain how continental averages are computed, including weighting and treatment of missing data.
- Organise regional and continental workshops and training sessions to build capacity and share best practices among national statistical offices.

- Establish a comparability index or scoring system to regularly assess and report data consistency across countries and over time.

### *Options*

- Conduct periodic methodological reviews and updates to reflect evolving international standards and regional needs.
- Publish detailed metadata sheets and data dictionaries accessible to all users, clarifying indicator definitions, sources, and limitations.
- Provide targeted training programs and technical assistance to national statistical offices to improve reporting and documentation practices.

### *Enhancement Proposals*

- Ensure user-friendly and easy access to metadata, methodological notes and user feedback mechanisms.
- Host forums and conferences focused on methodological challenges, innovations, and solutions in African statistics.
- Develop and deploy automated tools for metadata generation, validation, and quality assurance.
- Encourage peer reviews, audits, and collaborative assessments of national data collection and reporting processes.
- Integrate comparability and documentation metrics to enhance transparency and inform the data users.
- Promote open documentation practices and encourage data providers to publish detailed methodological reports alongside datasets.

## **Boosting User-Friendliness**

### *Systems Recommendations*

- Develop interactive visualisations with filtering and drill-down features.

- Expand to include major languages spoken in non-Anglophone and non-Francophone African countries such as Portuguese and Arabic to increase accessibility.
- Integrate help and guidance resources, such as FAQs, tutorials, and videos, to assist users.
- Provide comprehensive user support including help pages and tutorials.

### *Options*

- Clarify indicator definitions with tooltips and glossary features.
- Enable user accounts to save preferences and share data.
- Incorporate feedback mechanisms to continuously improve the interface. Create a user feedback loop by adding “Suggest Data” and “Report Error” features to crowdsource improvements.

### *Enhancement Proposals*

- Launch tutorial videos and webinars for different user groups.
- Develop community forums for user interaction and support.
- Regularly update visualisations based on the usage of the platform and user interests.

## **Conclusions**

The ECASStats portal represents a significant achievement in consolidating African socioeconomic data into a single, accessible platform. Its extensive thematic coverage, historical depth, and integration of multiple data sources provide a solid foundation for evidence-based policymaking across the continent. However, the audit revealed that the portal’s current functionality and design fall short of its potential as a dynamic system to support informed decision-making.

The portal offers extensive coverage across thematic areas and five decades of data from all African countries, with strong completeness in core domains, such as agriculture, national accounts, and population. However, its utility is constrained by notable gaps in emerging domains such as science, technology, innovation, tourism, and financial indicators. There is also a notable prominence of Africa-centric priorities, such as Agenda 2063, vulnerability, inequality, and demographic dividends. While some datasets are current through 2024–2025, others lag significantly, undermining their timeliness and responsiveness to current needs. Inconsistencies in

coverage hinder comparability. Moreover, limited interactivity, and unclear indicator definitions in some cases, reduce user-friendliness and accessibility for both technical and non-technical data users.

To realise its vision as a transformative platform, the portal must evolve beyond data aggregation to include interactive, interoperable, and user-driven features. This requires strategic investments in modernisation, including highlighting continent-specific priority development indicators, expanding coverage to emerging policy areas, and improving update cycles. Enhancing metadata transparency, usability, and guidance resources is critical to ensure that users can effectively interpret and apply the data. Ultimately, ECASStats has the potential to become a cornerstone of Africa's data ecosystem. Achieving this will require a deliberate shift from static presentation to dynamic functionality, aligning the portal with both global best practices and Africa's unique development priorities. By addressing some of the identified functional, technical, and data management gaps and implementing these targeted system recommendations, options, and enhancement proposals. Key areas of focus include expanding coverage, integrating Africa-centric priorities, ensuring timeliness, improving comparability, and enhancing user-friendliness. Resolution of some issues would require wider collaboration with external agencies responsible for providing the data in the portal.

In conclusion, ECASStats is a strong regional platform but risks being underutilised if it primarily remains a data repository. The portal is an invaluable resource; however, it requires strategic enhancements to maximise its utility for African policy agendas. These enhancements will aid the portal to evolve into a dynamic, responsive, and accessible platform that serves as a transformative policy and impact tool to support informed decision-making across Africa.