

External Statistics Conference 2026 Data Challenge

Leveraging data for innovative
insights



Overview of the Data Challenge

- **Purpose:** Encourage university students to **leverage the potential of external statistics** to address policy-relevant topics
- **Focus:** Make use of external statistics from the **ECB Data Portal** and **BIS Data Portal** to develop an innovative project showcasing **data analysis, visualisation and communication** skills
- **Participants:** Open to **Bachelor's** and **Master's** students from **EU universities** (in teams of **2 to 3 members**)
- **Timeline:** From **28 Oct 2025** to **31 Jan 2026**. The winning teams will be notified by **end-Feb 2026**
- **Prize:** The winning teams will be **invited to present their work** at the **External Statistics Conference (ESC) 2026** in Krakow
- All participants will receive a participation certificate.

Objectives of the Data Challenge

Enhance knowledge and usage of external statistics among university students

- *Increase students' knowledge of external statistics*
- *Familiarise students with concepts and applications of external statistics*
- *Encourage exploration of the potential of external statistics to address policy-relevant topics*
- *Enhance teamwork and collaboration skills*
- *Develop students' data analysis, visualisation and communication skills*

Focus of the data challenge

*The data challenge focuses on the 2026 ESC theme: “**Evolving cross-border dynamics in a fragmented and uncertain world**”*

*Each participating team is expected to **choose a topic/research question** aligned with this theme and develop a “**ESC Data Challenge project**” to address such topic, comprising **analytical, visualization and communication** outputs*

Examples of relevant topics which could form the basis for the project include:

- the evolution of global trade and supply chains trends, including reshoring, decoupling and trade restrictions;*
- the evolution of global finance, particularly the key shifts in international financial flows and roles of international currencies as well as the growing importance of non-bank financial institutions (NBFIs);*
- the interplay of real and financial factors, especially in relation to the complex activities of multinationals (MNEs);*
- the environmental impact of cross-border activities, including carbon emissions linked to trade and foreign direct investments.*

Submission format and judging criteria

Each participating team is expected to submit a complete “**ESC Data Challenge project**” composed of the following outputs, all contributing to the final grading of the project:

1. Abstract of the ESC Data challenge project (max ½ page) (10%)

- *Objective:* Discuss the relevance of the chosen topic/question and summarize how the project explored it
- *Judging Criteria:* 1. Policy relevance of the topic; 2. Clarity of the abstract; 3. Engagement

2. Data analysis report (max. 5 pages) (40%)

- *Objective:* Provide a detailed explanation of the methodology, data sources, and main results of the analysis.
- *Judging Criteria:* 1. Methodological rigor; 2. Innovative use of key external statistics data; 3. Insightfulness of conclusions

3. Data visualizations (free format) (50%)

- *Objective:* Present insights from the datasets used in the analysis through visualizations in a format of the team's choice (e.g. charts, infographics, dashboards, poster, videos)
- *Judging Criteria:* 1. Visual appeal; 2. Storytelling and impact; 3. Innovative design/format;

Submissions are to be sent to external_statistics_conference@ecb.europa.eu by 31 Jan 2026. Please use the following subject “[ESC Data Challenge 2026 - submission] <Surnames team members>”.

Eligibility criteria

- *Open to teams of 2 to 3 students enrolled in Bachelor's or Master's programs*
- *Participants must be enrolled in a university located in the EU*
- *Submissions must make use of at least one key dataset on external statistics from the **ECB Data Portal** or the **BIS Data Portal** (see list of key datasets on next slide).*
- *In addition to using at least one of the key ECB/BIS datasets, participants are encouraged to additionally use other publicly available datasets (e.g. from Eurostat, IMF, OECD, UNCTAD, World Bank, Asian Development Bank, national statistical offices, central banks) in their projects*
- *All data used for the project must be publicly available and their source must be explicitly stated in the submission*
- *All submissions must be original, unpublished and adhere to the competition guidelines*

List of key datasets to be used

Key ECB Data Portal Datasets on external statistics

- *Balance of Payments and International Investment Position ([BPS](#))*
- *Eurostat External Trade Statistics ([TRD](#))*
- *International Reserves of the Eurosystem ([RAS](#))*
- *Exchange Rates ([EXR](#))*

Key BIS Data Portal Datasets on external statistics

- *Bilateral exchange rates ([XRU](#))*
- *Effective exchange rates ([EER](#))*
- *International banking statistics ([LBS](#) and [CBS](#))*
- *International debt securities ([IDS](#)) and debt securities statistics ([DSS](#))*

Participants support

Resources Provided:

- *An optional introductory virtual event with experts from organising institutions presenting the ESC Data Challenge will take place on **Thursday, 20 November at 14:30 Central European Time (CET)** – Frankfurt time.*
- *The meeting can be accessed via **Teams** using the following [link](#).*
- *Dedicated email for queries: external_statistics_conference@ecb.europa.eu. To guarantee timely reply please use the following subject for any question “[ESC Data Challenge 2026] <query description>”*
- *Link to material/tutorials on [ECB Data Portal](#) and [BIS Data Portal](#) usage and the various ways to download/extract data (including via SDMX/APIs)*

Prizes

Winning team: awarded to the project with the highest score

Special prize sponsored by NBP: awarded to the project showcasing the most impactful use of external statistics in analysing the Polish economy

- The members of the two winning teams will be invited to present their main findings at the ESC 2026 in Krakow. All associated costs will be covered by the organising institutions
- Souvenirs will be provided to the two teams by NBP
- Possibility to network and interact with leading practitioners in the field of external statistics

Best 5 submissions

- Awarded a certificate of excellence co-signed by the organizing institutions