

**DIME/ITDG 2014**

**DIRECTORS OF METHODOLOGY GROUP  
IT DIRECTORS GROUP  
JOINT MEETING**

**26<sup>TH</sup> AND 27<sup>TH</sup> MARCH 2014**

*Final minutes*

## ***Final minutes***

Minutes as approved by written consultation written consultation 7 July 2014 (no comments received).

### **Introduction**

This document summarises the discussion and conclusions of the DIME/ITDG joint meeting held on 26 and 27 March 2014. The conclusions are coherent with the conclusions presented at the end of the meeting and already circulated to the participants.

### **Agenda items**

#### **1. Adoption of the agenda; opening of the meeting**

Ms Kotzeva (Acting director of Eurostat Directorate B - Methodology, corporate statistical and IT services) opened the meeting. The agenda of the meeting was adopted. Eurostat explained its new organisational chart as of 1 January 2014. Eurostat highlighted how the new organisational chart has a certain number of temporary entities (task forces) to deal with specific developments (for instance the Task Force on Big Data). Eurostat informed that Quality is no longer in the domain of Directorate B but it has been allocated to two entities: the Task Force Peer Review and Unit D4 – Quality management and application to Government Finance Statistics. In terms of ESS governance Quality will remain under the remit of the DIME.

The meeting was a joint meeting of the DIME and of the ITDG. For this special reason two delegates per country were eligible for reimbursement.

#### **2. Minutes of the previous ITDG meeting**

No comments on the minutes (already approved).

#### **3. Minutes of the previous DIME meeting**

No comments on the minutes (already approved).

#### **4. Integration of DIME/ITDG activities and new ESS working group structure**

The item was introduced by Eurostat with a contribution from the UK discussant. The DIME/ITDG focussed on three areas of discussion: the regrouping of DIME and ITDG activities, the associated governance structure (directors, working group and expert group structure) and the roadmap towards the implementation of the proposed new governance.

The reactions of the participants to the proposal of regrouping of DIME and ITDG were mixed. On the one hand there was broad recognition of the common role of the DIME and the ITDG in managing the modernisation agenda and the need to concentrate on strategic issues. On the other hand several concerns were raised: how to coordinate with other directors groups; who should represent countries in the joint meeting taking into account the different work structures in Member States; other issues such as the broad scope of the integrated group (a quite large portfolio for a single country representative); the frequency of meetings; the timeliness of meeting documents considering the need for internal coordination in the Member States.

The following comments were made on the working group structure:

- Importance to keep the connection between methodology and quality;
- Location of confidentiality in the governance structure;
- Role, mandate, scope and expected level of participation to working groups;
- Proposal for an expert group on data collection;
- Establishment of working arrangements at the technical level (third layer – expert groups); new ways of collaboration would be the preferred instrument (e.g. e-meetings).

On the roadmap the importance of a collective evaluation was stressed. Several participants underlined that the evaluation of the functioning of the proposed structure comes too early in the process of implementation and that the evaluation should include an assessment of transition costs. Several participants highlighted that the proposal should be adapted to take into account the outcome of the ESS Task Force Vision 2.0.

Eventually, the DIME/ITDG stressed the importance to choose a meaningful and effective name for the integrated group (short and indicative of its purpose).

### Conclusions

The DIME/ITDG:

- Acknowledged the need for DIME and ITDG to work together on strategic issues; a consensus on how to organise the work did not emerge from the discussion. Further elaboration is needed in this direction.
- Recognised that the level and portfolio of representation by country is a challenge and requires national coordination; the participants proposed to take into account the alternative option to have back to back meetings or partly overlapping meetings of DIME and ITDG.
- Stressed that further elaboration and time should be devoted to the evaluation of the implementation of the proposed new governance (target 2015); the evaluation should be performed collectively.

- Highlighted the importance of strengthening the collaboration with other directors groups and of establishing with them collaboration mechanisms.
- Agreed on the need to further elaborate the role, mandate and scope of the governance entities, notably working groups.
- Proposed to clarify and consolidate the use of collaborative tools for meetings, notably those at technical level (e-meetings).

## 5. Annual Statistical Programme 2015

Eurostat illustrated the background of the Annual Statistical Programme (AWP) 2015, the roadmap towards its finalisation and the expected role of the DIME/ITDG with reference to its areas of competence: quality management, support of modernisation of statistical production, methodology, training, innovation and research (objective 11 and 12 of the AWP).

In the discussion, the participants highlighted: the importance to take into account, as much as possible, the outcome of the peer reviews (at least in the AWP 2016); the relevance of establishing an overview of methodological projects running in subject matter domains in order to support the methodological work. For Big Data an ESS approach to the access of data is advisable. Eventually, the participants invited Eurostat to have a proactive approach in supporting the statistical dimension in the Horizon 2020 research programme.

### Conclusions

The DIME/ITDG

- Expressed a general support to the approach to the establishment of the AWP 2015.
- Highlighted that quality, at this stage, was not well covered.
- Took note of the roadmap towards the finalisation of the AWP 2015: (i) final proposal to ESSC September taking into account the comments provided in a coordinated way by MS by June 2014; (ii) the DIME/ITDG Steering Group will express its views on the AWP 2015 in the light of the outcome of the Task Force Vision 2.0; the DIME/ITDG are invited to provide their input at the national level through the ESSC consultation mechanism.

## 6. Reports from working groups and task forces

This agenda item was supposed to be discussed if there were explicit requests on the different reports.

In response to the exchange of views, Eurostat explained that the choice of the technical solution for the implementation of remote access to micro-data for research purposes was still under discussion.

## 7a. Sponsorship/Task force on Standardisation

The work of the task force on standardisation was presented by Hungary. The work consisted of three elements: (i) the roadmap for the implementation of the recommendations of the Sponsorship on Standardisation; (ii) the proposal for the mandate for a Standardisation Steering Group and (iii) the mandate and business case for a Standardisation maintenance body. The work was presented in the standardisation process cycle as developed by the Sponsorship. Under time pressure the business case for the maintenance body was not sufficiently developed and needs further elaboration.

The participants were not convinced of proposed governance structure for standardisation (two bodies) and asked for a business case of implementing measures. Suggestions were made to use the centers of competence for the facilitation of the maintenance body. The resources needed for the maintenance body, in particular the human resources, were perceived as too high (despite a gradual decrease from the implementation phase – investment in developing guidelines - and the follow-up phase).

### Conclusions

The DIME/ITDG:

- Asked for a clear elaboration of the business case starting from the outcome of the Sponsorship on Standardisation as endorsed by the ESSC.
- Invited to further elaborate on the real need for two standardisation bodies in the proposed governance and, in case, to develop the respective mandates.
- Asked for a further elaboration of the roadmap.
- Mandated the existing Task Force to continue its work and call upon other countries to volunteer as members of the Task Force – Eurostat committed to send out a call for participants.
- Invited the Task Force to report back to the DIME/ITDG.

## 7b+21. Impact analysis

Two related initiatives have worked on impact assessment. The ESSnet on Standardisation has further developed the SWOT-based tool originating from the Sponsorship on Standardisation for a qualitative and strategic assessment of projects aiming at quality and/or efficiency gains through harmonisation or integration. The Task Force on impact analysis of ESS.VIP projects has produced a methodology combining a SWOT analysis partly based on the work of the sponsorship and quantitative elements.

The meeting supported the proposals but stressed the need to reconcile the two approaches. A suggestion was made to apply the different types of assessment in different phases of the project life: a qualitative approach for the strategic decision enabling the project and a quantitative approach to decide on its implementation. In addition, the meeting called for a decision on the type of SWOT analysis to be carried out (with fixed items or not).

The discussion highlighted different issues related to the impact assessment:

- The time for carrying out the impact assessment may be a concern; impact analysis should not block decision making.
- Important projects take resources; the assessment has to be proportionate.
- Risk analysis should be included in the impact assessment.
- The methodology for cost assessment needs to be accompanied by guidelines and possibly training.
- The methodology needs to be further tested on one of the new proposed projects in the context of the Vision implementation (frozen ESS.VIPs appear as natural candidates)

### Conclusions

- The ITDG/DIME welcomed the work done in the ESSnet on standardisation and in the TF ESS.VIP cost/benefit analysis and stressed the need to reconcile the approaches and fine tune the methodologies.
- Eurostat will elaborate a proposal to reconcile the two approaches; the proposal will be further discussed in the Resource Directors Group meeting taking place on 13 June 2014 and in the DIME/ITDG Steering Group on 18 and 19 June 2014.

## **8. The ESSnet programme**

Eurostat presented the 2013 ESSnet report, the set-up of centres of competence and suggestions for the 2015 ESSnet programme. After consultation of the DIME/ITDG steering group in December 2013 it was decided to wait with the 2015 proposal for the 2015 programme until the finalisation of the work of the Task Force Vision 2.0. The meeting document presented two preliminary for feedback from the meeting: on a pilot Centre of Competence Knowledge Repository and on Sharing common functionalities in a service oriented architecture. The meeting was also asked to make other suggestions.

The discussion highlighted the following issues:

- Centre of Competence Knowledge Repository
  - Eurostat clarified that the potential centre of competence does not overlap with the standardisation initiatives but it aims at maintaining the current standards and supports their implementation (e.g. helpdesk or training activities). The inventory of standards is a searchable list of standards offering clarity on their status and references.
- ESSnet on shared services
  - Eurostat clarified the relationships of the proposal and the CSPA (Common Statistical Production Architecture) project

- Both proposed projects appear well in line with a broad ESS strategy; they offer a good balance between business and cross cutting.
- The platform/environment should be shared in an early phase. Eurostat is asked to circulate the documentation on the architecture as soon as ready.
- On the ESSnets more in general:
  - Collaboration tools should be more structured and standardised (e.g wiki's, CROS, CIRCABC).
  - A bottom-up approach for submitting proposals for new ESSnets should not be excluded.
  - The time horizon of centers of competence should be re-set on longer periods to earn back investments.
  - An overview of existing ESSnets is needed to understand how they fit in the overall programme.

### Conclusions

- Eurostat announced the roadmap (DIME/ITDG Steering Group in June 2014; written consultation of DIME/ITDG in summer; tentative consultation of the ESSC in September).
- The two project proposals will be further elaborated on the basis of the feedback received during the discussion, taking into account the suggestions made and how they fit in the ESSnet portfolio.
- Suggestions for other projects are still welcome (input to be provided to Eurostat Unit B1, Wim Kloek).
- The report on 2013 ESSnet activities is approved and will be submitted to ESSC.

## **9. Updated ESS Handbook for Quality Reports**

Eurostat presented the updated, i.e. 2014 edition of the ESS Handbook for Quality Reports (EHQR), and proposed a second, more thorough update transforming the Handbook into an "ESS Quality and Metadata Reporting Handbook". The development of an ESS Standard for documenting statistical processes (related to Inventories of Sources and Methods) was also proposed.

Members of the meeting broadly supported the approach of the second update, and therefore, the move from "quality reports" to "quality and metadata reporting" in the title. It was suggested that the technical issues as well as the inventory should be discussed in the next meeting of the Working Group on Meta data and the Working Group on Quality in Statistics.

A general support was expressed for the Single Integrated Metadata Structure (SIMS) that had been approved by the ESSC in its meeting of November 2013; any structure developed based on SIMS should be generic that could be applied in different domains. The inventories should be

integrated in SIMS and should include more information on the process. Tailored versions should be extractions from the standard structure.

### Conclusions

The DIME/ITDG

- Approved the 2014 edition of EHQR;
- Expressed support for the second update of the Handbook and for changing the title from "reports" to "reporting": support for the standardisation of quality and metadata reporting across statistical domains;
- Agreed that the development of the metadata standard of the Inventories of Sources and Methods should be discussed in the relevant WGs (e.g. Meta Data WG, WG on Quality in Statistics);
- Agreed that quality and any further relevant issues should be discussed in the next meeting of the Working Group on Quality in Statistics (date to be decided, subject to the outcomes of the discussion on the governance structures).

## **10. Software sharing policy**

Eurostat presented a policy for development, distribution and maintenance of software of interest for the ESS. A task force composed of CZ, IT, NL, PT, SI and Eurostat has worked on the policy. The work resulted in a comprehensive document.

### Conclusions

The DIME/ITDG

- Adopted the document.
- Asked for a review by the ESSnet on Standardisation for the standardisation aspect.
- Suggested to use the developed policy as an input for future projects.

## **22. ESS.VIP Validation**

Eurostat presented the ESS.VIP in Validation which aims to deploy a coherent validation policy in the different statistical domains, in cooperation with Member States. This includes:

- Distribution of validation tasks along the ESS production chain following the principle of Validation the sooner, the better.
- Design of validation rule syntax for expressing, documenting and communicating validation rules among the ESS organisations.
- Development of user friendly tools for maintaining a central repository of validation rules for the transparent validation of statistical data exchanged among organisations and covering all statistical domains.

- Development of services and adaptation of tools carrying out validation checks in accordance with the rules stored in that central repository. These services could be plugged into production systems and could be accessible to ESS organisations through the Web.

The meeting recognised that the project fits well with the strategy of sharing common services. There were questions on the actual validation language. Eurostat replied that VALS, the language recently developed and currently tested by Eurostat, is used as basis for the future VTL language, which will be linked to SDMX. It is therefore expected that when VTL is adopted by the SDMX sponsors, the eventual adaptation needed in VALS will be minimal. A common validation language is definitively useful for data exchange, but probably not always for internal processes. It is stressed that the validation standards and services should remain as generic as possible.

### Conclusions

The DIME/ITDG

- Recognised that the project is in line with the ESSC policy for sharing data validation principles and services in the ESS;
- Acknowledged the work progress and asked to integrate some feedback.

Eurostat underlined that

- The use of common validation tools in Member States is not compulsory; except perhaps some areas where the participation of all countries is paramount (e.g. SIMStat, ESBRS).
- Overall stove pipe solutions for validation services should be avoided, in particular in the ESS.VIP Programme.
- The VALS syntax is considered as a basis for a SDMX standard validation language.

## **11. Vision 2.0 – Role of DIME/ITDG**

Eurostat gave an overview of the recent developments at strategic level related to the work of the Task Force Vision 2.0. The Task Force made a distinction between the period until 2020, where the legal environment of the ESS is given, and from 2020 onwards, where this legal environment might change. Elements of the Vision up to 2020 are to get rid of stove pipes, promote shared services in the SDMX and DDI ecosystem. A core issue is the role of the DIME/ITDG in the Vision implementation, especially for the development and promotion of an ESS Enterprise Architecture. In this context the meeting was asked to approve the mandate of the ESS EA TF.

In the discussion, it was highlighted how that the implementation of the Vision will have to deal with national constraints (for some topics an opt-in/opt-out option should be considered, whereas in other cases, such as for instance SIMSTAT and ESBRS, this approach would not be possible). Focus was also on taking diversity into account; on building-in quality and robustness. A progressive approach was supported (what is needed first is the basic infrastructure:

metadata, service catalogues) as well as principles for the implementation such as simplicity, agility and fit for purpose.

Specific on the Enterprise Architecture (EA) Task Force:

- The meeting stressed the fact that the reference Business Architecture does not depend on the Vision.
- It has been suggested to take into account the work done by the ESSnet on Standardisation.
- A first report should be produced for the June meeting of the DIME/ITDG Steering Group.

In relation to the implementation of the Vision the discussion

- Called for further discussion in the June Steering Group, notably on the role of DIME-ITDG.
- Considered the need to revise the ESS.VIP programme to align it to the Vision.
- Called for a balance between between the general framework and domain specific needs.
- Stressed the importance of governance in the implementation.
- Highlighted the potential role that Centres of Competence could play in the implementation of the Vision.

### Conclusions

The DIME/ITDG

- Took note of current developments in relation to Vision 2.0 and ESS.VIP Programme.
- Discussed the roadmap of the DIME/ITDG: June 2014 DIME/ITDG Steering Group; consultation of the plenary in order to contribute to the input to the September DGINS meeting.
- Called for a clarification of the role of different players in the implementation.
- Stressed the importance of Centres of Competence for the implementation of the Vision; modalities will have to be further developed.
- Adopted the mandate of the ESS Enterprise Architecture TF.

## **12. ESS validation services**

Eurostat presented the ESS validation services. The current ESS validation services are based on the tool EDIT used in a series of statistical domains.

### Conclusions

The meeting took note of the increasing number of EDIT implementation actions in statistical domains

### **13. The ESS reference metadata standardisation**

Eurostat presented the ESS reference metadata standardisation. The meeting stressed that domain specific metadata structures should be avoided. In the Metadata Handler the export function should be improved. There is need for a good proposal on the metadata structure of statistical inventories.

#### Conclusions

- The DIME/ITDG took note and generally supported the reference metadata standardisation, including the principle of a common reporting on metadata and quality.
- Supported an approach that minimises the domain specific metadata structures.
- Agreed that the more technical work is to be carried forward in the upcoming Metadata Task Force/Working Group meetings.

### **14. SDMX implementation for data exchange (progress report)**

Eurostat gave a progress report on SDMX implementation; the meeting took note of the progress made. Standards such as SDMX will not be legislated in cross-cutting legislation, but in sector specific legislation.

#### Conclusions

- The DIME/ITDG took note of the progress on SDMX implementation.
- Standards such as SDMX will not be legislated through cross-cutting legislation, but in sector specific legislation.
- The Eurostat contact details on the Census Hub will be sent to Member States.

### **15. CPA version 2.1 and other classification topics**

Eurostat presented the revision of CPA (version 2.1) and the work on other classifications.

#### Conclusions

- The DIME/ITDG took note of the classification activities related to the CPA 2.1, COICOP, head offices/holdings etc.
- The legislation on the CPA 2.1 will be voted at the ESSC meeting in May 2014.
- It was pointed out that a risk analysis - impact on the statistical series – should be done before any change in classifications is made.

### **16. ESS Wikis and training services for metadata, SDMX and validation**

The meeting took note of the developments.

## 17. Revision of the ESS guidelines on Seasonal Adjustment

Eurostat presented the revised ESS guidelines on Seasonal Adjustment.

The meeting argued in favour of accompanying the guidelines with a tool. (JDemetra+ is currently still under development), while recognising that the guidelines are independent of specific tools, and of supporting them with the Centre of Competence. The Centre of competence will start in April or May 2014.

### Conclusions

The DIME/ITDG

- Stressed that the guidelines are more effective if accompanied by appropriate tool and support.
- Took note that the new software JDemetra+ is still under development.
- Took note of the formal start of the Centre of competence scheduled in April 2014.
- Agreed that further consultation of the DIME/ITDG is needed including a proposal on the timeline for issuing the guidelines; the guidelines will not be submitted to ESSC in May 2014.

## 18. Research; Horizon 2020

Eurostat made the meeting aware of the Horizon 2020 framework research programme. The programme has no explicit statistical research lines, but opportunities exist hidden in cases which for instance require evidence based policy making. Eurostat advised interested Institutes to prepare for building multidisciplinary consortia.

A number of upcoming conferences were briefly mentioned:

- Q2014 (Vienna, June 2014)
- The Conference of European Statistics Stakeholders (Rome, November 2014)
- The NTTS 2015 conference (Brussels, March 2015)
- The Fifth International Conference on Establishment Surveys will be held for the first time in Europe. Geneva 2016: <http://www.cros-portal.eu/content/fifth-international-conference-establishment-surveys-ices-v>

The chairman of FENStatS presented the Conference of European Statistics Stakeholders (CESS 2014) to the meeting.

## 19. Big Data

Eurostat presented the progress related to the Scheveningen Memorandum on Big Data. The list of issues is fairly well known: privacy, legislation rather long term (but continue experimenting), funding (participation of data owners). Concrete actions are rather difficult to define at this stage. An action plan should be adopted by the ESSC. The first draft will be available in summer 2014 (aiming at the ESSC in November 2014).

During the discussion the following points were raised:

- Possibility of reducing planning phase, for instance by allowing follow-up steps.
- Coordination with the HLG initiative on Big Data: Eurostat reported on the strong collaboration in place with the HLG work on this point.

## **20. Topics for report to ESSC**

The following points were selected for reporting to the ESSC:

- The governance structure of DIME and ITDG.
- The annual statistical programme.
- Centres of competence: need for operational procedures.
- Role of DIME/ITDG in the implementation of Vision 2.0.
- Roadmap on recommendations of Sponsorship on Standardisation (progress report).