



79th ESGAB meeting

Thursday, 20 January 2022

Minutes

Virtual meeting

Doc ESGAB 2022/21

The Secretariat



21 March 2022

Minutes

79th Meeting of the European Statistical Governance Advisory Board (ESGAB)

Expert Group *X02147*

20 January 2022

Virtual meeting

1. Welcome and adoption of the agenda

The draft agenda (Doc. 2021/101) was adopted without amendments.

The ESGAB Chair proceeded with making relevant announcements.

He informed the members that the 2021 ESGAB Annual Report, together with the accompanying press release, Recommendations and Executive Summary in English, German and French, was published the day before. Before the publication, the Report had been transmitted to the Commission, European Parliament and to the Council.

Regarding the nomination of ESGAB representative to GPAC, the Chair informed that the letter with the nomination had been sent to the respective authorities in Greece and a thank you letter had been sent to the previous ESGAB representative to GPAC, Ms Genovefa Ruzic.

As announced after the December 2021 ESGAB meeting, Mr Jorgen Elmeskov resigned from his duties as ESGAB member due to high workload. The process of his replacement is currently ongoing. As he was appointed by the Council, it is up to the Council to appoint his replacement.

The Chair informed that he had a meeting with Mr Marco Buti, Head of Cabinet of Commissioner Gentiloni, on 14 December 2021. He presented the Annual Report and the recommendations, which were very much appreciated.

The ESGAB Chair also recalled that following the publication of the French peer review report, the peer review report on Estonia was also published on Eurostat's dedicated web page.

The Chair also informed about media reports about a strike by the National Institute of Statistics in Romania, mainly due to lack of staff for the census.

The action points from the previous meeting were scrutinised to ensure all follow ups.



One ESGAB member asked whether more details could be available regarding the meeting with Mr Buti and his reactions to the Report and to ESGAB's recommendations, including institutional matters for Eurostat.

The Chair highlighted that the surrounding explanations were well noted and appreciated by Mr Buti and that all recommendations would be analysed and followed up. The issue of prioritisation and the need for strict priority-setting came up as a continuously important topic. On institutional issues, the Chair said that Mr. Buti conveyed that they will reflect on these issues. Eurostat added that they have until March to respond.

The ESGAB member inquired about exactly who would respond. Eurostat responded that Eurostat will discuss with the Commission on these issues and Eurostat will respond. On the interaction between Eurostat and the Cabinet, Eurostat added that it is responsible to develop the Action Plan for responding to the recommendations and the Cabinet does not intervene on statistical matters. However, there are issues that need to be discussed together, such as the working arrangements between Eurostat and the Commission. Other relevant stakeholders will also be involved while developing the Action Plan, for example on the recommendation regarding coordination and cooperation with the ECB, Eurostat will liaise with the colleagues from the Directorate General for Statistics of the ECB. Eurostat also expressed some diverging views indicated in the Report. It is currently reflecting on the recommendations, making an analysis and developing the Action Plan.

The ESGAB Chair thanked Eurostat indicating that ESGAB members were looking forward to receiving the response to ESGAB's recommendations and reflecting on it.

Another ESGAB member asked to fix meeting dates for the whole year so that the members could block their agendas in advance.

The Chair confirmed that the exact dates of the meetings would be established based on a doodle poll. The majority of the meetings would be virtual, but he hoped that a physical meeting could be organised before summer break.

The ESGAB representative in the Task Force on ESS Peer Reviews informed that the discussions at the task force were quite technical and detailed. The methodology is working well and the process is running smoothly without any major concerns. The ESGAB representative pointed out that due to the ongoing pandemic, the majority of the peer reviews conducted so far were virtual, which was not the most convenient format, giving rise to issues with planning, keeping the order of the agenda, getting experts or replying to questions in the online format. That is why there is still a strong commitment of Eurostat to conduct face-to-face peer reviews as much as possible.

2. Information from Eurostat on recent and future developments in the ESS

Eurostat recalled that the agenda of the ESSC meeting (Doc. 2022/07) to take place on 10 and 11 February was shared with the ESGAB members.



Eurostat informed that there had been some new developments in the last few days as concerns the potential revision of Regulation 223/2009. A small group composed of ten Heads of NSIs was established under the leadership of the Partnership Group Chair and Eurostat Director-General. It will have a kick-off meeting on 28 January. Its main tasks include defining the scope of the revision, current and future challenges. As the institutional setup, governance, cooperation and quality mechanisms are functioning well, the revision would rather focus on topics such as challenges related to digital technologies, agility in the ESS and mechanisms for faster reactions to user needs, data sharing, experimental statistics, reinforcing cooperation with Academia. A plenary discussion with all Directors General is planned to take place at a special high-level meeting hosted by the French Presidency on 7 and 8 April in Lyon. Another big milestone is the October ESSC, when the legal proposal should be discussed. After that, the Commission proposal will be tabled, kicking off the legislative process with the Council and the European Parliament.

Two ESGAB members pointed out that the timeframe and stages were very important so ESGAB could plan when to get involved. The legislative process tends to be lengthy taking 18 months on average from a proposal by the Commission until the adoption by the Council and the European Parliament.

Eurostat explained that there would be many different stakeholders involved in the process. There would be a broad consultation deployed, involving public consultation, opinions of different bodies such as ESGAB, organisation of workshops, also internal Commission procedures in order to capture the relevant issues to be included in the proposal. The public consultation should be launched in June and stay open for 12 weeks. Therefore, ESGAB could also consider responding to the public consultation.

One member indicated that while ESGAB's recommendations would potentially be useful to the ESSC and the Commission and it would be good to have recommendations for these bodies to consider earlier rather than later, ESGAB should not be too constrained by the timetable relating to the work of the ESSC and the Commission (conveyed by Eurostat) as ESGAB recommendations could also be provided and be useful at the stage when the legislative proposal is considered, discussed and amended by the Council and the Parliament.

The ESGAB Chair thanked Eurostat for providing the timeframe which ESGAB will use as basis for planning its input.

The following sessions were held without the presence of the Eurostat observers.

3. Topics for 2022

- Revision of Regulation 223/2009 (Doc. 2022/06)

The Chair highlighted several issues to be reflected on: determining a realistic timeframe and scope of ESGAB's contribution (targeted to the future-oriented topics or making a comprehensive input to the entire scope of 223/2009), which stakeholders should be involved,



how much time the members of ESGAB could dedicate to this work, whether an ESGAB workshop could be organized on the topic.

He highlighted that ESGAB's contribution should be ready by the end of April to be in time for the public consultation. This involves analysing what was previously done by ESGAB, as well as the current recommendations to see what would be relevant for revision of Regulation 223/2009 that could be pursued further.

One ESGAB member said that the focus should be on a limited number of issues which should be covered thoroughly, rather than focusing on more issues and cover them superficially. He stressed the topic of cooperation with Academia, which should be viewed not only as a user of statistics, but also in terms of allowing access to micro-data sets. This would be hard to achieve as member states do not want to share microdata, but eventually Eurostat should be the hub integrating data from all countries – so ESGAB recommendations should go in this direction. He offered to connect with researchers and seek their views - what they required, the obstacles they identified.

One ESGAB member stressed that the *raison d'être* of the ESS is to produce trustworthy, high quality statistics that are produced with impartiality, objectivity and independence. Thus, an amendment of Regulation 223 on European statistics has to primarily make sure that the institutional environment of the production of such statistics is fully adequate. Relevance of statistics is important, but the appropriate institutional setting is what Regulation 223 has to ensure first and foremost. The member pointed out that in Article 2, Regulation 223 is explicit about the need of European statistics to be governed by certain statistical principles, most of which are related to the institutional environment.

He concluded by saying that institutional environment/governance issues should be addressed properly in the amendment of Regulation 223, in addition to focusing on new issues such as integration of microdata, data sharing, private data source access, and new statistical products, all of which, by the way, require a high level of trust and integrity.

Another ESGAB member reminded that there was no strong appetite by the ESSC to go into the matters related to the governance aspect. This topic was complicated considering the complex legal aspect. He agreed that ESGAB should take its position from a leadership perspective and focus its discussions on substantial problems. As ESGAB is a governance body, governance should be part of its work also when looking at the revision of Regulation 223/2009. He pointed out that since ESGAB was an institutional body, maybe it should not take part in public consultations, but submit its opinion separately.

- First lessons from the pandemic in the areas relevant for the ESGAB mandate

One ESGAB member emphasised that the document produced on this topic was only an outline. Potentially the things that Eurostat did so far, such as launching Covid-related webpages and figures, could be further explored. Also, another topic to cover could be how the official statistics could better contribute to data on Covid-19 across countries. So far there was no time to deal with these issues in-depth.



Another ESGAB member pointed out the need to agree on methodology of work – either alone or in a group in order to produce a detailed issue paper. It would be useful to have discussions at the meetings and summarise the main points made as basis for further suggestions. That would also contribute to finding a balance between differing experiences and expertise of the Board members.

The ESGAB Chair suggested to separate the two topics and initially concentrate on Regulation 223/2009. He said that as the pandemic was still ongoing, more lessons might appear so for the moment the topic of pandemic could be postponed. To some extent it might impact Regulation 223/2009 in terms of expectations from future-oriented statistics. He added that if ESGAB wanted to have impact on the legal revision process, it should come up with concrete proposals by the middle of the year so it would focus on the lessons from the pandemics in the second half of the year.

The Chair proposed that before drafting the recommendations in relation to revision of Regulation 223/2009, a short paper should be drafted identifying concrete problems related to the current version of the Regulation, supported by actual examples. This way it should also be identified where the concrete problem lies – in the law itself or in the implementation of the law.

The ESGAB members agreed with this approach and postponing a more in-depth coverage of the topic of pandemics for the second half of the year. Several members pointed out that first lessons from the pandemic could be already incorporated in the work on revision of Regulation 223/2009, such as the issues of division of labour, flexibility of the legal act and whether it allows agility.

The members agreed to prepare an issue paper for the next ESGAB meeting, where it would be discussed further. In parallel, the members would work in smaller groups – concentrated teams of 2 or 3 addressing specific issues. The document produced would be kept confidential as it will cover some sensitive issues.

8. Next meetings

The next ESGAB meeting is scheduled for 21 February from 14h30 to 17h00. The members agreed to fix the dates of all subsequent ESGAB meetings until the end of the year so they can block them in their agendas in advance. The exact dates of the meetings will be established based on a doodle poll.