



European Statistical
Advisory Committee

40th Meeting

16 June 2023

14.30 – 17.00

Video-Conference Meeting

Final Minutes

ESAC Doc. 2023/12

1 – Welcome and adoption of the agenda (ESAC Doc. 2023/8)

The Chair, Ms Roxane Silberman, opened the Meeting that she chaired for the first time at 14.30 p.m.

The Chair welcomed the new Members of the ESAC.

The Chair thanked Mr. Gueye, Deputy Director General of ESAC for attending the meeting as Ms Kotzeva, Director General of Eurostat, had other commitments.

The Chair presented the agenda of the meeting.

ESAC Members adopted the agenda.

The Chair informed the Members of her participation to two ESSC Meetings since the last ESAC meeting took place. One special meeting of the ESSC concerned the revision of Regulation 223/2009.

2 - Recent developments in the ESS – Feedback from Eurostat

Mr Gueye, Deputy Director General of Eurostat, gave an update on the legislative changes underway. With regard to the revision of Regulation 223/2009, Mr Gueye explained that the proposal had been discussed in several forums, including the ESSC, in accordance with the Commission's internal procedures. The proposal is now at Commission level and is subject to the Commission's adoption procedure. The adoption of the proposal by the Commission is foreseen for the end of June 2023 and will be transmitted to the Parliament and the Council as well as to other stakeholders such as the ESSC. Eurostat has also been working on the ESOP (Regulation on demographic statistics) as part of the modernisation of social statistics. Adopted in 2019, the IESS (Integrated European Social Statistics) framework regulation was the first result of a long process aimed at modernising European social statistics, which is now being implemented by the Member States. For the ESOP, the aim is to develop a more harmonised population base, to improve the timeliness, frequency, and granularity of data, but also to allow more flexible use of specific implementing acts to make it possible to introduce new variables and themes to meet new policy needs and user requirements. The trialogue should begin in the autumn and the regulation should be adopted by Parliament and the Council during the current legislative period (spring 2024). Implementation of the Regulation could begin in December 2025. The third piece of legislation concerns labour market statistics on businesses. Eurostat has been working on this third part of the modernisation of social statistics for some time, in accordance with an ESSC decision of 2014 Eurostat wants to improve statistics on job vacancies and the labour cost index, as well as the structure of the salary survey and the labour cost survey. The timeliness of the labour cost index will be improved by 30 days. Eurostat wants to have a solid legal basis for measuring the gender pay gap, with the 'Gender Pay Transparency Directive' adopted in May 2023. Eurostat also wants to increase coverage of micro-enterprises. The aim is to have the legislation adopted during the current legislature (spring 2024 at the latest). Mr Gueye concluded

his presentation by pointing out that the 2024 annual work programme places a strong emphasis on innovation.

The Chair thanked Mr Gueye for the presentation and observed that this information is very important for the discussion on the opinion of the annual work programme.

Ms. João Valente Rosa asked if Eurostat was considering harmonising the concept of 'population resident' since two concepts currently coexist.

The Deputy Director General confirmed that there are currently two concepts of residents. One is demographic legislation, but the rules are not the same for qualified majority voting and demographic statistics in general. Some Member States have registers and others have other sources for demographic statistics. One of the aims of the ESOP is to obtain a more harmonised definition of population. This definition is centred on reference to the 12-month period (people intending to stay for 12 months or people who have stayed for more than 12 months). The difficulty is a practical one. The ESOP refers only to the length of stay, without taking other considerations into account. As far as counting the national population from existing sources, registers and/or other sources is concerned, certain adjustments need to be made with a view to the harmonised definition. Ways must be found of estimating cases that are at the limit of this 12-month reference period. Methods exist ("Science of life", "Rate of stay") or are being studied to make these estimates, and a task force is currently working on these methods to make these adjustments. Tools for making these estimates will be available by the time the ESOP regulation is adopted.

3 – Energy Statistics – presentation by Eurostat and discussion

The Chair welcomed Mr Diaz Alonso from Eurostat and thanked him for accepting to make a presentation on energy statistics to the ESAC.

Mr. Diaz Alonso explained that the energy statistics are under the spotlight due to the current situation in Europe and its impact on energy prices. It is a very dynamic domain that is constantly adapting to emerging needs and market developments. In this regard, he provided two recent examples where statistics try to adapt to evolving needs and require fast responses: the last amendment of the 'Energy Statistics Regulation' and the statistical response in the energy domain to the war in Ukraine. On the amendment of Energy Statistics regulation, Eurostat (with other services of the Commission) has taken swift actions to provide new energy statistics to support the Green Deal and monitor the twin transition based on prior discussions with the Member States on priority needs. This led to the adoption of an encompassing amendment of the Energy Statistics Regulation in January 2022 (Commission Regulation (EU) 2022/132 of 28 January 2022). Mr Diaz Alonso provided an overview of the main changes in the Regulation. New data requirements were introduced following the observation of the decentralisation of the electricity production to other sectors (e.g. households, industry, etc...) to capture changes in the production pattern. At the same time, Eurostat anticipated the uptake of the bio economy in the EU and the use of renewable products to replace fossil fuels for non-energy purposes (e.g. bio asphalts, bio lubricants, biogas as feedstock, bio dyes, etc...). Mr Diaz Alonso also

referred to data on hydrogen in view of the hydrogen-based energy strategy in the EU, data on energy storage (batteries to address energy supply variability), detailed data on ambient heat (heat pumps), more detailed data for solar photovoltaic (PV), data on newly installed and decommissioned capacities to address the shift in the types of energy usage, detailed data on final energy consumption for transport and services as well as data centres, split of data between agriculture and forestry for energy consumption. Mr Diaz also explained that all energy statistics will be provided earlier (T+10 months instead of T+11 months). These data will be complemented by earlier data collection in order to make early estimates of energy balances 6-months after year-end for determining early trends in the market developments. It is important to also monitor the behaviour of the energy grids and Eurostat will collect data on the split between transmission and distribution losses through the grids.

Mr Diaz Alonso went on to say that the war in Ukraine triggered an urgent statistical response in the field of energy. As soon as the war started, Eurostat began to assess the data needs following the EU's political reactions and the adoption of new EU legislation. Eurostat worked closely with DG ENER and Member States to design new data collections and adapt existing ones to meet new policy needs. Examples include the monitoring of the reduction of gas consumption by at least 15% in all Member States (due 15 days after the reference period compared to 55 days for the final monthly data), the monitoring of gas stock levels based on Eurostat data, and other cases where data collections have also been modified. For oil, Eurostat data are used to monitor stock levels (following the recommendation of 6 December 2022 to improve the security of oil supply) and oil imports from Russia (in the context of the embargo) based on data communicated by Member States to Eurostat. DG ENER also consults Eurostat and coordinates with the International Energy Agency to align provisions for emergency data collection in the event of a crisis.

About energy dependency, Mr Diaz Alonso explained that new indicators have been developed for all fuel types as part of the national energy and climate reports. Where NSIs or ONAs have already submitted data to Eurostat, the Commission has pre-filled the report templates from the Eurostat database wherever possible.

Energy prices have also been a very dynamic subject. To understand the plethora of compensation measures taken by Member States, Eurostat asked them - on a voluntary basis - to provide data on the nature of the subsidies and allowances that affect end-consumer prices: reductions in taxes and charges, price caps, allocation of lump sums or vouchers to end-consumers and, in some cases, application of regulated prices. Eurostat published concrete guidelines in this area in August 2022. Reporting countries have agreed to detail support measures and quantify them in a disaggregated way beyond the legal requirements, i.e. taxes and subsidies separately, instead of a net figure for taxes.

Eurostat has also developed its largest number of visualisation tools for the energy field on its website. Almost all energy data can be visualised in a user-friendly and interactive way, offering many types of diagrams, easy-to-understand definitions, customised views, etc.

The Chair thanked Eurostat for its detailed presentation and asked Eurostat to elaborate on the difficulties it encountered in collecting data from Member States (e.g. private data in the field of energy). The Chair also asked whether Eurostat was able to link data to policies and business and consumer behavior. The Chair also asked whether users were also involved in discussions and not only the Member States.

Ms Sloka asked if the presentation could be shared with the ESAC.

Mr Herteliu asked if Eurostat could clarify what is the geographical granularity level (regional for example) of the data collected. He also asked if the data on used batteries were also considered given the surge in the number of electric vehicles.

Another Member (Mr. van der Heijden) asked whether the publication of sensitive data that is accessible to all including countries not in the EU would not be problematic and make the EU more vulnerable.

Mr Diaz Alonso explained that access to data, including microdata, was at the heart of the discussions with the Member States. Eurostat only receives aggregated data from the Member States and the issue of access to microdata mainly concerns the Member States. This has led to difficulties in some Member States and lengthy discussions with Eurostat, as well as exchanges of best practice between Member States. Eurostat will collect the first data in October 2023 with reference year 2022 and expects some quality issues to be addressed with Member States. The need for energy statistics was politically motivated and initiated by the proliferation of new energy policies, but also by the Green Deal. This has involved a thorough review of existing legal texts and analysis of future trends in the energy market, for example the EU's policy objectives for hydrogen and decentralised renewable energy production, and the simplification of administrative procedures that need to be monitored. All these needs have been discussed with the relevant DGs to decide on priorities. As far as granularity is concerned, Eurostat only collects data at national level. Attempts have been made to collect data on final energy consumption at regional level, but this has not been deemed possible. As far as used batteries are concerned, this is currently more of an environmental statistics issue, although it may become an energy issue at the end of the battery life cycle. With regard to the accessibility of data, the impartiality protocol imposes no limits on the publication and dissemination of data to users, except for statistical reasons, such as confidentiality issues.

Mr Vichi asked whether more granular time-related data was also collected for energy forecasting.

Mr Wobben said that with regard to the lack of data on energy statistics at sub-national level, for example regional data on energy networks, especially when looking at the role of fuel infrastructure alternatives for electric mobility, it is very important to have data for effective and timely policy monitoring.

The Chair wondered whether this recurring issue of gaps in sub-national data was due to lack of data, lack of resources or other causes.

Mr Diaz Alonso explained that Eurostat also collects and publishes monthly data on energy statistics. The monthly data is less detailed, but it describes market trends and

dynamics. Data on consumption is only available on an annual basis. Eurostat does not publish forecasts but is working on a 'nowcasting' project to give an immediate picture of the market at the end of a given year. On the question of the lack of data at regional level on electric mobility, Mr Diaz Alonso explained that this was indeed a problem, but that it would be useful to check with the unit responsible for transport statistics to see whether any data was available. There are various reasons for the lack of data at regional level. Some countries aggregate the data collected at regional level but face various difficulties such as methodological problems of compilation between regions. Eurostat is not giving up, however, and will endeavour in the future to devote more effort to collecting data at sub-national level.

The Chair thanked Eurostat for the presentation and stated that topic energy statistics will be followed up by ESAC notably for its opinion on the draft statistical programme.

4- Opinion on the European Statistical Work Programme 2024 (ESAC Doc. 2023/10)

The Chair introduced the topic by explaining that issuing the opinion on the draft EU statistical work programme ("the draft programme") is the main task of the ESAC in accordance with Decision No 234/2008/EC. The draft was sent by Eurostat to the ESAC on 11 May, with a deadline for replies of 26 June. The Chair pointed out that the Secretariat had prepared a template form for collecting contributions from Members to prepare the drafting of the opinion. Four Members submitted contributions, which were incorporated into the draft opinion. A first draft was examined by the Executive Board and sent to ESAC Members for comment. No comments/suggestions have been made to date. The Chair suggested the difficulties for understanding the documents provided for the draft programme, the short deadline, etc. as possible explanations for the lack of response. This issue will need to be discussed in more detail under agenda item 7. For the time being, the aim is to continue examining the draft proposal for an opinion and to approve the broad outlines of the document's content. A revised text will be sent to Members immediately after the meeting for final comments and approval by written procedure by 22 June. The final opinion will be sent to Eurostat on 26 June within the deadline after a final proofreading.

The Chair proposed that the discussion follows the structure of the proposal that is based first on the general comments and then on the key elements of the work programme.

Ms Lehner pointed out that the draft programme would indeed benefit from being a little more detailed in terms of the actual actions and objectives for the year in question. Ms Lehner welcomed the fact that this was mentioned in the proposal.

Mr Vichi explained that in the past, the ESAC had been asked to provide comments directly related to the issues highlighted in Eurostat's transmission letter. Mr Vichi felt that the draft was already very comprehensive.

The Chair agreed that it was important to establish a link but explained that this time the letter of transmission was less detailed. Another difficulty was establishing very precise links between the draft opinion and the tables in the draft work programme.

Mr Gallo Gueye stated that, as it stood, the draft opinion appeared to be comprehensive and complete. Eurostat will carefully examine the final opinion and see how it can take the ESAC's comments into account when finalising the programme. Eurostat has taken note of the comments made on the clarity of the programme and will need to reflect further on how to improve it.

Mr Wobben thanked the Chair for having integrated his suggestions on data gaps at regional level in the text.

The Chair explained that certain comments were not included in the current draft because these were already made in the previous ESAC opinion.

Ms Lehner elaborated on her suggestions regarding inflation. She said that her suggestion was that, from a user's point of view, data on contributions to inflation for the main COICOP categories would be very useful. If this data would be available on the Eurostat website, this would make it possible to compare contributions between countries and would be very interesting.

Eurostat mentioned that it would further look into the matter.

Mr Vichi asked whether the European Court of Auditors' recommendation should also be addressed in this report.

The Chair agreed that the opinion should make a clear reference to the ECA recommendation to take better account of users' needs.

The Chair asked Members for their views on cooperation with researchers and universities. She proposed an additional suggestion to provide a monitoring tool to oversee the cooperation of the ESS with researchers or even users in general.

The Chair invited Members to provide further comments and suggestions on the draft opinion after the meeting.

The Secretary explained that, in accordance with the Rules of Procedure, the opinion could be adopted by written procedure, subject to the conditions set out in the Rules.

5 – European Statistical Day - Approval of the statement (ESAC Doc. 2023/9)

The Chair explained that European Statistics Day (ESD) would be celebrated on 20 October 2023. The ESAC adopted the ESD motto at its last meeting. The Executive Board had drafted a statement for the ESD 2023 which had been circulated to the ESAC for comment. No comments had been received by the date of this meeting. Given that it was not possible to organise a specific ESAC event to celebrate the ESD back-to-back to the DGINS Conference and the ESSC at Cork, it was proposed to publish the statement on the ESAC website and the Eurostat website under the ESD banner. The Chair also suggested sending it to the NUCs.

Ms Maria João Valente Rosa explained that since 2016, ESAC has been preparing a motto and a statement to celebrate the European Statistics Day (ESD). ESD takes

place every year, with the exception of the years when "World Statistics Day" is celebrated under the auspices of the United Nations, which takes place every five years on 20 October (the next one will be in 2025). This year, the ESAC should discuss how best to celebrate the 'European Statistics Day', given that it will not be meeting on 20 October 2023. The declaration could be made at the DGINS meeting on 20 October in Ireland and sent to the NUCs beforehand for publication and distribution.

Mr Wobben, Ms Rondonotti and Ms Sloka suggested some minor amendments to the statement.

The Chair stated that a revised statement would be circulated for approval after the meeting.

Some members suggested to disseminate the ESD statement to Statistical Societies in the Member States, to FenStat, universities and institutions that celebrate the event each year.

Mr Wobben suggested that the event be coordinated between the institutions represented in ESAC and that the Secretariat prepares an infographic or logo that could be used by all institutions.

Mr Vichi pointed out that Eurostat also has a dedicated ESD banner on its website. The Chair added that the ESAC had been invited to publish its statement under this banner.

6 – NuC's meeting: concept and date

The Chair introduced the subject by pointing out that the ESAC decision required it to liaise with the national user councils (NUCs). She also recalled that the ESAC had held discussions on relations with the NUCs for two years now and that a questionnaire had been sent to them. A report on the results of the questionnaire was discussed in depth at the first meeting between the NUCs and ESAC in October 2022 in Rome. The Chair also reminded that the Court of auditors had recommended in their latest report that ESAC should be more inclusive. The Chair stated that a follow-up to the Rome meeting could not be postponed again. Further discussions on how to build relationships would not lead to progress and it is necessary to put in place concrete actions beneficial to both ESAC and the NUCs. The Chair and the Executive Board proposed to organise a face-to-face workshop with the NUCs in two parts: one thematic part which would be open to a wider audience and the other part which would focus on NUCs' practices in statistical programming which is highly relevant given the mandate of the ESAC.

The Chair suggested a few topics for the first part of the workshop: one on energy statistics (gaps, challenges, and innovative approaches); another possibility would be health statistics taking the opportunity of the current discussions within the context of the ESS priorities-setting exercise. For the second part, the Chair suggested discussing the involvement of NUCs in the development of multi-annual/annual statistical programmes and inviting NUCs' representatives to make presentations aimed at exchanging best practices. No decision was taken on the venue of the

meeting, but the Chair suggested several possible locations (Brussels, Paris, The Hague) and explained that the event would take place back-to-back to the next ESAC meeting. The Chair plans to involve the NUCS in the preparation of the event, as well as a dedicated ESAC task force. Discussions had already taken place with Eurostat and the event could be organised at the end of November. The Chair expected that a budget would be made available for the organisation of this event and asked Members to volunteer to co-organise the event. Members were invited to comment on the proposals.

Mr Gueye confirmed that the ESS had chosen the health sector for its work on the priority-setting exercise. He also mentioned that health statistics are a very relevant topic. He added that the NUCs' commitment to cooperation with ESAC must be strengthened in response to the ECA's recommendations.

The Chair stated that the degree of user involvement in the priorities setting exercises was not clear to her. Anyway, the process of defining priorities for the health sector has just started, whereas for the energy sector, it seemed that this priority-setting exercise had been completed and that it had considered the needs of users. Energy and health were initial proposals, but Members may have other subjects in mind. Given the short timeframe, it would be difficult to involve the NUCs in the selection of topics.

Ms Sloka stated that the energy is an interesting topic for the workshop, but it might be too narrow. She mentioned that new data sources would be another option which would be very interesting for ESAC to hear from specialists in the field. She also underlined the importance of deciding and communicating the dates quickly because of the lack of availability of the ESAC Members and the NUCs.

The Chair said that the new data sources topic had been discussed in several meetings already. On the timing, the Chair insisted that the event with the NUCs takes place still this year even as a pilot exercise.

Mr Vichi suggested the Green Deal as another possible topic. In connection with data sources, the digital transition is topic that is gaining in importance and closely linked to the issue of new data sources such as administrative data. Artificial Intelligence is another relevant topic for users involving some ethical questions. The 'Next Generation EU' programme is ongoing and will be subject to a mid-term review and it could be useful discussing it.

The Chair agreed that all these topics are good ones and may be attractive to the NUCS.

Maria João Valente Rosa agreed with Mr Vichi's proposal to address the theme of digital transition and link it to artificial intelligence. For the second part of the workshop, the discussion should also consider future aspects and possible developments regarding the involvement of NUCS and ESAC in the statistical programming process.

The Chair concluded by saying that she would very much appreciate if Members would volunteer to help organise the workshop before contacting the NUCs. The Chair will send an email to the Members after the meeting to quickly set up a task force for organising the event.

7 – ESAC way of working

The Chair introduced the subject by suggesting that the ESAC holds an initial brief discussion on its way of working in order to prepare the ground for a more in-depth reflection on possible improvements at the next meeting. The main issue concerned the drafting of the ESAC's opinion on the European statistical work programme, with the Chair suggesting that the current process was not optimal in several respects, not least because of the lack of input from Members. Other aspects could be considered, such as the timetable, the presentation of documents provided by Eurostat, the lack of overall knowledge of Eurostat's activities and of the main developments in the ESS, the low number of meetings of ESAC and their short duration, or the way in which ESAC benefits from the participation of Members in the meetings of the Eurostat Directors' Groups. ESAC Members were asked to rate their overall satisfaction and to suggest improvements.

Ms Sloka explained that ESAC had arranged for the participating Members to report back to ESAC during its meetings after the Eurostat Directors' Group meetings. It is very important to share information on the discussions of these steering groups with the Members. In this respect, a meeting on business statistics was held shortly before the current meeting and gave rise to very interesting discussions, particularly on new data sources and experimental statistics in the Member States. Ms Sloka said that she would report back to ESAC in writing after the meeting and stressed that the issue of new data sources is an important one for ESAC to follow. In addition, Ms Sloka took part in an earlier meeting on social statistics at which the Labour Force Survey was discussed. This meeting was followed by several workshops involving exchanges of views and experiences between groups of directors from several countries, with Eurostat representatives facilitating the discussions. Overall, Ms Sloka was pleased to see the implementation of many innovative projects aimed at satisfying users' needs and supporting policy development.

The Chair explained that her question was whether information on discussions within the Eurostat Directors' Groups was communicated to the ESAC and shared with Members in an effective, timely and satisfactory manner. The lack of contributions from Members to the drafting of the annual opinion on the work programme could be a sign of these shortcomings.

Ms Sloka said that the lack of contributions could also be explained by the fact that the statistical programmes are well developed and comprehensive. In addition, it might be more effective to ask Eurostat staff to present topics, as they are very involved in the process and centralise information on the discussions.

Mr Wobben said that many ESAC Members are new and it may be difficult for them to contribute at this stage. He also said that it would be useful to hold a face-to-face meeting to prepare a first draft opinion. Mr Wobben suggested putting a topic on the agenda for each meeting where Members could explain what they are doing in the field and what is happening in their area of interest or constituency, country etc. Mr Wobben also suggested reviewing the calendar for the adoption of the opinion. In the

past, the Members of the ESAC used to report on the meetings of the groups of directors that they attended and this was a good practice that could be repeated. It would be interesting to involve some of the line DGs who use the data for policy developments.

Mr Vichi agreed with Mr Wobben and Ms Sloka. He added that twelve institutions are represented in ESAC and that it would be good if some representatives of institutions reported on the key themes and points of interest for their institution or even their country at each meeting. This would be an innovative approach that would give impetus to developing the involvement of ESAC Members. For example, ESAC could discuss the implications of the existence of two European systems, the ESCB and the ESS. Some external or Eurostat specialists could be invited to the discussions.

The Chair thanked the Members for the discussion and suggestions. She proposed that a questionnaire be sent to Members to gather their views and suggestions for future improvements to the way the ESAC works.

8 – Next meeting and closing

The Chair proposed to organise the next meeting back-to-back to the NUCs workshop. The Secretariat will inform the Members on the dates and venue after the meeting.

The Chair closed the meeting at 6.05 p.m.