



European Statistical  
Advisory Committee

**39<sup>th</sup> Meeting**

**06 March 2023**

**14.30 – 17.00**

**Meeting in-person**

**Brussels**

**Final Minutes**

ESAC Doc. 2023/07

## 1 – Welcome and adoption of the agenda

The Acting Chair, Mr Vichi, opened the Meeting and the ESAC Members adopted the agenda.

ESAC Members had no specific communications.

The Acting Chair informed the ESAC that Eurostat had responded to the ESAC opinion on the 2023 work programme. In its letter, Eurostat welcomed the general observations and recommendations of the ESAC on the key areas of the 2023 work programme and explained how they have been taken into account in the work programme, its supporting documents and the operational work of Eurostat. The Acting Chair stressed that Eurostat will take several steps in 2023 to address the need to react quickly to new requests for statistical information, as suggested by the ESAC. The Eurostat letter was sent to all members of the ESAC shortly before the meeting.

## 2 - Recent developments – Feedback from Eurostat

The Acting Chair thanked the Director General and the Deputy Director General of Eurostat for attending the Meeting. The Acting Chair explained that Eurostat had provided several documents ahead of the meeting and invited Eurostat to provide additional information orally.

The Director General of Eurostat explained that all documents had been distributed to the ESAC for information and she was ready to answer any questions from the Members. The Agenda of the 51<sup>st</sup> ESSC meeting had been distributed to ESAC in order to provide the Members with an overview of the topics that are currently under consideration by the ESSC.

### 2.1 Eurostat communications (Document 2023/2)

#### 1. *Revamp of Eurostat web site.*

The Acting Chair stated that he had looked at the new web site and underlined that the presentation of the web site had much improved. He underlined however that the upload of the web pages was sometimes slow.

Maria João Valente Rosa commented that the web site had significantly improved. From the users' point of view, she also asked if the presentation of the web pages and visuals are adapted to the different categories of users that may consult the web site. She also welcomed the announcement by Eurostat in the document on the ESAC Opinion that an automatic translation into all EU official languages is available on the Eurostat website but could not find the link to other linguistic versions. She asked whether Eurostat was aware of this.

The Director-General of Eurostat clarified that the revamp of the Eurostat was still work in progress. The first level of the web site is finalised and Eurostat is now working on the second level pages. The Director-General invited the ESAC Members to provide their feedback on the web site that is still being developed so comments could be still be taken into account (**Action Point 1**). On the translations, the Director General explained that Eurostat uses Artificial Intelligence (AI) notably of the part of the web site called 'Statistics explained'. Eurostat may still consider using the AI to translate the web site more widely. Regarding the users, the construction of the new site is largely based towards satisfying the so-called 'light users'.

Mr. Thomas Wobben pointed out that the Committee of the Region has its entire web site translated using machine translation tools, which has proved to be effective.

## *2. News release of 20.12.2022 on energy reduction*

No question was raised.

## *3. Eurostat's release calendar*

The Acting Chair thanked Eurostat for the information and underlined the quality of the Eurostat's release calendar that is published on the Eurostat web site in a week-by-week calendar view and in a monthly list view and can be filtered by statistical theme. The Acting Chair stated that this was an important step towards increasing the transparency of EU Statistics.

## *4. European statistics on population and housing (ESOP)*

The Acting Chair explained that the Commission has recently adopted (on 20 January 2023) a proposal for a new Regulation to integrate and modernise all population and demographic statistics, including censuses and the annual statistics on population and migration.

The meeting discussed the future orientation of the NSIs and costs involved, especially for censuses (although Member States also use administrative data). The Acting Chair was willing to discuss the issue with Eurostat from a user perspective (**Action Point 2**).

Eurostat explained that the subject had already been raised at the last meeting in Rome, at an early stage of discussions with Member States. Since then, the proposal has been submitted to the Parliament and the Council. Eurostat recalled that, with regard to the ESOP Regulation, one of the sensitive issues is the increasing demand for data on groups discriminated on the basis of sensitive criteria as defined in the EU Treaty (gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation and disability, age). This is a very sensitive issue in many Member States where the collection of such data is not allowed. These elements have been removed from the proposed Regulation on demography. Eurostat has provided a document (Doc 2023/5) in the form of a stocktaking exercise to inform the ESAC on the way forward for these sensitive topics. Other important Eurostat initiatives concern energy statistics, which Eurostat offered to present to the ESAC at another meeting (**Action Point 3**).

## **2.2 ESSC 51<sup>th</sup> meeting agenda February 2023 (Document 2023/3)**

The Acting Chair attended the February ESSC meeting. He underlined that the innovation agenda was very interesting. ESAC supports the collaboration with universities and innovation in the ESS. The Acting Chair explained that large-scale innovation is necessary while for smaller countries, it is very difficult to innovate due to the costs involved. An EU dimension for innovation with the help of academia is relevant. Statisticians, artificial intelligence experts and data scientists should work together to develop new technologies and methodologies to collect and produce data in a quicker manner to stay relevant. In the ESSC meeting, the Acting Chair noted some concerns from some countries regarding innovation, most likely because of the costs involved. The Acting Chair insisted that the European dimension has to be taken into consideration for bringing innovation forward in the ESS.

Mr. Thomas Wobben stated that the 'Artificial Intelligence (AI)' is developing very quickly as for example 'ChatGpt'. The Member asked whether a certified 'ChatGpt' like services for statistics should be developed. He also asked what could be done to harness the full potential of 'Big Data'. In particular, in some areas such as the Green Deal related statistics, important challenges arise from the regional statistics angle.

Mrs. Roxane Silberman mentioned as a general comment that it would be interesting to hear the comments of the Member States in the ESSC on the innovation agenda with regard to possible problems and implementation issues encountered.

The Acting Chair understood that the innovation agenda is at the early stage of development.

Eurostat pointed out that the innovation agenda was adopted at the last ESSC meeting. Comments from Member States focused on two issues. Firstly, statisticians may question the relevance of new technologies such as AI and 'chatbots' for the production of statistics. Secondly, Eurostat stressed that countries aim to implement concrete actions and projects. Eurostat offered to make a presentation on the innovation agenda at a future meeting of the ESAC (**Action Point 4**). Eurostat also explained that it has been successful in developing projects on experimental statistics and that it now needs to integrate these developments into regular statistical production when appropriate.

### 2.3 Action plan European Green Deal progress report (Document 2023/4)

Regarding the Green Deal, Thomas Wobben stated that there is unease, at local and regional level, due to a perceived gap between political ambitions and their impact on the ground. Many Green Deal actions/proposals have been developed very quickly without adequate and thorough impact assessments. The progress on the ground is probably not as fast as one would wish to. The Green Deal is a very "city" related debate to have clean cars, clean air, etc. The Green Deal dashboard is focused on the national level that overshadow the reality of some regions or local areas. There is a data gap for the local / regional levels, and we need a regional dashboard to reflect the implementation at the Green Deal at regional level. The same situation prevails for equality statistics. One should admit at this stage that there are data gaps. If not, surprises may happen at the next EU elections. The question is whether anything can be done now with the Green Deal action plan or on the equality statistics to raise awareness on these matters. The Committee of the Regions (CoR) noted similar problems with the 'Sustainable Development Goals' (SDGs).

The Acting Chair agreed that there is a need of data for the Green Deal but some prioritisation is needed.

Eurostat could not agree more and underlined that it is the role ESAC to point and report on such issues.

Thomas Wobben went on to refer to a specific example (the phasing out of the use of gas/oil energy sources from private vehicles). In the current legislative proposals, the Commission is asked to assess the impact of the situation by 2025 and to discuss with stakeholders how to mitigate the impact of car gas emissions. The Commission will have to provide some data, especially in the "automotive regions". This problem can be solved by asking the JRC to carry out a study, but it might be better to develop a data system to monitor the implementation of the Green Deal by the regions. The CoR would be more than happy to contribute to the work of ESAC in that area if need be.

Eurostat invited the CoR to also report on the data gaps it mentioned, notably on automotive regions to Eurostat (**Action 5**). Eurostat noted that there are many new initiatives that are undertaken by the Commission (notably for the Green Deal) where data is to be provided within a short time frame.

## 2.4 Equality statistics: way forward (Document 2023/5)

With regard to equality statistics, Mrs. Roxane Silberman pointed out that some of these data are quite sensitive, while on the other hand the document seems to call for the collection of more administrative data. The question is whether this is a coherent approach to follow.

Eurostat explained that there is a trend to use more and more administrative data that does however not include such sensitive data. This is why for demography statistics, the approach followed is to dissociate the data sources from administrative data. In parallel, Eurostat is developing statistics most likely based on surveys and collaborating with other partners like the Fundamental Rights Agency to collect the data Eurostat needs.

Roxane Silberman stated that it is a very important issue and asked whether a specific ESAC opinion on the matter would be appropriate at this point in time **(Action Point 6)**.

Eurostat welcomed the proposal. It also explained that the NGOs are very important actors in the field.

Mrs. Marie Bohata asked whether data on equality data would be a good candidate for the so-called 'European approach to statistics'.

Eurostat replied that this was a very good question and did not exclude any possibility. The most difficult debate concerned demography statistics and that this the reason why Eurostat has focused on those statistics. There will be a task force involving the Member States. Eurostat has tabled some proposals like Pan-European surveys and the EU Approach to statistics, but Member States want to stay involved.

The Acting Chair suggested that ESAC could participate to the Task Force, which was welcomed by Eurostat. Mr Claudiu Herteliu expressed some interest to participate in that work **(Action Point 7)**.

Eurostat indicated that this will be discussed at the next Directors Group meeting of the Social Statistics (DSS) next June. ESAC can also attend the meeting as observer **(Action Point 8)**.

## 3 – Update on Regulation 223/2009 (Document 2023/7)

The Acting Chair introduced the topic by referring to the recent special report of the European Court of Auditors and its recommendation N° 1 concerning broader inclusion of users in the work of ESAC. The Acting Chair explained that the recommendation was not very clear and that it was not possible for all user communities, such as NGOs or other groups, to be represented on the ESAC. ESAC does not agree with the recommendation as formulated, given the legal basis for the current composition of the Committee. However, there is scope for improving the connections with such users and the National User Councils (NuCs), the latter being part of the ESAC's mandate. Based on these considerations, the ESAC should be better recognised as the statistical users' representative in Regulation 223. Another relevant point for the update of Regulation 223 concerns innovation and scientific cooperation with universities and scientific institutions. Finally, a third relevant point is to develop the ESAC cooperation with National User Councils (NuCs). In this area, the Acting Chair stressed the need to develop cooperation with the NuCs. The ESAC Board discussed a short ESAC paper that provides some possible contributions to amending Regulation 223.

Mrs. Roxane Silberman explained that the document discussed by the Board follows the discussions at the Rome meeting and takes into account the recommendations made by ECA.

It has three general parts. The first part concerns the needs for access to administrative and privately held data. The document is really in line with the main objective of the revision of Regulation 223/2009. The ESAC Board suggests that the administrative data collected should be included in the scope of official statistics so that once these data are used for official statistics, they can be shared at a later stage. As far as privately held data is concerned, the ESAC Board suggests that there should be no formal restrictions on sharing such data when they are collected for official statistics purposes, while protecting confidentiality. The second part of the document concerns the improvement of the visibility of ESAC and a better definition of its role in relation to users' needs. This recommendation is largely based on the work and experience of the Committee. It is also in line with the decision establishing ESAC and the recent ECA report. An important suggestion for the revision of Regulation 223/2009 in Part II of the paper is that ESAC should give its opinion much earlier in the statistical programmes adoption process, so that users' needs are taken into account at an early stage. ESAC should also be systematically consulted at Eurostat working groups level. Finally, in the third part of the paper, the Board suggests including provisions in the regulation on cooperation with universities regarding innovation and access to microdata for research purposes. Mrs. Roxane Silberman requested ESAC to reflect on the follow-up to these suggestions, including the elaboration of legal provisions covering all these aspects. She explained that the Board had no information on the current status of the revision of Regulation 223 and that the paper was prepared independently.

Mrs. Marie Bohata said that she suggested in the Board's discussions to focus the ambitions of the document based on her own experience when Regulation 223 was adopted in 2009 and last revised in 2015. However, as there is an agreement to strengthen the role of the ESAC in line with ECA's recommendation, the Regulation 223/2009 and the Decision on the ESAC and should be aligned in order to ensure some symmetry.

Eurostat thanked ESAC for the paper and the suggestions made. Regarding the ECA's recommendation to increase the 'representativeness' of the ESAC Members, Eurostat explained state of play before ESAC was created, with a 'Committee on Statistical Information' that had a very large number of Members. There was a need to streamline this Committee and reduce the number of Members to the current ESAC size. Eurostat also explained that it is putting the focus on the selection procedure of Members by privileging their experience, their expertise and their capacity to discuss and assess the needs for all kinds to categories of users. Finally, it was suggested that ESAC could be more inclusive notably by enhancing contacts with the NUCs, organising workshops, seminars and conferences implying reaching larger audiences of users.

The Acting Chair stated that the statistical Regulation should foresee that the ESAC should coordinate such these kinds of activities.

Regarding the suggestions made by the Executive Board to amend Regulation 223/2009, Eurostat explained that there were several aspects to be taken into consideration. It is indeed very important that NSIs have a clear mandate to access administrative data and privately held data held. Eurostat is aware of the discussions on the proposed Data Act and this should be well articulated with the new Regulation 223. Innovation is also a very important and cooperation has to be developed with ESAC, universities, academia and Eurostat. A structure must be determined, including for the financing of this cooperation. During the discussion on the revision of Regulation 223, Eurostat considered that the institutional arrangements work well. We should not change something that works well but focus on improving agility (in times of crisis), or other issues such as access to privately held data or innovation, the European approach to statistics in certain areas, etc. Eurostat would not suggest changing institutional aspects, but to focus on most important aspects to achieve.

The Acting Chair agreed that ESAC should be realistic in its proposals to amend Regulation 223/2009. It would re-examine the document taking into account the discussions in the meeting, possibly with the support of Eurostat (**Action point 9**).

Ms. Roxane Silbermann explained that it would be difficult to recommend changing the institutional set up. The document provides for general ideas and one could maybe envisage revising some of the wording in the regulation to make it more precise and give some orientations that are aligned with ESAC suggestions. About the ECA's recommendation, the idea is not increase the number of representatives/members but rather to improve the connections and liaisons with the users.

Mrs. Donata Faccia explained that the ECB supports the stance expressed in the working paper about access the privately held data. The ECB intends to update its own Regulation 2533/1998. One of the aims is to facilitate the exchange of confidential information between the ESCB and the ESS. The confidentiality of information should be guaranteed by all Members based on clear governance. It is therefore very important that the update of Regulation 2533/1998 and Regulation 223/2009 are coordinated.

Mr. Thomas Wobben stated that the issue of representativeness is key for the CoR. He asked whether ESAC could do anything to operate in a more inclusive way, increasing the representativeness of users. Conferences such as the CESS can help in that respect. He also proposed to use the Statistics Yearbook. He did not however fully understand the recommendation of the court of Auditors in relation to stakeholders given the Mandate of ESAC. It is not clear what the ECA means. For example, regarding the representativeness of the scientific community, many ESAC Members originate from this community thus the problem raised by the ECA appears not fully relevant. ESAC should also strive to use the existing tools and instruments in place, to be more effective.

Mrs Maria Bohata stated that in the past ESAC organised workshops and seminars. This practice was stopped because of the pandemic. It would be good idea to maybe re-vitalise contacts with scientific communities.

The Acting Chair reminded ESAC that this issue had already been discussed in the past. For ESAC it is mainly a question of implementing well-defined working methods to reach certain categories of users. For example, seminars and conferences with statistical stakeholders may be an appropriate way to communicate with users. In addition, the mandate of the ESAC is to liaise with the NuCs. The ESAC could also consider trying to reach out to broad categories of NGOs to suggest the collection of certain statistics to meet their specific needs.

#### **4- Data Act**

Regarding the data act, the legislative process is ongoing. The Acting Chair welcomed the fact that the work carried out by the ESAC in 2022 was fruitful and that some of the considerations made by the ESAC were taken into account by the Parliament.

Eurostat stated that the file is indeed currently in the legislative process. The access to official statistics is being discussed but the Commission cannot comment on the matter at this point in time. The Data Act focusses on data that is needed for production statistics in exceptional circumstances or crisis, whereas the sectoral legislation such as the Regulation 223 would have to specify for which specific areas, access to privately held data is needed.

Ms. Roxane Silbermann asked whether it is correct that the Data Act would only focus on European official statistics. Concerning the revision of regulation 223 that would seemingly

open the access to privately-held-data for EU Statistics only, the Member explained that the official statistics are largely based on data collected by Member-States.

Eurostat explained that all EU Legislations are about EU Statistics, however a vast majority of the EU Statistics are built on national statistics. Eurostat produces EU aggregates but also statistics for all the Member States. Therefore, access to privately held data for the production of EU Statistics will also concern the Member States.

The ECB explained that the co-legislators compromise currently envisaged is disappointing for its institution. The ECB would have access to this data in exceptional circumstances only. The ECB expressed its wishes to cooperate with the ESS for the ECB to get access to this data.

Eurostat stated to be in contact with the ECB concerning the Data Act. However, as said earlier, it refrains for commenting the current state of the ongoing legislative process.

## **5 – NUCs – recent developments**

The Acting Chair referred to the minutes of the first meeting with the NuCs (in October 2022). He explained that during this meeting he presented the results of the questionnaire on NuCs. The situation in the Member States is very heterogeneous, with many different typologies of NuCs. Some are ESAC-type organisations, others are more ESGAB-type organisations. Many NuCs have expressed the wish to organise dialogues with users and producers of statistics. This was a first meeting with the NuCs which allowed ESAC to get a better understanding of the typology of NuCs in the Member States. A refinement of the questionnaire could be considered and another meeting on some specific topics with the NuCs could be organised by widening the audience to some other institutions or bodies that would like to be represented. The ESAC Members are invited to discuss the relevance and the forms of such a revised questionnaire as well as the concept of possible future NuCs meetings (**Action Point 10**).

Mrs. Marie Bohata explained that such meeting could be useful if discussions are focussed on users' needs. One first question to address could be on the manner to improve cooperation and the impact of users in the statistical programming.

Mrs Roxane Silberman stated that indeed the NuCs are heterogenous in nature, but the main question should be whether NuCs address the user's needs. She also suggested that NuCs provide regularly to ESAC a summary outlining their statistical needs.

Mr. Athanasios Thanopoulos mentioned that he wanted to first hear what the main ideas of ESAC are before stepping in more concretely and take actions.

## **6 – Feedback from Members representing ESAC in Directors' Groups and other meetings – (Doc 2023/9)**

The Acting Chair referred to the document distributed ahead of the by Mrs. Petra Lang. The document summarises the discussions of the 8-9 December Business Statistics Directors' Group meeting. The document was not discussed during the meeting.



## 7 – ESAC Members

The Acting Chair explained that the composition of ESAC would change as of 1 April.

The Secretary gave an overview of the membership situation and explained that the mandates of the members appointed by the bodies and institutions other than the Commission will expire at the end of March. The mandates of five members are renewable, while the mandates of five other members are not. One post is still vacant.

The ESSC renewed the mandate of Mr Thanopoulos at its last meeting in February 2022 and appointed a new member, Ms Juratė Petrauskiene, Director General of Statistics Lithuania - State Data Agency. Ms Caroline Willeke of the ECB was replaced by Ms Vitaliana Rondonotti, Head of Statistical Coordination in the Directorate General Statistics. The SME United (formerly European Crafts Association, SMES) has already appointed Ms Sophie Lehner to replace Ms Petra Lang.

The Secretary explained that members will remain in office until new members are appointed or renewed by their institutions or bodies.

The mandates of the Commission-appointed members will expire next year, and the Secretariat will launch the procedure before the summer (**Action Point 11**).

As the mandate of Mr Maurizio Vichi also expires at the end of March 2023, the Secretary mentioned that the ESAC must elect a new Acting Chair.

Mrs Maria João Valente Rosa paid tribute to Mr Maurizio Vichi's term as Acting Chair since 2019 and to his major contributions to the work of the ESAC over these years.

The Members of the ESAC warmly congratulated and applauded Maurizio Vichi, Acting Chair of the ESAC, for his work.

The Acting Chair thanked all members, Eurostat and the Secretariat for their contributions and achievements.

Eurostat thanked Mr Vichi and pointed out that he contributed decisively to the visibility and reputation of ESAC, in all institutions, but also in the media. Eurostat stated that he has worked with passion and inexhaustible energy for the success of ESAC.

Following a proposal from the Executive Board, the Acting Chair suggested that ESAC elects Ms. Roxane Silberman as its new Chair. The Acting Chair stressed that her qualities, skills and experience would be an asset for the posts to be filled.

Ms Roxane Silberman thanked the Acting Chair and the Executive Board for their trust. She appreciated the role of ESAC and would be very happy to contribute to its work as Chair with the help and support of all ESAC Members and the Executive Board.

The Acting Chair and the Secretary explained that the conditions for the election as laid out in the Rules of procedures were complied with.

Ms Roxane Silberman was unanimously elected as Chair of the ESAC as from 1 April.

The Acting Chair went on to explain that the first mandates of the 2 ESAC coordinators, as defined in article 3.2.1 of the Rules of Procedure, had expired and proposed to renew the mandates of Mr Peter Van Der Heijden and Ms Marie Bohata.

The mandates of Mr Peter Van Der Heijden and Ms Marie Bohata were unanimously renewed.

## **6 – ESD 2023 – Ideas and Suggestions (Doc.2023/8)**

The Acting Chair introduced the agenda item by referring to the document that was provided to the Members before the Meeting.

The document presents the mottos chosen by the ESAC for the last European Statistics Days (ESD) and makes proposals for the celebration of the ESD 2023 scheduled for 20 October.

After fruitful discussions the ESAC Members adopted the motto for the ESD 2023 as follows:

***‘Statistics for better development in a fast-changing world’***

The Acting Chair suggested that the ESAC executive board prepares the statement to be published on the ESAC website for discussion during the June meeting (**Action Point 12**).

## **7 – 2022 Meetings**

The ESAC Secretary updated the ESAC Members on the meetings foreseen in 2023.

Following Members suggestions, the following tentative meeting schedule was suggested:

<b>Meeting N°</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Type</b>	<b>Place</b>
40	16/06/2023	Virtual	
41	19 or 20/10/2023 (*)	In person	To be decided

(\*) *exact date to be confirmed.*

## **8 – AOB**

Mr. Thomas Wobben thanked the Acting Chair and the ESAC for their long-time collaboration and explained the Committee of the Regions will appoint a new Member next month. Mrs Florence Thome will continue assisting the Member representing the Committee of the Regions.

The Acting Chair closed the meeting at 5 p.m.