



38th Meeting

19 October 2022

14.30 – 17.00

Meeting in-person

Minutes

ESAC Doc. 2022/14

1 – Welcome and adoption of the agenda

The ESAC Members adopted the agenda.

The Chair, Mr. Vichi, invited participants attending an ESAC meeting for the first time to introduce themselves:

- Michel Di Pietro Director at the EFTA Statistical Office.
- Antti Ripatti appointed by the Commission

ESAC Members had no specific communications.

2 - Recent developments – Feedback from Eurostat

Mrs. Kotzeva thanked the Chair for organising the in-person ESAC meeting in Rome. She introduced the 3 points to be discussed today and mentioned that two documents were distributed ahead of the meeting relating to the statistical impact of the War in Ukraine and on the peer reviews are going to be discussed in the ESSC meeting in Oslo.

2.1 Emerging demands for European statistics in the context of the Ukrainian war (Doc.2022/13)

The ESAC chair asked the Director General of Eurostat to clarify if a specific statistical dashboard on the impact of the Ukraine war similar to the one on the Covid19 pandemic would be published on Eurostat website.

Mrs. Kotzeva mentioned that a dedicated section on statistics on the impact of the war in Ukraine is available on its web site as this approach was usually preferred by users. There are three broad areas with new demands: 1) population, 2) energy, and 3) economic statistics with macro-economic data (inflation) but also micro-economic data (supply chains for particular products). There is however no specific dashboard for Ukraine as it was felt that the current dashboard on economic recovery is also relevant for indicators impacted by the war (e.g. inflation and energy prices).

On energy EU-related policies, some recent developments such as energy consumption reduction or energy mix required specific data collection and publication of indicators by Eurostat. Such data are provided on a voluntary basis by the countries. It is foreseen to include provisions in the new Regulation 223/2009 in order to support the rapid provision of data subject to the support of Member States.

Regarding population statistics, Eurostat is also collecting data on refugees and asked Member States to provide data on population censuses in order to identify the Ukrainian population living abroad. On products and supply chains Eurostat also asked to provide data on a monthly basis but there is an issue of confidentiality as some enterprises might easily be identified.

Due to martial law in Ukraine, the National Statistical Office has limited activity. The law allows the NSI to resume its activities 2 months after the end of the war, but obviously the date is unpredictable. However, the NSI is preparing to resume its activities quickly if necessary. Eurostat is assessing the type of support and data that the Ukrainian statistical office might need to recover as soon as possible in order to produce key indicators (GDP, population, etc.). Eurostat is also drawing on the expertise of the NSIs.

Mrs. Silberman expressed a positive view of Eurostat's efforts to collect energy data. However, she asked whether the data would be micro or macro data, whether comparability would be ensured and whether Member States would survey consumers. Regarding

population data, Mrs. Silberman asked whether Eurostat has data on Ukrainians who have returned to their country. She also mentioned the current discussions on the classification of the status of Ukrainian refugees and asked for more information on the subject.

Mr. Ripatti asked to clarify whether arms export is visible and comparable in the national accounts of the new EU Member States and whether it affects inventories, bearing in mind that this information could be very sensitive. Another issue he raised concerned the identification of substitution effects as a result of the subsidisation of soaring energy prices in the Member States.

Mr. Herteliu referred to the considerable effect of the war in Ukraine on the various means of transport and the use of roads by people in transit in neighbouring countries. He asked if there were any parameters to measure this effect in the Member States.

Mrs. Pál explained that neighbouring countries measure the inflow of Ukrainian population and the point of entry at the border, but there is little information on the resulting flows to other EU countries. Population censuses can probably solve this problem.

Mrs. Kotzeva replied that as far as energy statistics are concerned, Eurostat did not start from scratch, as there are data covering various aspects, from energy production to consumption and prices. It is not a question of new data sources. A lot of information is available on the dedicated Eurostat website. Regarding national accounts, Eurostat explained that measures taken by Member States take different forms (subsidies, direct aids, price caps etc.). It is very important to make the data comparable between Member States and Eurostat provides very detailed methodological advice with the support of experts including the ECB. The same applies to the calculation of inflation. For population statistics, the current international standard is to use/measure the population on the basis of intention to stay one year in a country as usual residence Eurostat has very detailed information on Ukrainians entering a country, but other information is lacking, such as whether they stay in the country. It is also possible to use other data sources rather than surveys, but access to other data should be better guaranteed. Mrs. Kotzeva thanked the ESAC Members for repeatedly supporting the view that user needs are important and that securing access to modern data (e.g. mobile phones data) is a relevant issue also for the Member States. Mrs. Kotzeva also stressed that transport data could be a relevant topic in the future.

Mrs. Willeke explained that ECB economists and statisticians are also looking at government measures to limit the impact of energy prices on business and inflation. One of the difficulties is to ensure comparability between countries due to the different types of contracts used.

3.2 Progress in the third round of the ESS peer reviews (Doc. 2022/11)

Mr. Vichi introduced this point by observing that the Peer Reviews were moving in the right direction.

Mrs. Kotzeva explained that the third round of peer reviews is progressing well and is about half way through. Detailed information is provided in the document distributed to the ESAC before the meeting.

3.3 European statistics on population and housing ESOP

The Chair recalled that the topic of European population and housing statistics ESOP will be discussed at the next ESSC meeting.

Regarding European population statistics, Mrs. Kotzeva referred to the presentation she had prepared before the meeting and said that it could be shared with ESAC.

Mrs. Kotzeva mentioned that ESOP statistics are important in many ways, for example for elections (e.g. qualified majority voting systems) and economic indicators. Currently, censuses are carried out every 10 years. The problem is one cannot wait every ten years for solid data. Furthermore, if we have access to good and sufficient administrative data, there is a feeling in the statistical community that better annual or even monthly population data could be produced. There is a need for timely statistics on housing, for example to support energy efficiency measures. The proposal is to combine the use of administrative data with periodic censuses. At the next ESSC meeting, discussions with the Member States will continue. One question concerns the criterion used for the measurement of the population, i.e. the actual or intended place of usual residence in a year. The issue of diversity and inclusion is increasingly high on the political agenda, while collecting such data through administrative registers remains very sensitive. Finally, the proposal should offer the possibility of ad hoc data collections to adapt to changing policy needs and new opportunities emerging from new sources, subject to the agreement of Member States. Mrs. Kotzeva also mentioned the importance of data sharing across the ESS (anonymised, aggregated and harmonised data). Overall, the proposal is quite visionary.

The Chair stressed the importance of prioritising statistical collection according to costs. The ESAC may need to consider issuing an opinion on this point.

Mrs. Kotzeva suggested that it might be preferable for ESAC to give an opinion when the Commission gives a formal proposal to the Parliament and the Council.

Mrs. João Casanova de Araújo e Sá Valente Rosa asked when Eurostat expects to reach an agreement on the concept of residence, as this also affects data on migration flows and asymmetric methodologies may lead to different figures.

Mrs. Silberman indicated that administrative data and registers are different concepts. She also asked about the possible implementation of the continuous or permanent census to address this issue.

Mr. Herteliu indicated that the issue is not only a question of harmonization of methodologies between the different countries. The countries from which migrants depart have difficulties in measuring the extent of migration. Some countries are part of the Schengen area and migrants can easily move and settle in other countries in the same area, which complicates the measurement of migration flows due to the lack of border controls. Regarding the use of rolling censuses, he expressed some doubts about their general feasibility.

Mrs. Jakaitienė commented on the issue of data sharing and asked whether there is a general trend in the EU for statistical offices to become the single statistical authority as will be the case in Lithuania next year. This would facilitate data sharing in general.

Mrs. Pál pointed out that there are also new demands and regulations outside the scope of official statistics but which have an influence on them. Statistical systems are heterogeneous as national data centres/owners are decided at national level. For example, Hungary has recently created an institution called "Data Governance Agency", which is separate from the National Statistical Office.

Mr. Van Der Heijden asked whether it would be possible to define synthetic data that could be shared between countries to avoid confidentiality problems.

Mrs. Kotzeva explained that a process with different steps has to be followed, in which basic definitions are issued before they are applied. First, available population registers and administrative data should be used to determine the situation of a specific person by combining different data sources. These aspects should be the subject of legislation. Methodological guidance is also important but cannot be included in legislation. This aspect will for example be covered by expert groups or task forces. The next issue is access to data. Countries need to ensure that they will be able to combine various data sources in a timely manner in order to estimate the place of usual residence. On migration, there is a need to work on a conceptual framework, for example by combining migration and labour flow data. Regarding synthetic data, Ms. Kotzeva agreed that this could be a way forward. However, the law should focus on key principles such as privacy by default and disclosure controls, while the practicalities should be addressed outside the law. On the topic of data agencies, Ms. Kotzeva explained that in very few countries, statistical authorities are also data agencies. In some countries, statistical offices assume the role of data agencies, but in others this is not the case. Eurostat could encourage good practices but not force countries to require that statistical offices also act as data agencies. The discussion is complex and requires a thorough analysis of the functions performed by statistical offices before reaching a conclusion.

The Chair proposed to collect some viewpoints from ESAC on the user side regarding the housing and population statistics proposal and to share them with Eurostat.

3 – Revised Data Act and Regulation 223/2009

3.1 Review of the Regulation 223/2009 (Doc. 2022/10)

The Chair introduced the item by mentioning that he had prepared a document on the subject (Doc. 2022/10). The idea of the paper is to make suggestions in order to link the revision of Regulation 223 with the ongoing discussions on data access and data sharing. The first proposal is to include in the current principles of Article 2 those from the code of practice that are useful to justify the need for access to administrative and private data: for example, coordination and cooperation; mandate for data collection and access; timeliness and punctuality; consistency and comparability. Secondly, the Chair suggested to clearly specify the roles of the two committees ESAC and ESGAB in the Regulation, next to that of the ESSC. In particular, the role of the ESAC should be defined by mentioning that it represents the users of statistics with a specific mandate that is also closely linked to the definition of the statistical programme. The Chair also indicated that the cooperation with scientific institutions (universities) for the development of methodologies for collection, production and dissemination of statistics should be clearly defined. The Chair explained that he could organise the sharing of the document for Members to make comments or suggestions.

Mr. Karlsson agreed with the idea to better define the role of ESAC and to make the importance of users more explicit.

Mrs. Silberman proposed to also mention the National User Councils (NuCs) in the basic regulation as ESAC has an obligation to liaise with the NuCs. She also asked what kind of impact the suggested changes would have on ESAC's work.

The Chair explained that the main impact would be on the visibility of ESAC. ESAC should also give its opinion early in the process of adopting the statistical programme so that the needs of the users are taken into account early enough.

Mrs. Willeke indicated that the Regulation should also mention that the ESAC should have the possibility to comment on what it considers useful to users for the production of better statistics. The areas of interest will be identified during the consultation process, but it is known that topics such as data sharing in the ESS and access to private data are also aimed at producing better statistics. In particular, data sharing with the ESCB and the ECB is important to ensure the overall consistency of financial and non-financial accounts and ESAC may have an opinion on this from a user perspective. It should also be borne in mind that Article 12 of the Regulation also provides for quality principles and that duplication of references to statistical principles should be avoided.

Mrs. Sloka said that the efforts of the ESAC Chair should be supported, especially with regard to cooperation with the academic world. University professors are not only users of statistics, but they also teach statistics and participate in research. Their role and importance should be recognised.

Mrs. Jakaitienė asked to clarify what is meant by 'scientific institutions'. In Lithuania, academia does not have access to micro data because the current legal framework requires research institutions to submit a project with funding before they can access the data. This condition should be reversed, with access to data being granted before a project is launched.

The Chair said that scientific institutions are a broader concept than universities, for example, it should also cover scientific councils that carry out research.

Mr. Herteliu referred to the existence of the EMOS network universities. Regarding the place of ESAC in the Regulation, he mentioned that resources should be allocated to ESAC.

Mr. Van Der Heijden suggested a rewording of the reference to "development of methodologies for the collection, production and dissemination of statistics" by adding "in the fields of" before "collection".

Mrs. João Casanova de Araújo e Sá Valente Rosa suggested adding/moving two principles on clarity and accessibility of statistics from Article 12 to Article 2.

Mrs. Silberman asked whether the word "dissemination" was appropriate in this context and wondered whether the word "access" to statistics would not be more appropriate.

The Chair clarified that the word "dissemination" should be interpreted as "communication", as one of the main problems is the lack of understanding of statistics by users.

Mrs. Silberman felt that a principle guaranteeing access to micro-data (also for researchers) should be inserted in the Regulation. The Chair accepted this suggestion.

3.2 Revised Data Act – Letter of ESAC to the Shadow Rapporteurs (Doc. 2022/12)

The Chair referred to the ESAC letter of 11 October 2022 (Doc. 2022/12) which had been circulated before the meeting. He briefly recalled the history of the proposed data act.

He recalled that the Commission had adopted a proposal for "*harmonised rules on fair access to and use of data*" in February 2022. After some discussions, a compromise was reached under the Czech Presidency, notably on Chapter V on the provision of data to public sector bodies and EU institutions on the basis of "*exceptional needs*", notably by clarifying and operationalising what is meant by "*exceptional circumstances*" in which access to private data could be granted for official statistical purposes. On 9 September 2022, the Chair of the Council Working Party on Telecommunications and the Information Society

(TELECOM) participated in the meeting of the Council Working Party on Statistics (STATIS), in order to inform delegates about the state of play of the proposed data law, including the Presidency compromise text on Chapter V.

The ESAC Chair consulted several stakeholders, including the Commission, following which he suggested in his letter that a new article 22a be added to the proposal for the provision of data to the national statistical institutes and Eurostat. This article would oblige data holders to *'make available the data used for the production of European statistics included in the European Statistical Programme in order to meet the information needs of European citizens in a timely manner'*.

The idea is that data from the EU statistical programme should be available without exceptional conditionality, as was the case for Covid-19, for example. In the case of migration and the war in Ukraine, such a provision would have been very useful. What matters is the relevance of the information and data for the production of EU statistics under the Statistical Programme.

The Chair stated that he had discussed the issue with the Italian rapporteur and had been informed that the text would be discussed on 9 November. The Chair encouraged further contacts with other MEPs as he felt that there was a lack of understanding of statistical issues, particularly in relation to access to data. The Chair advocated a step-by-step approach by first ensuring access to data for statistical institutes before extending it to other entities.

Mr. Karlsson suggested changing the wording used in the proposal for Article 22a from "EU citizens" to reduce the target group to "NSIs". The Chair accepted this proposal as this is the exact meaning of the new article and the NSIs are the producers of EU statistics in the context of the EU statistical programme.

Mrs. Willeke mentioned that the ECB had issued an opinion on the proposed data law. She expressed some concerns about Article 22a as included in the letter to MEPS. In her view, the data should be made available to the producers of European statistics, i.e. the ESS and the ESCB, and there is therefore no valid reason to make a distinction between the two.

The Chair confirmed that the underlying objective was to allow data sharing for both systems.

Mr. Di Pietro (from the EFTA Statistical Office) pointed out a methodological problem with the term "data used for the production of statistics" and felt that it should rather be "data to be used".

The Chair clarified that the principle should be that when we refer to data sharing by private companies, it is relevant for the production of European statistics in the context of the EU statistical programme. The word "production" is essential here. This approach should convince policy makers but also private companies to share their data.

Mrs. Silberman asked about the current status of the NSIs discussions on the proposal, i.e. at national level.

Mrs. Kotzeva recalled that after the presentation of a proposal by the Commission, the legislative procedure foresees that the European Parliament and the Council (i.e. the competent ministries of the Member States) can make changes to the Commission's text. She explained that if NSIs want to make proposals at national level, they should discuss them with their competent ministries.

The Chair encouraged ESAC Members to use their contacts in their countries to convey ESAC's position on the issue, i.e. that users' needs can be taken into account.

4 – Feedback from Members representing ESAC in Directors' Groups and other meetings

Mr. Herteliu informed the ESAC Members about the results of the meeting of the Directors of Macroeconomic Statistics (DMES) held on 21-22 June 2022, including some methodological issues regarding the Excessive Deficit Procedure in the context of the RRF, the harmonisation of owner-occupied housing price indices (a task force is dealing with this issue) and the revision of the NACE. The next meeting of the DMES will take place in person.

5 – Conference of European Statistics Stakeholders (CESS) on 20-21 October 2022 in Rome, Italy

The Chair informed the ESAC about the current status of the organisation of the CESS 2022. Some 490 participants have registered for the conference and this number continues to grow. The general programme is available on the CESS 2022 website and the abstracts of the sessions and panels can be downloaded by clicking on the links for each session indicated in the general programme. The Chair confirmed that the first meeting of the National User Councils' Meeting (NUCs) would take place on the morning of 21 October. The Chair reminded the meeting that ESAC Members are invited to the social dinner that will take place in the evening of 20 October. The Chair reminded that the European Statistics Day (ESD) would be celebrated during the opening session of the conference and that Mrs. João Casanova de Araújo e Sá Valente Rosa would present the conference motto and the ESAC statement on ESD on this occasion.

ESAC Members congratulated and applauded Maurizio Vichi, ESAC Chair, for organising the conference.

6 – National User Councils' Meeting (NUC) on 21 October 2022

The Chair briefly presented the report on the results of the questionnaire on National User Councils (Doc 2022/08). He explained that this questionnaire was a first attempt to identify NUCs in the Member States and to get a better understanding of their mandates and tasks. He said that ESAC could consider launching a new and improved questionnaire in 2023.

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 agreed:

Meeting N°	Date	Type	Place
39	Week of 6/03/2023 (*)	In person, back to back with the NTSS	Belgium, Brussels
40	16/06/2023	Virtual	
41	19 or 20/10/2023 (*)	In person, back to back with the DGINS/ESSC	Ireland, Cork

(*) exact date to be confirmed.

8 – AOB

No issue.