



European Statistical
Advisory Committee

35th Meeting

17 May 2021

10.00 – 13.00

Videoconference

Minutes

ESAC Doc. 2021/10

1 – Welcome and adoption of the agenda

The Chair announced that the mandates of three current members of ESAC (Ms Biruta Sloka, Ms Ariane Koenig and Mr Claudiu Herteliu) were renewed for another five years by a Commission Decision adopted on 3 May 2021. The Chair was pleased to welcome two new members of ESAC appointed by the same Commission Decision: Ms Roxane Silberman and Mr Antti Ripatti. Both new members shortly presented themselves.

The Chair welcomed Eurostat's Deputy Director-General, Mr Gallo Gueye, who replaced Ms Kotzeva, Director General of Eurostat, who was absent.

The ESAC members adopted the agenda.

2 - Recent developments – Feedback from Eurostat

Eurostat updated ESAC on the recent developments in the ESS, focusing on three main topics: 1. Census 2021; 2. Impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on statistics; 3. Third round of peer reviews.

- Census 2021

Eurostat informed ESAC that the ongoing census is based on European legislation, as was the case for the census of 2011, ensuring comparability among the EU Member States. The legislation also implements international standards for censuses, allowing for international comparison with the countries outside the EU.

In line with the legal requirements, countries enjoy freedom on how to implement the census: 11 countries have signalled to use exclusively registers for collection of data; 11 other countries will combine registers and conventional sources; and the remaining countries will use conventional sources only.

Eurostat reminded that this census is conducted under particular conditions, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, which might be disturbing in particular for the countries using surveys for the data collection. In addition to that, there might be some security issues.

The reference year for the census is 2021. The countries choose the precise date of the year when they conduct the census and they communicate this date to Eurostat. A few countries will undertake some census operations in 2022. The deadline for the census data transmission to Eurostat is end of 2022. Eurostat will disseminate the results via a census hub in March 2023. The users of census data request more detailed, more frequent and timelier statistics. There is also an increased interest in data on migration.

Eurostat has established a working group to discuss methodological issues, and is in continuous bilateral contact with countries that face difficulties.

- Covid-19

Eurostat further informed ESAC on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on data production. The lower accessibility to traditional data sources has led to the development of alternative methods. Due to the measures taken by countries, Eurostat in cooperation with the NSIs and other international institutions, developed or adapted methodological guidelines in all areas of statistics. In this context, the good cooperation with the European Central bank (ECB) was emphasised. The calendar of

publications of Eurostat was not disturbed and all data releases took place as scheduled. The data quality received from the Member States did not suffer from the crisis either.

In December 2020, Eurostat published the European Statistical Recovery Dashboard aiming to track the economic, social and environmental aspects of recovery from the crisis. The dashboard shows 24 indicators, covering various areas of statistics, and is updated regularly. Thinking ahead, Eurostat is aware that the timeliness and frequency need to be improved and some more indicators will need to be included in the dashboard.

- Third round of peer reviews (PRs)

Eurostat gave an overview of the latest development in the forthcoming peer reviews, which will be launched in June for both Member States and Eurostat. There are some delays in previously announced timing; however, they are not significant.

The methodology for NSIs PRs had been agreed by the ESS; ESGAB has adapted that methodology to the specificities of Eurostat. The PRs, including that of Eurostat, will be conducted online. This might change to physical visits at later stage, should the sanitary situation allow.

ESAC members raised several questions on each point of the presentation:

- One member expected that the ongoing census would bring improvements in terms of more detailed data, and that the results would show how some parts of social statistics have changed. Eurostat confirmed that the census should result in very detailed data at lower geographical levels. It may provide more detailed data on migration.
- Regarding the recovery dashboard, the representative of the Committee of Regions enquired about possible regionalisation and shared with the members a document produced by the Commission for Territorial Cohesion Policy and EU Budget “Integration of Geographic and Statistical data for better EU Policy Making”. For the moment Eurostat does not foresee to show regional data. Another member felt that some indicators, such as the ones based on the Labour Force Survey, are rather outdated at the time they are presented in the dashboard. He strongly urged Eurostat to provide monthly data in the social domain, as this is what researchers are interested in. Eurostat agreed that timeliness is an issue and that Eurostat has taken measures to improve it. The new regulation on social statistics could improve the situation. The idea is indeed to work with monthly data, however some methodological issues need to be overcome. Eurostat also plans to improve the dissemination of data. Eurostat stressed that it will be giving more emphasis on improvement of timeliness in statistics. Eurostat continues to improve the recovery dashboard in cooperation with the Member States.
One member was interested in the recent developments in the agricultural census. Eurostat committed to replying in writing.
- ESAC members recognised that conducting PRs remotely might be challenging. Eurostat underlined that many visits to Member States, which in the past used to be conducted physically (GNI, EDP visits) have been transformed into remote missions and the results have been positive. In addition, the flexibility that the remote visits provide could be seen as an advantage.

3 - Preparation of the ESAC Opinion on the 2022 Annual Work Programme

The Chair reminded that Eurostat expects a written ESAC opinion on the draft 2022 Annual Work Programme by 4 June 2021. Annex 1 to the letter of DG Eurostat sent to ESAC on 4 May 2021 listed two general objectives and 10 specific ones. The Chair will draft a first version of the opinion (as done last year) and will invite the members to provide their comments in writing.

As the new techniques play an important role in the production of statistics, Eurostat is looking forward to seeing in particular an ESAC reflection on modernisation and new data requirements.

4 - Preparation of the ESAC workshop ‘Non-traditional data sources and trusted smart statistics’

The Chair informed the members that the workshop will take place on 20 October and will be organized by ESAC, Eurostat, STATEC and ECB. The final title of the workshop is: Non-traditional data sources and Big Data for trusted smart statistics

Subtitle: New methods, challenges for data quality, governance and participation models.

The workshop will be held on one day, divided in two half-day sessions, with two keynote speakers and the participation of various important stakeholders. A panel discussion will conclude the morning session. The organisation of the event is ongoing and Eurostat has already contacted one possible keynote speaker.

Structure of the workshop

9.00 – 9.30 Opening session

9:30 – 10:15 Keynote speaker

10.30 – 12.00 Session 1

12:00 – 13:00 Panel discussion

13:00 – 14:00 Light lunch

14.00 – 14.45 Keynote speaker

15.00 – 16.30 Session 2

16:30 – 17.00 Closing session

The organizers intend to verify if this can be an event of the conference for the future of Europe.

The Chair invited ESAC members to attend the workshop.

Ms Koenig informed about a related event which will take place in January 2022. This event will be smaller than the October one and will discuss issues raised by citizen science, such as: data legitimacy, data quality, capacity building, diverse data landscapes, presentation of data to different target audiences, etc. A meeting to debate the organisation of both events was scheduled for 20 May.

A member of ESAC wanted to know how the topic of citizen science will be covered in October. The Chair considered this topic relevant and mentioned that this discussion may include elements such as the typology and quality of such data collection. Ms Koenig added that the issue of democratizing and evidence based statistics will be covered in January.

Another member was interested in what is included in the word “governance of statistics” and whether the change of current statistical legislation with respect to the privately held data will also be discussed in October. The Chair explained that this topic is the subject of a common paper with ESGAB, currently under preparation.

One member asked about what should be understood under the term “aspects of education and literacy” in the context of statistics. The Chair clarified that he understands these as additional

competencies in treatment and typology of data and/or identification of skills needed to deal with the data sources.

Eurostat considered the presented topics as relevant, and asked to accommodate appropriately also the topic of privately held data and the related legislation, which are important elements nowadays.

The Chair invited the members to provide their comments on the October workshop in writing.

5 – National User Councils questionnaire

The ESAC secretariat sent the online questionnaire to the countries on 15 April, with a first deadline for response on 10 May and later on extended until 31 May. The authors of the questionnaire clarified that its main purpose is to help ESAC obtain information on the advisory boards that advise the national statistical systems on statistical needs and government statistical policies. The answers to the questionnaire will also provide an overview of the institutional arrangements and actions taken to address user needs in each country. Based on the preliminary results, the authors had the impression that the respondents might have misunderstood some of the questions. They further indicated that most of the NUCs that have responded seem to be ESAC like bodies. The authors suggested that ESAC could discuss at its next meeting the results of the questionnaire, their future use as well as the issue of building closer relationships with these ESAC like bodies.

Several members asked to receive the questionnaire and the list of bodies that have responded. The Chair indicated that the results of the questionnaire could be ready in June – July.

6 – European Statistics Day (ESD) 2021

Ms Maria Joao Valente Rosa presented the suggested ESD motto and the first draft of the ESAC statement to the members.

Proposed motto: Statistics, a vaccine to protect democracy and combat the virus of disinformation

Draft Statement:

The European Democracy Action Plan 2019-2024, presented by the European Commission, highlighted the need to empower citizens and build more resilient democracies across the EU.

Democracies worldwide face the proliferation, similar to that of a virus, of false or biased information that potentially has the power to quickly destabilize democratic institutions and undermine citizens' choices and trust.

Strengthening democratic resilience means tackling disinformation by having high-quality statistical data that citizens can fully trust, which the European Statistical System produces.

High-quality statistical data, supported by statistical methodologies based on recognised scientific criteria, provide essential information to support people, businesses, and organizations in taking appropriate decisions and actions.

In the information society we live in, it is vital to confront current and future social and environmental challenges with statistics that are widely used and understood. Recently, the

COVID-19 pandemic has shown the high importance of being well informed and of having trustworthy and up-to-date data on which to base policy decisions to prevent the spread of the virus.

In summary, the heart of our message for European Statistics Day 2021 is the need to defeat disinformation by strengthening the production and use of high-quality statistical information with the highest standards of transparency and accountability, as a vital means of protecting freedom and democracy.

The main issue raised in the discussion that followed was the word “vaccine” in the text and in the motto in the context of the use of official statistics to protect democracy. The Chair explained that the vaccination is seen as something that can liberate from the pandemic situation and, in this context, one could official statistics with a vaccine to protect democracy. However the Chair understood that there might be some possible misinterpretation.

Eurostat supported both, the motto and the draft statement. The majority of the members agreed with the use of the word “vaccine”. The Chair invited members to provide further comments on the motto and the text in writing.

7 - Feedback from members representing ESAC in Directors Groups and other meetings

The ESAC member who attended the December 2020 meeting of Business Statistics Directors Group informed on the main topics of the meeting: recent developments in business statistics, Green Deal initiative, impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on business and trade statistics and the recovery dashboard. The ESAC secretariat had distributed the respective written summary prior the ESAC meeting. The member invited other members to contact her directly in case of further questions.

8 – Update of the 2021 meeting schedule

The ESAC secretariat will update and distribute the document on the annual planning of meetings of Director Groups scheduled for 2021. Some of the members indicated their interest in attending those meetings. The Chair invited the ESAC members to reflect on their possible attendance at the remaining meetings and indicate it to Secretariat.

9 - AOB

The Chair explained that the joint ESAC/ESGAB paper on ‘Smart statistics and big data’ is still work in progress.