

EUROSTAT IMPROVEMENT ACTIONS IN RESPONSE TO THE ESGAB PEER REVIEW 2021 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. ESGAB recommends that legislation should specify reasons for the early termination of the contract (dismissal) of the Director-General of Eurostat. These should not include reasons that compromise his/her professional or scientific independence.**

The reasons for the termination of the services of the Director-General of Eurostat are laid down in legislation (EU Staff Regulations, Title III 'Career of officials', Chapter 4 'Termination of service'). As recalled in the Commission Decision on Eurostat, the Commission is committed to exercising its powers with regard to the transfer and dismissal of the Director-General of Eurostat with due regard to the need to guarantee independence, objectivity and efficiency in the exercise of his or her responsibilities, and following a transparent procedure based on professional criteria only. The EU staff regulations, in combination with the Commission Decision on Eurostat, correspond therefore to the Code of Practice indicator on having specified in a legal framework the reasons on the basis of which the incumbency can be terminated.

Recommendation 1 is thus without object.

- 2. ESGAB recommends that the recruitment and dismissal of Eurostat senior management, other than the director-general, should be public and transparent, with a strong emphasis on statistical qualifications.**

Eurostat senior managers, other than the Director-General, are also recruited following a procedure that is transparent and based on professional criteria, in accordance with the EU Staff Regulations. Cases of transfer or dismissal are similarly provided in the EU Staff Regulations.

Recommendation 2 is without object and also goes beyond the Code of Practice.

3. ESGAB recommends that Eurostat ensure the systematic follow-up of the implementation of the reference quality framework applicable for other statistics, in cooperation with the European Commission directorates-general concerned. This should include exploring the usefulness of setting up a mutual peer-review process in order to monitor and, if needed, strengthen compliance with the reference quality framework.

Improvement actions:

- A. Conduct a survey among the concerned services to monitor and evaluate the implementation of the Reference Quality Framework in the 2021 pilot phase;
- B. Inform the concerned services at the regular meetings of the statistical correspondents about the state-of-play in the implementation of the RQF as well as about experiences, best practices applied and challenges;
- C. Set up specific meetings with individual Commission services concerned, subject to resource availabilities, to discuss issues related to the implementation of the RQF.

Timeline:

- A. End of 2022;
- B. End of 2022 and regularly afterwards;
- C. End of 2024.

4. ESGAB recommends that Eurostat evaluate critically whether the current practice of pre-releasing statistics to other bodies of the European Commission, while respecting the ES CoP, complies with Eurostat's position as standard bearer of the ESS.

Improvement action:

Provide an overview of the current state of play in existing MoU with Commission services. This will allow for a sound basis for a critical evaluation of the current practice.

Timeline:

Summer 2022.

5. ESGAB recommends that Eurostat further develop its already strong safeguards for confidentiality by reviewing and, to the extent possible, further harmonising practices across statistical areas as regards procedures and tools for anonymisation and/or statistical disclosure control.

Improvement actions:

Eurostat harmonises the approaches to protection of confidential data across statistical areas by means of confidentiality charters laying down some general rules for publication of table totals involving confidential national data. This includes in particular EU totals, but also other totals, e.g. based on NACE classification. In this context, Eurostat examines the needs for a confidentiality tool allowing automatic protection of such totals in tables.

Proposed actions cover: (A) a review of current practices for protection of totals and (B) an analysis of IT solutions for possible integration with statistical production systems at Eurostat.

Timeline:

- A. end 2022,
- B. end 2023

6. ESGAB recommends that Eurostat develop a comprehensive strategy of cooperation with academia.

Improvement actions:

Eurostat has close relationships with universities in the context of the European Master for Official Statistics ('EMOS') programme. Starting in 2022, EMOS activities and impact will be reviewed with the aim of outlining options for its future scope and operation, extending, where possible, the analysis to cover more in general relations with universities and the academic sector (A). Based on the findings of the study, Eurostat will draft a more comprehensive strategy of cooperation with academia (B).

Timeline:

- A. Results of EMOS review: Q1 2023;
- B. Development of more comprehensive strategy: Q4 2023

7. ESGAB recommends that Eurostat further improve its communication and dissemination in light of the ‘new world of information overflow’, where many providers fight for the limited attention of the users.

Improvement actions:

Eurostat will continue to monitor and evaluate the implementation of its communication and dissemination strategy to ensure that it continues to be relevant for the users. At this stage, the following improvement actions are foreseen:

- A. Modernize the website: homepage, level 1 and 2 pages (2022); level 3/4/5 pages (first half of 2023)
- B. Further develop webinars, thus fully using the new multimedia based information habits and directly engaging with users (2022)
- C. Tap the potential of the new ways of information consumption, by introducing a new audio-oriented dissemination product, podcasts (2022)
- D. Systematically user-test dissemination products, as part of the annual dissemination planning, and follow-up on user recommendations
- E. Ease the access to support for website visitors through a new instant messaging system (2022)

Timeline:

End of 2022 for majority of improvement actions (B, C, D, E).
First half of 2023 for finalisation of website modernisation (A).

8. ESGAB recommends that Eurostat find ways, where appropriate, of establishing externally accessible vintage databases for relevant statistics in order to facilitate policy-relevant research.

Improvement actions:

Eurostat has developed a vintage database for Principal European Economic Indicators (PEEIS). It will select a relevant set of main indicators that could be made available externally for policy relevant research.

Timeline:

End 2022

9. ESGAB recommends that Eurostat take action to enhance research on microdata by developing appropriate methods and agreeing with Member States on data sets to which access may be feasible, and by developing privacy-protecting techniques for access (such as metadata-driven software) that could also be applied at the Member State level.

Improvement actions:

Eurostat constantly improves microdata access services.

Further improvement of microdata access foresees: (A) advancing a metadata project (description of variables in microdata sets in machine readable format); (B) expanding remote access to secure use files via access points in research entities [to cover additional datasets and to have access point in all Member States]; and (C) exploring and discussing with Member States and researchers protection methods and tools allowing queries of microdata for scientific purposes.

Following successful completion of (C), Eurostat will define and launch a project to implement metadata driven-software allowing dynamic queries of microdata (D).

Timeline:

- A. Q4 2023
- B. Q4 2024
- C. Q4 2024
- D. Q4 2025

10. ESGAB recommends that Eurostat further develop its analytical frameworks with respect to revisions. Eurostat should publish its revision policy and regular analyses of revisions.

Improvement action:

Eurostat and the ESS have developed and implemented guidelines on revision policies concerning different statistical sectors such as Principal European Economic Indicators (PEEIs) and ESA 2010 national accounts data. Eurostat will look again into the subject of revision policies and will in particular investigate whether the existing guidelines could be extended to other statistical domains or data sets.

Timeline:

End-2023

11. ESGAB recommends to the co-legislators that the upcoming adoption of the EU Data Act should establish a permanent path for access to privately held data for Eurostat and for all producers of European statistics.

Improvement action 11:

This action has already been implemented at the level of the Commission with the adoption on 23 February 2022 by the Commission of its Data Act proposal (COM(2022)68). The proposal is now under consideration by the European Parliament and the Council.

12. ESGAB recommends that Eurostat develop a comprehensive strategy for the use of new digital data sources that have the potential to contribute to the objectives of relevance, accuracy and timeliness, and may help to reduce the burden on respondents and increase cost-effectiveness.

Improvement action 12:

Following the ESS Vision 2020, Eurostat will coordinate the design of an ESS innovation agenda that will encompass reuse of new digital data sources for the purposes of official statistics. The innovation agenda will define and prioritize specific innovation activities, including use of new data sources.

Based on this experience and taking into account the advancement of the revision of the European Statistics regulation, Eurostat will reassess the need and feasibility to formulate a generic and standalone roadmap for the use of the new digital data sources for the ESS statistical production purposes.

Timeline:

Q1 2023

13. ESGAB recommends that Eurostat and the ECB build on the existing strong cooperation between the ESS and the ESCB to exploit the scope for better coordination and cooperation on data sharing and on dealing with complex statistical cases (such as multinational enterprises), and to evaluate the potential for common statistical infrastructures (such as statistical business registers).

Improvement action 13:

CMFB Task Force on Exchanging Confidential Information - phase II on-going; ECB is partner in Early Warning System, in EU Network on MNEs coordinators and in the asymmetries resolutions on complex statistical cases (FDI, ITSS); ESS-ESCB sharing statistical business registers for statistical purposes only on-going.

Timeline:

On-going

14. ESGAB recommends that Eurostat identify and map the (future) required skills/competencies of staff. Based on this information, training for existing staff should be adjusted to allow for successful upskilling in the relevant new areas. At the same time, Eurostat should proactively use all the possibilities of the Commission's current recruitment system to attract and retain staff with the necessary future-proof skills.

Improvement action 14:

Eurostat is undertaking a skills mapping exercise of existing skills and future skills needed. The activity on skills mapping is supported by an external contractor who started their work in November 2021. Training for existing staff will be accordingly adjusted. Future selections and competitions will include the new skills set. In addition, in the context of the European Master for Official Statistics, learning outcomes are extended to include data science skills and competencies.

Timeline:

Skills mapping: Summer 2022
Other actions: by end 2024

15. ESGAB recommends that EU policymakers back up all the ongoing innovation endeavours with appropriate funding, covering both financial and human resources. It also reiterates its recommendations (recommendations 2020/6 and 2020/7) that the Commission propose significant investment in digital infrastructure for statistical purposes, to enable innovation and experimentation. The Member States' recovery and resilience plans and other relevant EU funds should support this action on new EU policy initiatives throughout the ESS, covering both development and running costs.

Improvement action 15:

Eurostat has carried out sustained investment in order to develop a modern, secure IT infrastructure for statistical production and dissemination, which are supported by its newly adopted IT strategy. The focus has been on using modern technologies to support large scale secure data exchanges with Member States, data processes automation and data integration and to build a digital data platform to process new data sources.

Based on the IT strategy goals, Eurostat will continue building a reliable and innovative IT infrastructure based notably on secure cloud technology to support co-production statistical processes in close cooperation with Member States.

In order to support this recommendation addressed to EU policy-makers, Eurostat and the ESS will discuss how best to engage with policy-makers at national and European level on the subject of resources. This action has already started in particular with the inclusion of this requirement for resources in the Council conclusions on statistics of November 2021 and will be pursued.

Timeline:

Platform for multisource confidential data processing: By the end of 2022

16. ESGAB recommends that Eurostat and the ESS perform a thorough assessment of the experience during the COVID-19 crisis. This review should cover the challenges, reactions, obstacles and successes, and should draw concrete conclusions. In addition, an action plan should be prepared to ensure resilience in future crisis situations.

Improvement action 16:

This action has already been implemented. Eurostat and the ESS carried out an assessment of the impact COVID-19 crisis on statistics, covering the various aspects of designing statistics, setting up production system, collecting and obtaining data, processing data, analysing results, the dissemination and communication of results as well as the coordination within the ESS. Also the impact on quality criteria such as relevance, accuracy and reliability, timeliness and punctuality, coherence and comparability as well as accessibility and clarity was considered. This assessment led to the Wiesbaden Memorandum “ESS coordinated response to future crises”.

In accordance with this Memorandum, the Rules of Procedure of the Partnership Group have been updated to specify that the Partnership Group members also form the Crisis Response Team that, under the Chair of Eurostat Director-General, supports Eurostat in the coordinated response to crises within the ESS in accordance with the Wiesbaden Memorandum

The need for agility and resilience of the ESS will also be fully considered in the context of the forthcoming revision of Regulation 223/2009.

Timeline:

Action implemented. The ESSC endorsed the new RoP of the PG in May 2021. It was agreed that the Wiesbaden Memorandum should be reviewed by the ESS Committee every 4 years, i.e. next in 2024.

17. ESGAB recommends that Eurostat, jointly with national statistical institutes (NSIs), set up procedures for proactively introducing rapid statistical innovation, which should include experimental statistics in particular. This will help prepare for times of crisis. Proposals should be included on how to ensure the visibility of such statistics, and processes should be devised for their eventual mainstreaming.

Improvement action 17:

Agility and rapid implementation of innovative statistical products is an important aspect of an innovation strategy within the ESS. Eurostat is organising together with Statistics Norway the DGINS 2022 with the topic 'Innovation management in the ESS: from experimentation to production' aiming at promoting an innovation culture within statistical offices and defining ways to accelerate the transition towards mature statistical products and the related communication and user engagement actions.

Legislative enablers related to agility and experimental statistics will be considered in the process of revision of Regulation 223/2009. The conclusions of the DGINS together with possible changes of the European Statistics regulation will constitute the basis for the development of appropriate statistical procedures.

Timeline:

DGINS: October 2022

Revision 223/2009: End 2022

18. ESGAB recommends that Eurostat use, when necessary, the powers provided for under Article 14(1) (b) and Article 14(2) of Regulation (EC) No 223/2009 on European statistics actively and to the fullest possible extent so as to be able to react quickly to unexpected and urgent statistical demands for policymaking. It should therefore analyse the potential and limits of these legal provisions. If they turn out to be inadequate, the issue should be considered in the context of an amendment to Regulation (EC) No 223/2009.

Improvement action 18:

Eurostat will keep considering the use of temporary direct statistical actions in accordance with Article 14 (1)(b) and (2) of Regulation 223/2009 when this is relevant and adds value. Moreover, in the context of a possible revision of Regulation 223/2009, Eurostat will analyse the potential and limits of these provisions, when considering the options and instruments that are the most appropriate to make the European Statistical System fit for the future. An impact assessment in line with the Commission's Better Regulation Agenda will be performed as part of that process.

Timeline: Early 2023