

## Introduction and welcoming words

Dear Reader,

Greetings and a warm welcome to the fourth edition of our bi-annual newsletter, where we present the achievements and dedicated efforts of the National Statistical Institutes (NSIs) participating in the IPA 2019 Multi-beneficiary Statistical Cooperation Programme (MBP).

In this edition, we offer insightful information on the Policy Group on Statistical Cooperation (PGSC) as well as insights into the statistical projects (SPs) of Metadata, Waste Statistics, and Communication. Additionally, our focus extends to traineeships as part of the horizontal activities.

We appreciate your continued interest and support in exploring the practical aspects of statistical cooperation. The content within is designed to provide you with a straightforward understanding of the progress made within the IPA 2019 MBP.

Thank you for your ongoing engagement.

Sincerely,  
The GOPA team

### Overall information



Overall project duration

01 April 2021 - 31 March 2024



**134** expert missions planned

141 expert missions carried out until 01/2024

out of which 41 took place remotely



**26** workshops planned

26 workshops carried out until 01/2024

out of which 8 took place remotely



**19** Statistical Projects (SPs)



**55** contracts foreseen with NSIs for work to be carried out within Statistical Projects



**300** working days for ad-hoc consultancies planned

353,5 working days for ad-hoc consultancies carried out until 01/2024



**77** traineeships planned

47 traineeships in four rounds and in 9 statistical domains (24 in Eurostat, 23 in EU Member States and EFTA countries) in total



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## PGSC Meeting – Policy Group on Statistical Cooperation 2023 in Albania

**Eurostat's annual Policy Group on Statistical Cooperation meeting took place from 8 to 9 November 2023 in Tirana, Albania.**

The event, organised by Eurostat together with Instat (the national statistical institute of Albania), was the 22<sup>nd</sup> meeting of the Group and brought together top managers and international cooperation officers from the NSIs of the EU enlargement countries, Eurostat, DG NEAR and EFTA. It was the first time that representatives from Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine were physically present. The PGSC meeting this year coincided with the announcement of the adoption of the 2023 Enlargement Package, which recommended opening the EU accession negotiations with Moldova and Ukraine, granting candidate status to Georgia and opening EU accession negotiations with Bosnia and Herzegovina, once some outstanding steps towards complying with membership criteria in the latter two countries are taken.

This important policy background further reinforced the inspiring exchanges at the PGSC meeting on how to accelerate progress in the statistical domain of EU enlargement. Eurostat's team was headed by Jean-Pierre Poncelet, Director for Standards, Dissemination, and Cooperation in the European Statistical System.

Over the two days of the PGSC meeting, several statistical topics were discussed in depth, under the leadership of Eurostat colleagues dealing with statistics in the areas of agriculture and fisheries, as well as transport. Particular focus was put on agricultural censuses, as most enlargement countries were either preparing or already implementing the agricultural census in their countries. Another important topic was the implementation of a new round of peer reviews



**Photo 1:** From left to right, Avis Benes (then Head of Unit B-3 at Eurostat), Jean-Pierre Poncelet (Director Directorate B at Eurostat), Elsa Dhuli (Director General of INSTAT) and André Rizzo (Head of the political section at EUD Tirana).



in the enlargement countries. All countries reiterated their willingness to participate in the peer reviews, using a methodology based on the one used for the Member States.

In addition, Eurostat learned from the countries about the progress and challenges they are currently facing, exploring together the best ways to continue cooperation. Further value added to the meeting was brought by a dedicated round table on good practices that allowed for sharing and mutual learning of innovative know-how.

Eurostat made a strong call to the enlargement countries to increase data transmission, with the long-term ambition of

using the same channels and calendar as the EU Member States. The importance of the call was highlighted in the context of the Annual country reports of the Enlargement package, where the statistical annex (with 152 indicators) is an important part.

Finally, future cooperation under IPA 2022 and the state of play in IPA 2019 were discussed with the Western Balkans countries and Türkiye.

A big thank you goes to Eurostat colleagues who participated in the meeting, as well as to Instat colleagues who successfully co-organised and hosted the meeting.



**Photo 2:** Group photo from the PGSC meeting, 08-09.11.2023, Tirana, Albania

## Metadata

**In the field of statistics, metadata serves as a cornerstone for ensuring data quality and facilitating proper understanding and use of statistical outputs. The producers of official statistics adhere to strict standards to ensure that European statistics are developed, produced, and disseminated uniformly and using harmonised methods.**

Metadata provides vital information about the content and quality of statistical outputs, giving users access to essential contextual details. By describing the methodologies and standards employed in data collection, processing, and analysis, metadata enable users to interpret statistics accurately and make informed decisions based on them.

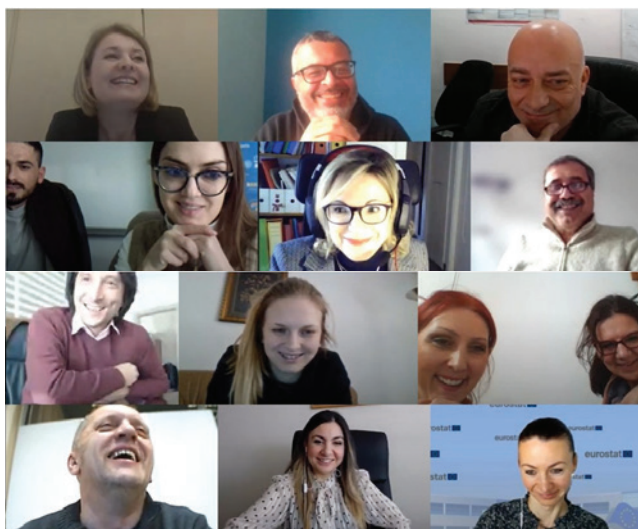
In essence, metadata acts as a bridge between statistical producers and users, facilitating transparency, consistency, and reliability in the statistical information exchange process. This transparency ultimately enhances trust in statistical data and promotes its effective use across various sectors and decision-making processes.

This statistical project aimed to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of data and metadata exchange systems. It began by leveraging the groundwork laid by the National Statistical Institute in developing standards-based systems for this purpose, drawing upon previous initiatives. Key objectives included identifying shortcomings in existing systems and prioritising areas for improvement, aligning with recommendations from the European Statistical System (ESS).

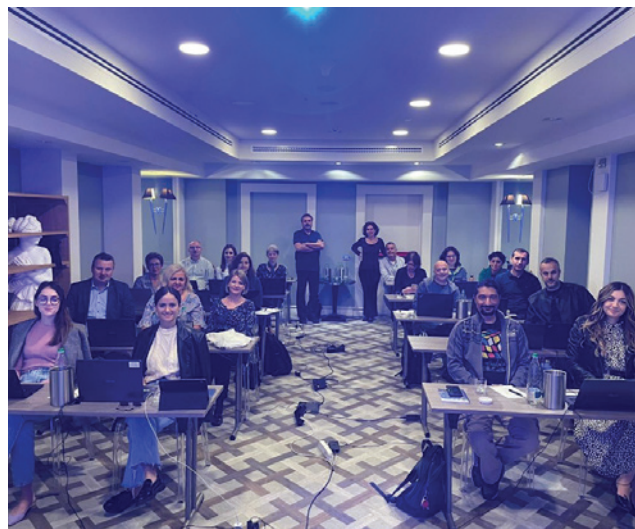
A detailed work programme was crafted to address these gaps, laying out specific actions needed for enhancement.

Central to the project was the implementation of two key standards: the Single Integrated Metadata Structure (SIMS) for managing reference metadata and quality reporting, and the SDMX standard for facilitating data exchange with Eurostat. This involved not only adopting these standards but also potentially establishing infrastructure like the SDMX-RI to support the smooth exchange and dissemination of statistical data.

Moreover, the project aimed to foster stronger collaboration between the National Statistical Institutes (NSI) and other national authorities responsible for official statistics. This included building robust connections to ensure seamless data and metadata exchange practices. Additionally, a significant aspect of the project was raising awareness within NSIs and other national bodies about the advantages of standardised and harmonised approaches to data and metadata exchange. Through these efforts, the project sought to streamline statistical processes and improve the overall quality and reliability of data across different entities and jurisdictions.



**Photo 3:** Photo from the first workshop, carried out remotely on 16-17.02.2022.



**Photo 4:** Group photo from the second workshop, 31.10 – 01.11. 2022, Rome, Italy



## Waste Statistics

**Eurostat has been developing and promoting waste statistics for many years. Waste statistics is a key tool for environmental policy, measuring the circular economy and monitoring progress towards sustainable development goals.**

The waste statistics data project was initiated within this programme with several key objectives in mind. Firstly, it aimed to ensure compliance with new legal requirements by conducting thorough assessments of the current situation in the beneficiary countries. Additionally, the project sought to address specific weaknesses identified in various documents of the Waste Statistics Working Group. These weaknesses included challenges in accurately measuring waste quantities separately collected for recycling and in industrial waste treatment. Another key objective of the project was to ensure the timely delivery of data to Eurostat.

For Kosovo<sup>1</sup>, an additional objective was to enhance the industrial waste survey process. This involved the development of a database system and an electronic reporting tool. The envisioned system, initially designed as a pilot with limited functionalities, aimed to replace paper and interview-based data collection methods with electronic data transmission.

Overall, the project aimed to enhance the efficiency, accuracy, and compliance of waste statistics data collection and reporting processes, benefiting both national and European-level stakeholders.

The programme supported beneficiary countries by providing planned technical assistance, ad hoc support, and organising two study visits to Member State countries.

The study visit for the staff from Bosnia and Herzegovina was organised at the Spanish National Statistical Institute (INE), and it aimed at providing insights into the waste statistics compilation methodologies employed by the INE, focusing on its alignment with the Waste Statistics Regulation and its transition from paper-based to electronic data collection

systems. The visit also highlighted the development of an administrative waste information system. The objectives of the visit included learning from INE's experience in EU-compliant waste statistics compilation, discussing the collection and compilation of municipal waste (MW) data, understanding the development and implementation of electronic data collection tools, and gaining insights into Spain's waste management systems and practices. Concrete results of the visit included BA experts gaining knowledge about INE's waste statistics compilation methodologies, understanding the implementation of reporting requirements, and obtaining insights into the challenges associated with electronic data collection systems.

The study visit for the staff from Kosovo was organised at the Croatian Institute for Environment and Nature, and aimed to facilitate the knowledge exchange regarding the collection and production of high-quality industrial waste (IW) data. The visit focused on Croatia's expertise in IW data collection methodology, administrative framework, data processing, and validation, as well as the implementation of an electronic reporting system. Specific objectives included learning about Croatia's approach to IW data collection, gathering insights into the design and functionalities of the Croatian database and electronic reporting system, understanding the implementation phase and potential challenges, and preparing for the transition to electronic data collection. Concrete results included the acquisition of knowledge on Croatia's IW data collection approach, awareness of technical and communication challenges, understanding the guidance and support needed for a smooth system implementation, and receiving information on the design and technical aspects of Croatia's waste information system, which would be beneficial in developing and optimising Kosovo's reporting tool.

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<sup>1</sup> This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence

## Communication

**In an age of information and misinformation, effective communication is a cornerstone for organisations around the world. For National Statistical Institutes (NSIs), tasked with providing accurate and reliable data to support decision-making, robust communication is essential. Recognising this, the IPA2019 project has dedicated a statistical project to communication in each of the seven partner countries.**

At the heart of these efforts is the understanding that communication goes beyond simply disseminating statistics; it is about building trust, engaging with different stakeholders and combating misinformation. This statistical project has sought to address existing weaknesses and share best practices tailored to the specific context of each participating NSI.

The project has involved a multi-faceted approach, including website improvement, use of social media, media relations and internal communication. By fostering cooperation between the partner countries and drawing on Eurostat's expertise, the project aims to equip NSIs with the tools and strategies needed to navigate the complexities of modern communication.

Throughout the project, seven on-site expert missions were organised to help countries assess strengths and weaknesses and chart a course for further development in communication. Each of the participating NSIs has its own unique challenges and strengths in this area, which necessitates tailor-made priorities for each country.

In Albania, the focus has been on improving communication practices of the National Statistical Institute (INSTAT) in order to better communicate to users. Objectives include promoting two-way communication on social media platforms, refining the design of the Institute's website and increasing the production of infographics for improved visual communication.

Similarly, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the focus has been on strengthening the communication practices of the Bosnia and Herzegovina Statistical Agency (BHAS). Key initiatives include refining dissemination strategies, strengthening relations with the media and improving public appearances by BHAS officials.

In Kosovo, the focus has been on overcoming significant communication hurdles ahead of the 2023 population census, in particular the development of a comprehensive census communication strategy and crisis communication protocols.

In Montenegro, the priority was to refine communication practices at the statistical office (MONSTAT), with efforts focused on crisis communication and strategic planning.



**Photo 5:** Group photos from the second workshop, held in Ljubljana, Slovenia on 29-31.01.2024

In North Macedonia, joint efforts aimed to transform the dissemination and communication landscape, with a focus on improving social media engagement and news releases.

In Serbia, strategic communication efforts have been focused on key statistical activities, including the population and agricultural censuses.

Finally, in Türkiye, steps have been taken to modernise dissemination. Recommendations include a comprehensive plan covering the redesign of content of publications, media relations, social media strategy, crisis communication and statistical literacy initiatives.

At the beginning of the project, a workshop brought together all seven participating countries and representatives from Eurostat. The aim of the workshop was to present the communication initiatives undertaken by Eurostat and the NSIs, to share best practices and to identify areas for improvement.

It served as a platform to deepen Eurostat's communication practices, including integrated editorial planning, new media activities such as webinars and podcasts, user engagement strategies and media communication. Similarly, another workshop was held at the end of the project to present the results achieved and to outline priorities for future improvements. This workshop provided participants with an additional understanding of potential areas of collaboration and synergy.

In essence, the IPA2019 project, with a specific statistical project on communications, has underlined the paramount importance of effective communication for NSIs and provided a roadmap for improving communication practices tailored to the specific needs and challenges of each partner country. The project facilitated the strengthening of the communication infrastructure for NSIs through cooperation, innovation and strategic planning, which in turn contributes to public trust in official statistics.

## Traineeships

**Traineeships are a form of training where employees from NSIs or other national statistics producers (e.g., ministries of agriculture, ministries of finance or the central banks) are seconded to units of Eurostat or to NSIs of the EU member states or EFTA countries to gain a deeper understanding of the European statistical system.**

Tasks such as participation in the preparation of documents for meetings, inventories of existing data, methodological papers and publications enable the trainees to obtain a better overview of the functioning of the whole statistical system and an in-depth knowledge of the scope and definitions of different areas of statistics. Prerequisites for traineeships include sufficient language and computer skills as well as relevant experience related to the terms of reference for the specific post.

Traineeships in IPA 2019 project have emerged as a powerful tool for personal and professional development, offering 47 participants practical experience, valuable insights, and networking opportunities. The third round of IPA 2019 traineeships was implemented in the period 11.09.-15.12.2023 in Eurostat and 18.09.-08.12.2023 in EU/EFTA countries. In total, 14 statisticians from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Northern Macedonia, Serbia and Türkiye conducted traineeships at Eurostat and in national statistical institutes in Austria, the Czech Republic, the Netherlands, Poland and Switzerland. Here, we look at the experiences of these trainees, highlighting their general impression and most valuable aspects of their traineeships.

"I worked with a great department of people. They are super kind, welcoming, and friendly as well as they have huge knowledge and experience. All my colleagues in Eurostat taught me a lot, supported me and helped me when needed. I gained new aspects and experiences about two main topics of my studies. I am always thankful for them."

"Experiencing a different culture and work routine was the most valuable part. By observing various work practices and actively participating, I gained different perspectives."

"The most valuable aspect of the traineeship was the advanced method and scientific approach to provide solution and improve the quality of statistical production in the official statistics"

"The most valuable aspect of the traineeship was the hands-on experience. Working closely with a dedicated team and engaging in diverse tasks enriched my skills and understanding of statistical methodologies. The practical application of theoretical knowledge and mentorship significantly contributed to my professional growth. Additionally, the opportunity to explore a new domain within statistics expanded my versatility and adaptability, making the traineeship a transformative and rewarding experience."

"Even though it was only for three months, the traineeship was a valuable experience to be able to observe the working environment and modalities in the host NSI. The exchange of experiences, ideas and statistical knowledge with colleagues was quite fruitful. More specifically, witnessing the register-based statistical production processes at first hand and studying data sets directly made it possible to compare the statistical context of two statistical offices. It was pleasing to see so many similarities except for a few differences. Personally, exploring subpopulation in a foreign country, utilising SPSS programme and monitoring the mentors' statistical approach against limitations were important aspects that should be highlighted"

These exemplary traineeship experiences underline the transformative power of this activity. By gaining practical skills and knowledge, establishing connections with mentors and colleagues, and embracing new challenges, these traineeships have played pivotal roles in shaping their professional trajectories. The ability to apply what they learned in their current roles highlights the relevance and impact of such opportunities.

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