

Doc. DSS/2020/May/3

### **ITEM 3**

#### **DATA COLLECTION ON WEEKLY DEATHS**

**MEETING OF THE EUROPEAN DIRECTORS OF SOCIAL STATISTICS**

**VIDEO CONFERENCE, 14 MAY 2020**

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Besides its major impact on people lives and populations' economy and health care system, the Covid-19 pandemic has triggered a tremendous interest on related statistics. Whilst the international comparability of data associated to the Covid-19 may still be arguable due to possible different rules of disease / causes of death classification and coverage issues, high-frequency data on overall mortality offer a viable alternative for internationally comparable monitoring and analyses of direct and indirect effects of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Eurostat, in cooperation with the NSIs of the European Statistical System (ESS), has therefore launched in April 2020 an exceptional and voluntary data collection on weekly deaths (EuroWDC). The present document reports on the state of play of this initiative.

## **2. PROGRESS AND STATE OF PLAY OF THE EUROWDC**

Taking in due consideration the urgent need of statistical information for mortality monitoring, EuroWDC has been designed having timeliness as primary quality criterion. National data are expected to be transmitted by the national statistical office as soon as ready and the validation processing in Eurostat is kept to a minimum to allow a prompt dissemination. At the current stage, timeliness of weekly data on deaths is a must for their usefulness.

The EuroWDC has been set up in very short time. These are the milestones of the project:

- Start on 2 April 2020.
- EU survey on data availability from 6 to 8 April 2020.
- Data request launched on 15 April 2020.
- Information at the Partnership group on 17 April
- Data collection opened on 20 April 2020.
- Information at the meeting of the Directors General of the NSIs on 23 April
- Data first published on 29 April 2020.

The list above proves the exceptional reaction of the ESS and of the system of national statistical offices at large, even though – reasonably – the EuroWDC is still in development. Updates and improvements are being implemented and data providers are gaining a better understanding of the technical requirements.

As of today, the participating countries are: Belgium, Bulgaria, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Spain, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Austria, Portugal, Slovakia, Finland, Sweden, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Switzerland, Serbia, Armenia, and Georgia. Data from Norway and Andorra are under processing and France has announced the data

transmission. This would take to 15 the number of participating EU Member States, plus the 4 EFTA countries and further 4 non-EU countries, for a total of 23 participating countries with varying extent of data availability. The following Table 1 summarises the data available online as of 06/05/2020 in the Eurostat database (Eurobase). For sake of simplicity, the report is here limited to the total number of cases without further disaggregation by sex, age or NUTS level.

**Table 1: availability of weekly deaths totals in Eurobase as of 6 May 2020**

Country	Start year	Start week	Latest year	Latest week
BE	2000	1	2020	16
BG	2015	1	2020	17
CZ	2005	1	2020	10
DK	2007	1	2020	17
EE	2000	1	2020	18
ES	2000	1	2019	39
LV	2020	14	2020	18
LT	2000	1	2020	18
LU	2000	1	2020	8
AT	2000	1	2020	13
PT	2000	1	2020	15
SK	2000	1	2020	14
FI	2000	1	2020	14
SE	2000	1	2020	18
IS	2000	1	2020	18
LI	2000	1	2020	15
CH	2000	1	2020	16
RS	2000	1	2018	52
AM	2020	1	2020	13
GE	2014	1	2020	1

## 2.1. Technical specifications

The EuroWDC aims to collect data on weekly deaths broken down by NUTS3 region, sex and 5-year age group. Even though the dimensions used for the breakdown are rather basic, a few clarifications are still needed. Table 2 focuses on the modality of data transmission, while Table 3 reports the preferences regarding the content. The compliance with these latter would increase data comparability to the highest degree. When different options are adopted by the data provider, they should be described in the national metadata.

When having a broader view of the available data, their transmission and specifications, Eurostat envisages to include a methodological note on the European data collection on Weekly Deaths Counts (EuroWDC) in the so-called methodological corner “COVID-19: support for statisticians” in Eurostat web-site.

**Table 2: modalities of data transmission for EuroWDC**

<b>Feature</b>	<b>Options</b>	<b>Eurostat preference</b>
Weekly data transmission	1. On the same weekday 2. As soon as data are available	2. As soon as data are available
Completeness	1. Full (including aggregations) 2. Only highest disaggregated data	1. Full (including aggregations)
Data revisions transmission	1. At regular time intervals 2. As soon as available	2. As soon as available

**Table 3: technical specifications for EuroWDC**

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Options</b>	<b>Eurostat preference</b>
Time breakdown	1. Weeks 2. Days	1. Weeks
Age breakdown	1. Single age 2. 5-year age group 3. 10-year age group 4. Other	2. 5-year age group
Sub-national breakdown	1. NUTS level 3 2. Lower NUTS levels	1. NUTS level 3
Definition of age	1. Age completed 2. Age reached 3. Both (“Lexis triangles”)	2. Age completed
Definition of date of the event	1. Date of occurrence 2. Date of registration	1. Date of occurrence
Definition of (geographic) place of the event	1. (Geographic) Place of occurrence of the death 2. (Geographic) Place of residence of the deceased person	2. (Geographic) Place of residence
Location of the event	1. Hospital 2. Institution 3. Home 4. Elsewhere	Data not collected, but information on their coverage possibly provided in the metadata
Beginning of the weeks	1. On Mondays (ISO 8601) 2. Any other weekday	1. On Mondays (ISO 8601)

First week of the year	1. The week with the year's first Thursday in it <sup>1</sup> (ISO 8601). 2. Any other (e.g., the week with the first Monday in the calendar year)	1. The week with the year's first Thursday in it (ISO 8601).
Back-series (before 2020)	1. At least 5 years 2. Up to 20 years 3. Other	2. Up to 20 years

### 3. ALTERNATIVE DATA COLLECTIONS OR ANALYSES

Several national authorities disseminate data or analyses on Covid-19. However, in order to improve the general knowledge on this disease, to better support scientific efforts and to learn from best practices, an international comparison is needed. Most of international repositories report data on cases and deaths due to Covid-19. Among others, this is the case for:

- The world-renowned Coronavirus Resource Center<sup>2</sup> of the John Hopkins University, which offers a wealth of data and analyses on Covid-19 for all countries of the world, but no possibility to download datasets.
- The World Health Organisation (WHO) that, likewise, has a dedicated section on Covid-19 pandemic<sup>3</sup> with data for all countries of the world, but only available in dashboards and reports. No data download offered.
- The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC), an agency of the European Union, in whose website<sup>4</sup> it is possible to download data on the geographic distribution of Covid-19 cases worldwide (no further breakdowns).
- The European Crisis Management Laboratory (ECML) Covid-19 website<sup>5</sup> by the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission, reporting also national containment measures.

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<sup>1</sup> For instance, in the calendar year 2020 the first Thursday was on 2 January. Consequently, the week starting on Monday 30 December 2019 is considered the first week of the year 2020.

<sup>2</sup> <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/Covid-19-pandemic>

<sup>5</sup> <https://jrc-Covid.azurewebsites.net/>

- The French National Institute of Demographic Studies (INED)<sup>6</sup> website for “International Data on the Demography of Deaths Related to the COVID-19 Pandemic”, where data for Denmark, Germany, Spain, France, Italy, The Netherlands, Portugal, Norway, and the Republic of Korea are disseminated broken down by sex and age.

There are some initiatives that, similarly to EuroWDC, focus instead on overall mortality:

- EuroMOMO<sup>7</sup>, a European mortality monitoring activity, aiming to detect and measure excess deaths related to seasonal influenza, pandemics and other public health threats. The EuroMOMO partners are mainly public health institutes. Weekly data are from 24 participating countries and regions: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany (Berlin), Germany (Hesse), Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, UK (England), UK (Northern Ireland), UK (Scotland), UK (Wales). However, the EuroMOMO network hub is not mandated by the participating countries to release any national data, which must therefore be asked to the countries individually. Further, displayed data are not broken down by sex or NUTS region, and the age breakdown is limited to the groups 0-4, 5-14, 15-64, and 65+.
- The Human Mortality Database<sup>8</sup> (HMD) has recently launched a project on “Estimating mortality and human losses during health crisis” based on weekly deaths counts, aiming to cover at least the EU27 Member States plus Norway, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, Russia, USA, Japan, South Korea, Canada and Australia. As of now, data by sex and age have been collected and processed for 9 countries/regions (Germany, Spain, Italy, the Netherlands, Austria, Sweden, England and Wales, USA, and Russia). Contacts between Eurostat and the HMD are ongoing for exploring possible synergies.

#### 4. CONCLUSIVE REMARKS

At the best of our knowledge, the EuroWDC exercise is quite unique among international data collections on mortality and Covid-19 pandemic, in that:

- It offers a single source of almost comparable information on weekly mortality in Europe.
- The data are highly disaggregated, namely by sex, 5-year age group and NUTS level 3 region.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://dc-Covid.site.ined.fr/en/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.euromomo.eu/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.mortality.org/>

- The data are expected to be very timely, as they should be provided on weekly basis by the participating countries and rapidly disseminated by Eurostat.
- It provides as well a long term basis for analyses, as the time series cover about 20 years of observations.

Its ultimate success will depend on the continuing efforts of the data providers. Now that the EuroWDC is getting over the starting phase, it becomes possible to exploit the data (e.g., with analyses on excess deaths) and link them to illustrative dashboards and graphs.

**The DSS are invited:**

- **To take note of the new data collection on weekly deaths EuroWDC, its purpose and specifications and the current state of play of its implementation, as one of the exceptional and timely answer to the need of statistics for measuring the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.**
- **For the Member States already participating to the EuroWDC data collection, to continue updating the dataset by providing data for the most recent weeks as soon as available, possible revisions of data already sent and longer back series whenever possible.**
- **For Member States not yet providing data, to join this effort on a voluntary basis, as far as possible following Eurostat preferences for modalities of data transmission and technical specifications, having timeliness as primary quality criterion.**