

CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS

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Topic - Improving internal communication: working better together

STATISTICS EXPLAINED – A NEW WAY OF COLLABORATION

Submitted by Eurostat¹

I. INTRODUCTION

1. In order to reach larger user groups, Eurostat started a project on disseminating statistical information through a wiki system. Content from existing publications is converted into a wiki-suitable form and numerous hyperlinks to the Eurostat data bases and publications, and to related information on the Eurostat and on other websites are included. The wiki system can then be updated by all Eurostat staff, conflicts will be managed by the Dissemination unit. It offers a new way of collaboration and transparency. It is expected to improve the quality of Eurostat's dissemination and to increase the motivation of the participating staff.

II. THE PROBLEM

2. Eurostat publishes annually 5-15 printed statistical books, 15 pocketbooks, 120 Statistics in Focus and various methodological publications. Large amounts of value-added content have been created and are disseminated in paper and PDF format. Similar content is often created repetitively in different forms for different purposes.

3. Especially for large publications such as the Eurostat yearbook, the production process is quite cumbersome. Drafts are circulated and discussed several times with the statistical units concerned before a final version is reached. As a consequence, data at the moment of publishing is already 6-9 months older than what can be found on the website.

4. In order to improve the situation, the Eurostat management committee asked to examine possibilities to disseminate the content of publications more effectively. It also limited the number of major printed publications to 5 per year and asked to promote the publishing of small 'Statistics in Focus' publications.

5. The subsequent discussions lead to the creation of a Wiki-type system for the dissemination of textual content. This new system does not only change the way of dissemination, but also the way of collaboration between the statistical and the dissemination unit.

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A. Using Wiki to improve communication

6. Since the remarkable success of Wikipedia, which, only a few years after its creation in 2001, became the main global reference for encyclopaedic information, Wiki technology became popular for numerous other applications.
7. The success of Wikipedia lies in the fact that everybody who feels to be expert in a field can contribute to its content. The editing language is simple and easy to learn, and well documented. Producing an attractive layout also does not require high technical skills. The system keeps trace of all changes, so that inadequate contributions can be removed and a previous version restored. The author of a contribution can always be traced.
8. A similar concept is now proposed to contribute to the value-added content of Eurostat. Statistical articles are proposed by an expert in a field, but can then be reviewed easily by his/her colleague or supervisor. They can be revised by different person under different angles, for example by a statistical expert on content, by a native English speaker on language, by a technical person on layout and presentation, and by a reviser on coherence or political correctness.
9. Communicating the results of statistics to a larger audience is a difficult task which requires high-level skills both on the statistical and on the editorial level. Experience shows that Eurostat staff has a high level on statistical skills, but editorial skills are often limited. Only a few people combine both skills in the same way and are able to produce attractive and informative statistical articles for the intended audience. An additional problem is the fact that only a few people in Eurostat write in their mother tongue. Combining capacities of different people with different qualities when writing articles will lead to much better results.
10. A further element of this approach is the ease of re-use of information. The fact that all Eurostat articles are stored or are at least accessible from one single integrated system makes an end to the current diversity of sources (Publications, ESMS-files, short descriptions for data sets, definitions. Texts will be re-used rather than re-written, and original text might be improved or updated at the same time. Quality of texts will therefore automatically improve over time, and multiple variants of the same content will disappear.

B. The concept of Statistics Explained

a. The overall structure

11. Statistics Explained is expected to become an entry point for all types of users of Eurostat statistics. It is a new way of publishing statistical information, using wiki technology. It is comparable to Wikipedia in technical and content aspects, but not in governance.
12. The main part of Statistics Explained consists of statistical articles presenting and explaining statistical data on a specific topic. Statistical articles have a fixed structure and show the main statistical results, explain data sources and data problems as well as the potential use of the data. Numerous links lead to detailed data on the Eurostat data base, but also to external information such as related international organisations, European legislation, academic articles, policy information etc. A typical example of a statistical article is shown in annex 1. A solid basis of statistical articles for all statistical areas has been taken established from the content of the Eurostat yearbook and the regional yearbook.
13. In addition, Statistics Explained has two types of background pages. Background articles explain methodologies and statistical concepts in an understandable way. They may cover a variety of topics such as data collection methods, surveys, statistical concepts or methods, or

the relationship between statistical indicators. The second type are glossary items, which are short explanations of concepts appearing statistical articles. Both glossary items and statistical articles are currently taken from various Eurostat publications.

14. The system follows a three-layer model covering three different levels of access to statistical information. The first level is targeted at the general public, requiring minimal prior knowledge. The second level covers professionals not specialised in statistics, and the third level covers statistical or data experts. In the Eurostat dissemination, Statistics Explained covers the first level and parts of the second level (see annex 2). However, the various links to all levels of metadata and to the latest and most detailed data make the system also a user-friendly entry point for specialists and for all kind of European statistical information.

b. The governance

15. For the governance of Statistics Explained it is important to find a good balance between functions for cooperative working on content and the means to control the content by the organisational units and statisticians in charge.

16. In contrast to Wikipedia, Statistics Explained cannot be modified by external users.

17. Although everybody in Eurostat will be able to log in as editor and make modifications, it is a major principle of Statistics Explained that its content will be fully controlled in cooperation between the dissemination unit and the unit in charge of its content. A validation procedure will assure that only validated content will become visible for users.

18. In detail, the governance applies the following principles:

- The content is 'owned' by the statistical unit responsible for the topic. In case of cooperation between units on a subject, a responsible unit is identified after consultation;
- Modifications to the content can be done by all Eurostat users after logging in; there is no anonymous modification possible;
- The Dissemination Unit is in charge for the overall coordination, such as the general structure of pages, navigation or other general pages. It also coordinates the coherence and user-friendly presentation of all pages in terms of readability and conformity to the guidelines.
- New entries or modifications to existing ones are only visible to users after validation by the dissemination unit. Except for trivial modifications, it will consult the unit in charge before releasing new information.
- The Eurostat Dissemination Committee will regularly discuss governance issues and potential improvements.

19. A major question of Statistics Explained is the updating of the content. Since newest data can always be easily accessed through hyperlinks, there is no need for frequent updates. However, text and tables/graphs should not become too outdated either. For example, in the current situation of unexpected economic decline, it might be advisable to update texts talking about continuous growth during the past years. The need for updating is very dependent on the subject covered. However, units will be invited to check their pages at least once a year.

20. In its current form, Statistics Explained contains graphs, tables and maps that have mostly been created by a professional service in the production process of a publication. The dissemination will provide this service in the future for individual graphs and tables to be inserted into Statistics Explained.

c. Statistics Explained and Publications

21. The introduction of Statistics Explained will have a major impact on the future of publications.

22. In a first phase, Statistics Explained will be primarily a tool for presenting and integrating existing publication content with some added value, such as the cross linking. Content created for the purpose of Statistics Explained will be very rare albeit not impossible.

23. In a second phase, Statistics Explained should take a wider role towards publications by replacing some of the current Statistical Books because it is much easier and faster to update or enlarge the entries of Statistics Explained than producing a new publication.

24. In a third phase, Statistics Explained will be suitable to become a type of production system for publications in that a selection of Statistics Explained entries will be recombined into a traditional publication. The production process of publications such as the yearbook or the regional yearbook could be much simplified by selecting and assembling a set of statistical articles which previously have been updated by the statistical units.

C. First experiences

25. The system is currently in a pilot phase. At the time of writing, the system has not yet been deployed to the whole of Eurostat, nor to the general public. Although technically access is possible for all Eurostat staff, no publicity has been made yet. Currently, the staff of the Dissemination Unit feeds as first priority the content of the Eurostat yearbook and the regional yearbook and makes various experiments with adding other types of existing information. In parallel, user guides are written and training is prepared.

26. Currently, the system contains over 100 statistical articles and 150 articles in the background area.

27. First experiences show a very high motivation of the people involved in the project. The gradual and incremental improvement can already be seen within the work of the dissemination unit. First contacts with statistical units also show a high level of interest, and a small number of 'ad-hoc'-corrections have already taken place. First experiences also show that very clear guidelines need to be established, especially on the level of structuring of the information. The concept of statistical articles and of the various types of background articles must be well communicated and enforced, in order to arrive at a sufficiently homogeneous content.

28. The system is expected to become publically accessible towards the middle of 2009. It is expected to have a major impact on the dissemination of statistics in Europe.

Annex 1: Example of a statistical page on Agricultural Products

(texts are extracted from the Eurostat yearbook and are shortened)

Navigation

- Main Page
- Statistical themes
- Recent changes
- Popular pages
- All pages
- Browse categories

Search

Toolbox

- What links here
- Related changes
- Upload file
- Special pages
- Printable version
- Permanent link

[page](#)
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Collecting data on agricultural products is important to understand developments in the markets across Member States, both current and historical, and also to analyse the response to policy actions or testing policy scenarios.

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- 3 Context
- 4 Further Eurostat information
 - 4.1 Publications
 - 4.2 Tables, graphs and maps
 - 4.3 Database
 - 4.4 Other information

Main statistical findings [edit]

The EU-27 produced 258.4 million tonnes of cereals in 2007, of which a little under half (46.0 %) was wheat, more than one fifth (22.1 %) barley, and less than one fifth grain maize (18.4 %). France and Germany were by far the largest cereal, sugar beet and rape producing Member States, together accounting for nearly 40 % of the EU-27's cereal production, over 50 % of its sugar beet production, and over 60 % of its rape production in 2007. While EU-27 production of cereals fluctuated between 2000 and 2007, potatoes and sugar beet production decreased through to 2006, while rape production increased significantly (also to 2006).

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Data sources and availability [edit]

Annual statistics on the production of 200 specific crops are mostly covered by Council regulations, although the data for fresh fruit and vegetables are collected under gentlemen's agreements from Member States.

Crop production figures relate to harvested production. Agricultural production of crops is harvested production (excluding losses to the harvest).

Context [edit]

In October 2007 the Council adopted legislation to establish a single Common Market Organisation (CMO) for agricultural products. This is designed to reduce the volume of legislation in the farming sector, improve legislative transparency, and make agricultural policy more easily accessible. During the course of 2008, the single CMO has replaced 21 CMOs for different products such as bananas, eggs, sugar or wine.

Further Eurostat information [edit]

Publications [edit]

- [Agricultural statistics – Main results - 2006-2007 pocketbook](#)
- [Agriculture – Main statistics - 2005-2006 pocketbook](#)

Tables, graphs and maps [edit]

- [Agriculture](#) see: [Agricultural products](#)

Database [edit]

- [Agriculture](#)

Other information [edit]

- [Council Regulation \(EEC\) No 837/90](#) on the statistical information to be supplied by the Member States on cereals production and [Council Regulation \(EEC\) No 959/93](#) on statistical information on crop products other than cereals.
- Milk statistics are governed by [Council Directive 96/16/EC](#) and [Directive 2003/107/EC](#) of the European Parliament and of the Council.

(1) 2007: not available.
Source: Eurostat (tag0004, tag0003, tag0006 and tag0008)

Graph 1: Indices of the agricultural production of crops, EU-27 (2000=100) [edit]

	Collection of crops with (1)	Butter (2)	Cheese (3)	Meat: cattle (4)	Meat: pigs (5)	Meat: sheep & goats (6)
EU-27	122 547	42 546	3 130	3 200	12 560	12 560
Austria	95 058	1 523	5 585	1 438	10 378	10 378
Belgium	2 379	100	30	273	1 063	1
Denmark	146	7	76	6	4	4
Czech Republic	2 446	37	116	70	300	2
Denmark	4 448	109	211	130	1 862	2
Germany	27 211	449	1 927	1 185	4 985	44
Estonia	359	7	31	15	38	—
Finland	1 241	233	124	343	205	70
France	6 702	8	174	98	732	114
Spain	5 729	38	309	458	3 513	238
France	25 267	386	1 684	1 527	2 201	120
Italy	19 000	117	1 154	1 132	1 601	95
Cyprus	144	0	11	4	25	7
Lithuania	311	7	35	21	48	15
Luxembourg	1 247	14	90	56	99	1
Luxembourg	250	—	—	9	10	—
Hungary	1 440	8	72	35	459	1
Malta	41	0	3	1	8	0
Netherlands	10 799	174	722	386	1 208	5
Austria	2 663	23	145	216	501	0
Poland	6 144	162	574	507	2 760	1
Portugal	1 817	28	69	91	304	13
Romania	1 136	8	69	211	401	—
Slovenia	330	3	20	36	33	0
Slovakia	564	10	44	21	114	1
Finland	2 259	55	102	88	133	1
Sweden	33 162	41 352	1 129	1 144	200	4
United Kingdom	13 247	12	110	682	138	120
Croatia	473	—	—	15	656	1
Rep. of Macedonia	42	—	—	2	25	—
Iceland	133	2	4	—	—	8
Iceland	1 666	—	81	—	—	133

(1) (3) (5) euro area, Greece and Sweden, 2006; Iceland, 2006; the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, 1996.
(2) (6) (7) euro area, excluding Luxembourg and Malta; (4) (2) euro area, Greece, Slovenia and Sweden, 2006; Iceland, 2005.
(3) (4) (5) euro area, including Ireland and Luxembourg; (1) (2) euro area, Greece, Italy, Slovenia and Sweden, 2006; Iceland, 2005.
(6) The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, 1999.
(7) Croatia, 2006.
Source: Eurostat (tag0003, tag0004, tag0005, tag0006, tag0007 and tag0008)

Table 2: Agricultural production related to animals, 2007 (1 000 tonnes) [edit]

Annex 2: Role of Statistics Explained in the Eurostat dissemination

