

Rolling Review

Regional Statistics

Executive Summary

October 2012

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Executive Summary

1 Introduction

In 2007, Eurostat set up a Quality Assurance Framework aimed at streamlining the existing quality control activities in Eurostat and incorporating them in the wider framework of the European Code of Practice and Total Quality Management. Several initiatives, most notably Rolling Reviews, were developed within this framework in order to document, measure and assess the quality of statistical production processes and outputs, as well as to develop strategies to ensure that these processes remain as cost/benefit efficient as possible.

A Rolling Review is essentially a formative evaluation of both the statistical data produced and the processes involved in compiling the data, the working structures (i.e. the interaction between data providers and users of the data) and the data quality. The findings are used to formulate recommendations for improvement and to identify ways in which to implement these improvements. This layered evaluation approach, an important feature of the Quality Assurance, fully complies with the internal control standards approved by the Commission.

The methodology of the currently implemented Rolling Review implies a review of users' satisfaction, a review of partners' satisfaction and a review of some special production processes. The results of these assessments are hence used to formulate recommendations for improvements. The Rolling Review was implemented during December 2011 to June 2012.

2 Eurostat's Regional Statistics

The Rolling Review on Eurostat's regional statistics differs from other rolling reviews insofar the subject of this Rolling Review is not a statistical domain. It touches rather upon a specific dimension in all statistical domains, namely space. The spatial dimension plays a role in many statistics which are produced by Eurostat. The way in which the spatial dimension is coordinated within these statistics as well as its ultimate results are of paramount importance in this rolling review and ultimately its real subject.

Within Eurostat unit E4 is in charge of the spatial coordination which includes various aspects. First and most important, the management of the way the spatial dimension in the regional statistics is operationalized by means of a common administrative breakdown of the whole territory of the European Union. This "Nomenclature of Statistical Territorial Units" (NUTS) subdivides the administrative territory of each Member State of the European Union into a number of regions at NUTS 1 level. Each of these NUTS 1 regions is then subdivided into regions at NUTS 2 level. Finally, each of these NUTS 2 regions is subdivided into regions at NUTS 3 level^{1 2} Set up and managed under a gentlemen agreement in the last century the NUTS obtained a legal status in the beginning of this century³. The present classification was amended in 2011⁴.

Other aspects of the coordination of the spatial dimension relate, among others, to the internal coordination within Eurostat as regards publications in the field of regional statistics. In this con-

¹ Depending on the size and/or institutional structure of a Member State some NUTS regions at distinct levels may be identical.

² Eurostat, Regions in the European Union. Nomenclature of territorial units for statistics NUTS 2010/EU-27. Luxembourg, Publication Office of the European Union, 2011.

³ Regulation (EC) No 1059/2003 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 May 2003 on the establishment of a common classification of territorial units for statistics (NUTS).

⁴ Commission Regulation (EU) No 31/2011 of 17 January 2011 amending annexes to Regulation (EC) No 1059/2003 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 May 2003 on the establishment of a common classification of territorial units for statistics (NUTS).

text special mention should be made of the procedure of putting together the regional data of the various thematic domains into a specific Regions domain in order to meet the needs of users for regional data from various domains⁵.

In addition to these coordination aspects unit E4 is at present also directly responsible for the compilation of labour market statistics on employment and unemployment at NUTS 3 level for policy purposes, and also for the publication of these statistics at the NUTS 2 and NUTS 3 level. The labour market statistics on employment and unemployment at national and more aggregated regional levels (NUTS 1 and 2) are produced by unit F3 which is officially in charge of the labour market data. The basic data source for these labour market statistics – the Labour Force Survey – allows only a compilation of data at the NUTS 2 level, so that various data sources together with a special methodology are used to compile these labour market statistics at the NUTS 3 level.

Finally, at the time of this rolling review unit E4 carried out two other supplementary projects in the field of regional statistics accentuating the spatial dimension of those statistics, although both were in a different phase. They refer to

- a compilation of statistical indicators for metropolitan regions (abbreviated as metro-regions) and for areas based on an urban-rural typology;
- a data collection for statistics on rural development covering the period 2005-2010.

Against this background the Rolling Review on Eurostat's Regional statistics covers the following topics:

a. reviews of the users' and partners' satisfaction with regard to regional statistics from various thematic domains. At the time of these reviews Eurostat's regional statistics covers the following fourteen thematic domains:

- agriculture statistics;
- demographic statistics;
- economic accounts;
- education statistics;
- environment statistics;
- health statistics;
- information society statistics;
- labour cost statistics;
- labour market statistics;
- migration statistics;
- science & technology statistics;
- structural business statistics;
- tourism statistics;
- transport statistics.

b. a review of checklists for:

⁵ European Regional and Urban Statistics. Reference Guide. 2010 edition. Luxembourg, Publication Office of the European Union, 2010, page 12. The complete process is described here as follows: "The data from various national sources are collated in each country's National Statistical Office and then sent to the thematic units of Eurostat, which validate them. This data set is then loaded into Eurostat's statistical databases by the thematic unit in question. The Regional Statistics Section copies this information from the thematic domain into the Regions domain".

- the production of labour market statistics on employment and unemployment at NUTS 3 level and the publication of these labour market statistics at NUTS 2 and 3 level;
- indicators for metro-regions and areas based on an urban-rural typology;
- data collection on rural development.

The Rolling Review doesn't cover the statistics collected and published by unit E4 within the framework of the Urban Audit.

The results of the reviews of the users' and partners' satisfaction are presented by means of percentages (or their linguistic descriptions), average scores and values of a Satisfaction Index (SI). The average score summarizes generally the frequency distribution of the opinions on a scale from 5 ("very good") to 1 ("very poor"); whereas the Satisfaction Index weights the values of positive and negative opinions in order to avoid the central or average tendency effect⁶. It is defined as the number of positive opinions ("good" or "very good") minus the number of negative ones ("poor" or "very poor") divided by the number of positive and negative opinions. It can take values between -1 and 1. It is equal to 1 if there are no "poor" or "very poor" ratings and is equal to -1 if there are no "good" or "very good" ratings. In the calculations of average scores or SI values 'no opinion' replies are not taken into account.

3 Main outcomes of the user satisfaction survey

3.1 Need for European Regional Statistics

Background

Sixty-four replies to the user satisfaction questionnaire are used for the analysis⁷: eleven replies from a Commission service, thirty-five from respondents working in a EU country, four from respondents working in a Candidate Country, one respondent working in an EFTA country and three respondents working in another country, of which two in the USA. The participation in the survey is in line with surveys of other Rolling Reviews. Some respondent groups are probably overrepresented in terms of affiliation and country of work. The respondents are in possession of a relatively high quality of statistical experience. Altogether, they may presumably be qualified as advanced or professional users.

Importance and general purposes

Data from Eurostat's regional statistics are essential or important for the work of a majority (66 %). This is in line with user survey results from other domains like national accounts and the labour force survey. They are also fairly well used as background information (22 %). The main general purpose, for which data from Eurostat's regional statistics are used, is statistical analysis (35 %). Other main purposes are scientific research (16 %) and general background information (15 %).

Satisfaction with statistical information services

The satisfaction with the statistical information services offered by Eurostat in general is very high. Only two per cent are rather unsatisfied with these services. The satisfaction with the statistical information services offered by Eurostat in the field of regional statistics is also very high, although eleven per cent is rather unsatisfied with these services.

⁶ The central or average effect refers to motives to choose the safe middle.

⁷ Three replies received from the same organization (research institute) are completely identical. The reason for this could not be determined. Two of these replies have been excluded from the analysis.

Statements about Eurostat's regional statistics

Eight statements about to what extent (from always to never) Eurostat's regional statistics are dealt with, were submitted to the respondents. They refer to purposes why respondents are looking for regional statistics, interest in methods and concepts to produce regional statistics and understanding of regional data, methods of regional analysis and accessibility of the regional statistics at the Eurostat website.

- The most important purposes why respondents are looking for regional statistics are having access to a huge amount of regional statistics to arrive at new insights (48 % always or most of the time and 25 % rarely or never) and intentionally looking for regional data to follow certain developments (39 % always or most of the time and 23 % rarely or never). Browsing for regional statistics for interesting data (17 % always or most of the time and 35 % rarely or never) are least important.
- Understanding of the regional data is very high (87 % always or most of the time and no one rarely or never); also interest in methods and concepts used for the production of regional statistics is quite high (67 % always or most of the time and ten per cent rarely or never).
- Comparing a few selected regional indicators across all regions of the EU (57 % always or most of the time and 18 % rarely or never) as method of regional analysis is more often used as comparing a few selected regions across all indicators (23 % always or most of the time and 42 % rarely or never).
- The accessibility of the website in search for regional statistics is quite good (52 % get rarely or never lost), although 8 % get easily lost most of the time.

Regional Statistics and their thematic domains

Demography is the most regularly (weekly, monthly, quarterly or annually) used domain for regional statistics (82 %), followed in order by economic accounts (72 %), labour market statistics (69 %), education and migration statistics (62 % each). Agriculture and information society are mostly used at other intervals (agriculture 41 %; information society 38 %). The domains from which regional statistics are mostly not used at all are labour cost, information society, environment, health and tourism (18 % each). Economic accounts and demography are by far the main domains from which regional statistics are used: economic accounts by 36 % and demography by 34 %.

Information products mentioned for regional statistics

The database is the most consulted source from all products mentioned for information on regional statistics (36 %). Next are: Eurostat regional yearbook (15 %), Main tables (13 %), Statistics explained and Pages dedicated to regional statistics (11 % each). Explanatory texts (metadata files attached to tables and datasets) and Statistics in Focus (less than 10 % each) are the least important products which are mentioned to find information on regional statistics.

The opinion on Eurostat Regional Yearbook, Statistics Explained, Database and Main Tables is very positive (average scores varying from 4.3 to 3.7 and SI values from 1.00 to 0.86). The opinion on Statistics in Focus is also still rather positive (average score of 3.9 and SI value of 0.75). Respondents are slightly less positive about Explanatory Texts (average score of 3.3 and SI value of 0.67) and even less about Pages dedicated to regional statistics (average score of 3.4 and SI value of 0.56).

NUTS and basis of collection

The familiarity with the NUTS and its levels is very high. However, finding information on the NUTS is not always easy (17 % did not easily find this information or didn't find it at all). A

majority (59 %) is aware of the fact that a lot of regional statistics are collected on a gentlemen's agreement; 30 % are not aware, whereas 11 % has no opinion.

Other sources

A majority (53 %) uses also regional statistics produced by others at the European level. OECD data (29 %) and NSIs regional data (28 %) are mostly used. Next are UN regional data (16 %) and regional data from other national public data sources (12 %).

One third of the respondents using regional statistics from other sources assess the quality of Eurostat's regional statistics as better and about half of them think the quality of both is the same. Nine per cent qualify Eurostat's regional statistics as worse.

3.2 Assessment of data quality and services

The data quality aspects of accessibility, accuracy and comparability are considered as very good (average scores varying from 3.8 to of 3.7 and SI values from 0.95 to 0.89). The data quality aspects of coherence and clarity are also still considered as rather positive (average score of 3.5 and SI value of 0.71 and 0.69 respectively). The opinion on timeliness (average score of 3.3 and SI value of 0.49) is less positive and completeness (average score of 3.1 and SI value of 0.26) seems to also be a real issue.

Respondents from non-governmental organisation⁸ are particularly very critical in their assessment of the latter two data quality aspects: timeliness with an average score of 2.6 and a SI value of ~0.29 and completeness with an average score of 2.9 and a SI value of ~0.20. Timeliness and completeness are also an issue for respondents from a Commission service as indicating by their average score (3.2) and SI value (0.33) for these data quality aspects. Respondents from non-governmental organisation are also very critical in their assessment of clarity (average score of 3.0 and SI value of ~0.20).

Accuracy and comparability (average score of 4.6 each) as well as completeness (average score of 4.5) stand out as the data quality aspects as (very) important for Eurostat's regional statistics. The other data quality aspects of coherence, timeliness, accessibility and clarity are equally assessed as a bit less (very) important (average score of 4.3).

Respondents are very satisfied with the user support as regards Eurostat's regional statistics (average score of 3.9 and SI value of 0.90) and the overall quality of service as regards these statistics (average score of 3.8 and SI value of 1.00).

4 Main outcomes of the partner satisfaction survey

4.1 Introduction

The partner satisfaction survey has been addressed to the national Co-ordinators of Regional Statistics in the NSIs of the Member States, the Candidate Countries and the EFTA countries. The survey was launched at the beginning of March. It was closed at the end of April after having extended the deadline twice⁹. The results of the partner survey came available in the second

⁸ This group concerns 23 respondents affiliated to universities, research institutes and business firms.

⁹ In order to customize the standard survey questionnaire and make it more domain-specific, it was decided to have first preliminary telephone interviews with some respondents. The subjects chosen for the interview were adapted to the topic in question. The preliminary telephone interviews were held in the first half of February, after which the survey questionnaire was constructed.

week of May¹⁰. The first part of the survey refers to the assessment of the organisation and functioning of Eurostat's regional Statistics; the second part to the assessment of the quality of the regional data.

4.2 Planning, data requests and coordinating structures in the field of regional statistics

Statistical Programmes

About half of the respondents are (very) familiar with the regional statistical programming in the Community Statistical Programme 2008-2012 and three fifths with this programming in the Annual Statistical Work Programmes of the Commission. The other respondents are not (so) familiar with these statistical programmes. The regional statistical programming in the Annual Statistical Work Programmes is assessed as positive (average score of 3.4 and SI value of 1.00). The links between the Annual Statistical Programmes and the Community Statistical Programme as regards the regional programming is considered as less satisfying (average score of 3.3 and SI value of 0.60). What's more, one quarter has no opinion about these links.

Regional data requests from the Commission

Seventy-two per cent agree fairly with the fact that regional data requests from the Commission are proportionate and 76 % fully or fairly that they are justified in relation to its regional policies. The opinions vary with regard to the question whether such data request may have a legal base. About half of the respondents (52 %) agree fully or fairly with this idea. The other half is indifferent regarding this issue (28 %), is opposed to it (8 %) or has no opinion about it (12 %).

Working Group on Regional Statistics

The possibility of having influence on decisions inside the Working Group of Regional Statistics and its effectiveness (average score of 3.5 and SI value of 0.63 and 0.60 respectively) may be considered as still rather positive, although twelve per cent assess both aspects as poor.

4.3 Functioning of Eurostat's Regional Statistics during the present programme period 2008-2012

Overall level of satisfaction

Average score (3.5) and SI value (1.00) indicate a positive opinion about the overall functioning of Eurostat's Regional statistics. The opinion about defining goals and setting priorities in the work programme, the progress of the work programming activities and reporting on projects and the evaluation of projects is also rather positive (average scores of 3.4 and 3.5 respectively and SI values varying from 0.67 to 0.73). The coordination between Eurostat and other international organisations in the field of regional statistics is assessed as good (average score of 3.6 and SI value of 1.00), but it should be noted that one fifth has no opinion about this coordination.

4.4 Direction of change

Average score (3.6) and SI value (0.86) indicate a positive opinion about the direction of change in the coordination and cooperation in the field of Eurostat's Regional Statistics. One fifth, however, has no opinion about this direction.

¹⁰ Replies were received from twenty-five national Co-ordinators of Regional Statistics: twenty-one from the Member States, two from the Candidate Countries and two from the EFTA countries. No replies were received from the national coordinators of Germany, Finland, Italy, United Kingdom, Macedonia, Luxembourg, Malta, Iceland and Liechtenstein. It should be noted that the regional and national level are identical for Luxembourg, Malta, Iceland and Liechtenstein.

4.5 Eurostat's role in the field of Regional Statistics

Regulations

Communication about preparatory activities, Eurostat's assistance and the planning of data deliveries by Eurostat with regard to the 2011 amendment of the NUTS Regulation are assessed as very good (average scores varying from 4.0 to 4.2 and SI value of 1.00 for all aspects). Only 52 % of the respondents, on the other hand, are (very) familiar with the NUTS level required in Regulations on regional data collections in various thematic domains, whereas 48 % are not (so) familiar with this issue.

Performance of Eurostat

The opinion about the internal coordination within Eurostat as regards requests for regional data from the NSIs is rather positive (average score of 3.6 and SI value of 0.73). The internal coordination within Eurostat as regards harmonisation of regional statistics (average score of 3.5 and SI value of 0.82) and the internal coordination within Eurostat as regards compilations and publications in the field of regional statistics (average score of 3.8 and SI value of 0.88) are even better assessed.

The availability of information at Eurostat on best practices at NSIs in the field of regional statistics (average score of 3.3 and SI value of 0.27) as well as on possibilities of data deliveries by NSIs (average score of 3.4 and SI value of 0.47) are areas where partners would like to see improvements, as it is the case in many rolling reviews. The capacity of Eurostat to use knowledge, competence and experience available at NSIs (average score of 3.4 and SI value of 0.60) could also get better.

Respondents are quite satisfied about the preparatory activities performed by Eurostat for meetings on regional statistics (average score of 3.9 and SI value of 0.73) and even more about the overall progress of meetings (average score of 4.0 and SI value of 1.00). A minor point concerns meeting papers that reach the participants too shortly before the meetings.

As regards the follow-up of meetings on regional statistics: respondents have a positive opinion about the content and timeliness of the minutes of meetings (average score of 3.7 and SI value of 1.00). However, the provision of information on progress of activities or new activities between meetings (average score of 3.4 and SI value of 0.57) as well as the information on results of projects between meetings (average score of 3.3 and SI value of 0.33) do have scope for improvements.

The staff of Eurostat's unit E4 performs very well outside meetings as regards the response to queries from the partners as well as regards taking due account of the needs of the partners (average score of 4.2 and SI value of 1.00 for both aspects).

The opinion about CIRCA as instrument for on-line exchange of information in the field of regional statistics and E-DAMIS as instrument for on-line data transmission is very positive (average scores 4.1 and 4.2 respectively and SI value of 1.00 for both aspects).

Respondents are also very positive about the publications of Eurostat's Regional Yearbook (average score of 4.4 and SI value of 1.00), Statistics in Focus (average score of 4.1 and SI value of 1.00) as well as the Database and Main tables (average score of 4.0 and SI value of 1.00). Their opinion is a little less positive about the Metadata files attached to tables and datasets (average score of 3.7 and SI value of 1.00), but the publication is still assessed as good.

Overall assessment of Eurostat's role acting in this field

Eurostat but particularly unit E4 within Eurostat performs its role quite well as actor in the field of European regional statistics (average score of 3.8 and SI value of 1.00).

4.6 Assessment of the quality of regional data

The data quality aspects of accessibility, clarity and accuracy (average scores varying from 3.8 to 4.0 and SI value of 1.00 for all aspects) are considered as very good. A similar assessment applies also to comparability between regions and over time (average score 3.6 and 3.5 respectively and SI value of 1.00 for both aspects).

Completeness (average score of 3.4 and SI value of 0.64) and coherence (average score of 3.5 and SI value of 0.69) are less well rated compared to the previous quality aspects, but they are still assessed as rather positive.

The data quality aspect of timeliness (average score 3.3 and SI value of 0.38), however, leaves much to be desired.

The several data quality aspects were ranked with respect to their importance on a scale from 1 (very important) to 7 (unimportant) by 64 to 72 % of the respondents (depending on the type of quality aspect). Accuracy (average score of 2.4) and comparability (average score of 2.9) are by far the most important data quality aspects from a respondents' point of view. The next in order are: accessibility (average score of 3.7), timeliness (average score of 4.1) and clarity (average score of 4.3). Coherence (average score of 5.0) and completeness (average score of 5.1) were ranked as the least important data quality aspects.

Respondents are very positive about the overall data quality (average score of 3.8 and SI of 1.00) and the overall metadata quality of Eurostat's regional statistics (average score of 3.6 and a SI value of 0.85).

5 Checklist reports

5.1 Checklist regional labour market statistics

Background and conceptual framework

Eurostat's generic self-assessment checklist on regional labour market statistics was completed in the last week of January 2012. The main source for these statistics is the Labour Force Survey (LFS). The NUTS 2 level statistics are compiled by the EU Labour Force Team (EU-LFS) in Eurostat unit F3. The compilation is based on the NUTS 2 level codes provided by the NSIs. No legal basis exists for transmitting NUTS 3 data on the labour market to Eurostat, so that many NSIs transmit NUTS 3 data on a voluntary basis. Unit E4 does not receive micro-data as such, but tabulated aggregates at NUTS 3 level. Consequently, the checklist is based on the tabulated aggregates provided by NSIs to unit E4 for year 2010.

The tabulated aggregates are limited to employment, working age population, unemployment and economically active population. The source of the tabulated data provided by NSIs varies from LFS data (main sources for most cases), other survey data and register data to a combination of LFS and register data. Subsequently, the tabulated data transmitted are processed in such a way that they are coherent with the LFS data at the NUTS 2 level.

Users

Unit E4 is well aware of the users of the data at NUTS 3 level. Key users are: DG REGIO (main user), other Commission DG's, international organisations such as OECD. Formal and informal contacts are maintained with these users. Their interests are clearly articulated. They appear to have a generally good opinion about the quality of the regional labour market statistics. Quality aspects of some concern are timeliness and completeness. Other users are especially universities and research organisations, which have similar interests.

Another user need is a more detailed geographical breakdown of the labour market statistics. In

order to meet this need a study has been outsourced for the analysis of the quality and the provision of methodological improvements of labour market statistics at the NUTS 3 level.

Data provision and validation by NSIs

NUTS 3 labour market data are currently collected by two different units in Eurostat. On the one hand unit E4 traditionally receives tabulated data aggregates from NSIs at NUTS 3 level in the framework of a gentlemen' agreement (see above). On the other hand, unit F3, responsible for the LFS, receives at present micro-data with NUTS 3 coding from most of the Member States. Within the framework of reducing the burden of the data providers and doing the best use of current resources, unit E4 will stop collecting NUTS 3 tabulated aggregates for NSIs providing micro-data with the NUTS 3 codes to unit F3, with the NSIs agreement that unit E4 will then use the data transmitted to F3.

Data deliveries at the NUTS 3 level by the NSI's to unit E4 are discussed once a year at the Working Group on Regional Statistics. Data deliveries of NUTS 3 codes to unit F3 in the framework of the LFS are discussed in the Working Group on Labour Market Statistics. Labour market issues at regional level are discussed between units E4 and F3 in internal meetings two or three times a year.

Tabulated data at the NUTS 3 level sent by the NSIs to unit E4 for 2010 are checked on their completeness and consistency. Problems with timeliness, missing data, non-response and revisions for these data exist for less than half of the NSIs.

Validation (Eurostat)

The reliability of the data validation system is judged as good. The validation rules for the statistics at NUTS 3 level are borrowed from the LFS data at NUTS 2 level, which may be questionable. The outsourced methodological study will address this and other quality issues. The percentage of statistics revised after publication is judged as relatively low with a maximum of ten per cent.

Statistical confidentiality

Cell suppression and rounding of figures are used as disclosure control methods for frequency tables and tables of magnitude at the NUTS 3 level. Two rules are applied to confidential data. First, a particular data will not be published when a NSI requests not to do so (it is not clear, however, whether this request is based on statistical confidentiality or on statistical (un)reliability of the data). Second, depending on the thresholds in the basic guidelines used for LFS data, data can be published and flagged as unreliable or not published because of their extreme unreliability (this rule, however, is rather an example of application of sampling theory than an application of statistical confidentiality). The thresholds used for NUTS 3 data are the same as for NUTS 2 data, which may be also questionable. The outsourced methodological study will address the issue of specific guidelines for the NUTS 3 labour market data.

Documentation

The data production process is partly documented. A better documentation is needed for data collection, data validation, data dissemination and methodology.

Information on the quality of the key statistics is partly available to users, and all quality aspects with regard to the key statistics are covered by the published documentation. Possible gaps in the completeness of the information on the quality of the key statistics are partly compensated by the assistance to users in the interpretation and use of the statistics produced.

Data dissemination

Labour market statistics are electronically disseminated in the database and electronic press releases and on paper in the Regional Yearbook and Statistics in Focus (although both are also dis-

seminated electronically). The publication of the labour market statistics at NUTS 3 level for 2010 ff. are currently under revision due to quality concerns.

The timeliness of the publication of the final statistics at the NUTS 3 level is assessed as good, although the delay of the publication can run to five months. The comparability of the key statistics at NUTS 3 level over time is also judged as good, although some breaks in the time series exist due to changes in the NUTS classification over time; their comparability between countries is also assessed as good, because concepts and methodologies used by most of the countries seem to be comparable with standard concepts.

Follow-up of the production process

Lessons learnt during the production rounds of the LFS data at NUTS 3 level are internally discussed, but not after each production process. The three areas where improvements are sought are: methodology, dissemination practices and documentation.

IT conditions

Eurocube is used for the IT production system. There is no need for further automation of routine clerical operations. The running and further development of the IT applications is partly dependent on external contractors.

Management, planning and legislation

No internal staff backup exists for the key stages in the production process; the segregation of duties is only ensured for critical stages of the process. A clear time schedule for the most important stages in the production process does exist.

Some tasks are outsourced to outside contracts, such as some methodological work (mentioned above) and the production of some publications.

An agreement about the transmission of NUTS 3 labour market data is reached in the annual Working Group meeting on Regional Statistics, because no formal gentlemen's agreement exists for such transmission. The unit experiences positively consequences of a revised LFS legislation or the reporting obligations included in the LFS legislation, although no legislation exists for the LFS data at NUTS 3 level.

Staff, work situation and competence

Activities to maintain the competence of the existing staff are assessed as good. The training needs for newcomers in this statistical field as well as the availability of human resources to carry on the work are considered as serious problems. Financial resources are sufficiently available and working conditions are satisfying.

5.2 Checklist Indicators for metro-regions and urban-rural typology

Background and conceptual framework

Eurostat's generic self-assessment checklist on the indicators was completed in the last week of January 2012. The project contains a compilation of statistics available at NUTS 3 level for (a) metropolitan regions which consist of an individual NUTS-3 region or a combination of several NUTS-3 regions with at least 250 000 inhabitants, and (b) predominantly urban, intermediate or predominantly rural areas being a typology of NUTS 3 regions.

The project started in 2011 and its first results were published in the beginning of February 2012 – a few weeks after the checklist was completed. The publication contains main indicators for demography (four tables), regional accounts (three tables) and the labour market (six tables).

Users

The key users are: DG REGIO (instigator of the project) and DG AGRI (oblique benefit agent). The completeness of information on the key user satisfaction is judged as very good, because the provided information is assumed to be in accordance with the specifications of both key users. The need for other and more indicators for both types of those areas remains. An additional indicator for patents is the first one which will be added.

At the time of completing the checklist the key user's satisfaction with the quality of the compiled indicators could not be assessed due to their 'newness'. Based on the underlying and published statistics at NUTS 3 level – the 'building blocks' - coherence, completeness and relevance are assessed as very good. Comparability between countries is also assessed as very good, because the compiling processes are identical for all countries. Accuracy and reliability, timeliness, accessibility, clarity and comparability over time are not assessed because of a lack of assessments of these quality aspects for the 'building blocks'.

Data providers and validation

The data providers are the internal Eurostat units responsible for demography, labour market and economic accounts. No problems exist with regard to data deliveries from the providers or with regard to the data validation by national data providers, except for the problems encountered by the production units of the 'building blocks'.

The reliability of the internal Eurostat data validation system is judged as satisfactory due to the phase in which the project finds itself at present. Once the production process is stable and verified, the reliability of the validation system is expected to be very good.

Statistical confidentiality

Confidential data at the NUTS 3 level from the statistical 'building blocks' are not yet processed in the aggregation process for metro-regions and areas based on the urbanity-rural typology. This aspect may be addressed in the assessment of the data quality aspects.

Documentation

A complete documentation is needed for at least data validation, data dissemination, methodology used and probably also for the main issues regarding the data collection. Consequently, no documentation about the methodology of the production process is available yet for the public. ESMS files for the released statistics are far from complete. They are available to users insofar this information relates to the ESMS files for the three statistical 'building blocks': demography, labour market and regional accounts. The only exception refers to the statistics on the labour market for which a metadata file dedicated to metropolitan regions is available.

Data dissemination

The first results are disseminated in Eurostat's online database and contain main indicators for demography, regional accounts and the labour market. Verification and consistency checks are performed before releasing results.

Future results will be published immediately after new statistics from the statistical 'building blocks' are available in Eurostat's database Eurocube. Consequently, their timeliness and punctuality depend on the timeliness and punctuality by which the statistics of the three sources are released.

A very high coherence with other statistics and information on the same subject is obvious. The comparability over time is good, although some breaks in the time series exist due to changes in the NUTS classification. The comparability between countries is also good. Concepts and methodologies used by most of the countries are comparable with standard concepts.

Follow-up of the production process

Lessons learnt after the production round of project results are discussed with the staff working within the three 'building block' domains. The three areas where improvements are sought are: dialogue with the users, availability of metadata and documentation.

IT conditions

Eurocube is used for the IT production system. The need exists for further automation of routine clerical operations with respect to the validation of the results before dissemination. A main problem in terms of IT applications is the different location of the various data sources in Eurocube. The running and further development of the IT applications is partly dependent on external contractors.

Management, planning and legislation

At the time of the self-assessment the organisation of the backup for the key stages in the production process was not yet known. The segregation of duties is only ensured for the critical stages of the production process. A clear time schedule for the most important stages in the production process does not exist either.

Staff, work situation and competence

Activities to maintain the competence of the existing staff with regard to their work are good. Human and financial resources are sufficiently available and the working conditions are satisfying.

5.3 Checklist Data collection on rural development

Background and conceptual framework

The data collection on rural development is a pilot project based on a grant agreement issued by Eurostat. The preparatory activities started in 2009; data collection, data validation and reporting should have taken place during 2011, but they were yet on-going at the time the checklist was filled in.

The project aims at a collection of (a) statistics from various thematic domains at the NUTS 3 level covering the period 2005-2010 based on the urban-rural typology; and (b) location data for primary and secondary schools, universities and hospitals by way of geocodes or addresses in order to calculate the accessibility of these infrastructure for the population.

Users

The most important users of the project results are DG AGRI and DG REGIO. The satisfaction of the key users with the results of the project is not yet assessed due to the on-going status of the project.

Data providers

Data providers are various units within Eurostat for already available data at the NUTS 3 level and National Statistical Institutes (NSIs) for not yet available data at this regional level. Only nine NSIs applied to the available grant. The compliance with the grant by these nine data providers is monitored by way of an agreement.

The kind of data requested are data which are already collected by the NSIs at a higher regional level, but which are needed at a lower regional level. Data from the NSIs which did not apply to the grant are obtained as much as possible by exploring their websites. The results will probably be of lesser value than expected in the beginning due to the low participation of the NSIs.

Validation (national data providers and Eurostat)

The NSIs applying to the grant are obliged to describe the validation for the statistical results of each variable or indicator in the final report.

The overall accuracy of statistics from the internal units will be good. Data sources and methodologies used for these statistics are according to the Eurostat standard, although the statistics on rural development will be published at a more detailed regional level.

Statistical confidentiality

Some provided data could be confidential for certain rural areas. But no processing of such data is foreseen.

Documentation

The documentation will be provided after the production process of the on-going project has come to an end. Parts of the documentation will be delivered by the NSIs reports.

Data dissemination

The statistics will be published in the Eurostat database in case such publication is feasible. Validation, consistency and coherence checks will be assessed before releasing the statistics. A clear time reference of the data will be given in the paragraph on metadata in the final report by the data providers.

The comparability over time is assessed as good, although some breaks in the time series 2005-2010 will be unavoidable due to changes in the NUTS classification. The results will be comparable for most of the countries.

Articles are foreseen in Statistics in Focus, in Statistics explained and in the dedicated section for regional statistics.

Follow-up of the production process

Lessons learnt after the production round of project results are discussed with every staff working within the various thematic domains.

The output is also used as input for coastal regions (also defined at the NUTS 3 level) and for the indicators for the urban-rural typology.

IT conditions

Eurocube is used for the IT production system. The need exists for further automation of routine clerical operations with respect to the validation and the disseminated datasets. The running and further development of the IT applications is partly dependent on external contractors.

Management, planning and legislation

There is only backup staff for certain important stages in the production process. The segregation of duties is only ensured for the critical stages of this process. A clear time schedule exists for the most important stages in the process. The internal coordination of the work with other units is well organised.

Staff, work situation and competence

The staff competency for this work as well as its maintenance is good. More human resources might be needed to continue the project, whereas enough financial resources are sufficiently available. The material working conditions are fine.

6 Conclusions

6.1 Need for regional statistics (user survey)

The question may be raised whether the results of the user survey yield sufficiently reliable information in view of further actions. This is certainly the case: not because of the representativeness of the results (which is doubtful), but because of the very strong involvement of the users who have responded. They stand out as advanced or professional users with a relatively high quality of statistical experience. They are in possession of a high degree of understanding regional data and of interest in methods and concepts used to produce regional statistics. Moreover, they are more prone to arrive at new insights or to follow certain developments when (intentionally) looking for regional statistics.

Although the accessibility of the website in search for regional statistics is quite good, it is not always without some difficulty to access the statistics. Other than the small number of respondents who get easily lost most of the time on the Eurostat website in search for regional statistics, there are still quite a large number of respondents (40 %) who get lost some of the time. Reasons for this problem refer to the database software and to the design of the regional statistics at the website. The software seems to have too many bugs concerning selecting items and sorting results, is sometimes freezing or even crashing and too slow. As to the design: it seems that it is difficult to get through the different pages and options, selection of indicator specifications is very tedious and time consuming, it is not obvious why a request does not work and the handling is sometimes a bit circuitous.

The most commonly used information products on regional statistics are also positively rated with the exception of the Pages dedicated to regional statistics. Reasons for the rating of this publication are not given. The comments on Explanatory Texts (the metadata attached to tables and datasets) refer mostly to its incompleteness. It is suggested that this information product could be improved by attaching metadata to every table or even to every variable or indicator. It is even suggested to rewrite all metadata files, so that they are more attuned to the interests of users (see recommendations).

Comparing a few selected regions across all indicators as method of regional analysis is less used as comparing a few selected regional indicators across all regions as method of regional analysis. The latter can probably be made easier for users by a different manner of presentation of the regional statistics. Eurostat's regional statistics are until now only presented as regional specifications of statistics belonging to thematic domains and not as regional statistics as such. Regional specifications emphasize statistical descriptions of the regional occurrence of phenomena belonging to a specific thematic domain, whereas regional statistics as such emphasize the statistical description of certain regions with regard to the occurrence of several phenomena belonging to various thematic domains. In this connection two types of users may be distinguished: the specialist versus the regionalist. The specialist is focused on the details of data from a specific thematic domain, of which the region is one of these details. A regionalist is interested in a combination of data about precisely one region or more regions. In order to facilitate a regional analysis by a regionalist it is desirable to have the disposable of a publication of regional statistics in which the statistics from various thematic domains are presented for individual regions in such a way that the main indicators from all thematic domains are arranged according to several types of regions: regions at the several NUTS levels as well as other specific regions (metropolitan regions, coastal regions, etc.). Some comments on the Database and Main tables are indirectly pointing to such a publication stating that, for example, to have possibilities to adapt the database for doing queries with regard to NUTS 2 and 3 levels, or to download statistics by NUTS level, or to have a more adequate access to files by NUTS level (see recommendations).

Finding information on the NUTS is not always easy. Even the respondents who find that information use various sources, such as Eurostat's website, Eurostat's publication on the NUTS Regulation, the Ramon database and Wikipedia. It is probably necessary to inform the users more explicit where to find that information. It is also suggested to enlarge the information on the NUTS by presenting a map or maps online as well as by publishing an overview on the availability of data by which NUTS levels (see recommendations).

6.2 Organisation and functioning of Eurostat's system of regional statistics (partner survey)

The results on the planning, data requests and coordinating structures in the field of regional statistics yield some points for discussion. First, it appears that the familiarity with regard to the regional statistical programmes leaves to be desired. This situation is probably largely due to the fact that this kind of programming is spread to a great extent into the statistical programmes as part of the several thematic domains and which are presented as regional specifications of the domains. Such programming in the field of Eurostat's regional statistics - in the Annual Statistical Programmes particularly - is not suitable for partners and for users of these statistics at the European level (as, for example, DG REGIO) who are mainly interested in regional statistics as such. A clearer presentation of the programming of all regional statistics would be very helpful for DG REGIO, other Commission DGs and Eurostat partners, so that their familiarity with all regional programmes will be increased (see recommendations).

The issue of a legal base for regional data request from the Commission in relation to its policies should be further discussed with the partners. This applies also to the issues of influencing decisions and effectiveness as regards programmes in the field of regional statistics by the partners. The opinions about these issues may be considered indeed as rather positive, but the satisfaction index in particular indicates that there is room for further improvement with regard to these issues.

On the other hand, the system of Eurostat's regional statistics functions well during the present programme period: overall as well as regards the various work programming activities. This applies also to the direction of change in the coordination and cooperation in Eurostat's regional statistics during the present programme period which is generally considered as improved during this period.

6.3 Eurostat's role in the field of regional statistics (partner survey)

Eurostat's role in the field of regional statistics is considered as quite good. They are many positive points in this respect. To summarise: its role with regard to the 2011 NUTS regulation, the various aspects of its internal coordination, preparatory activities for and progress of meetings on regional statistics (minutes inclusively) as well as outside meetings (response to queries and taking account of needs of partners), instruments for exchange of information and data transmission and last but not least, its publications in the field of regional statistics.

However, the fact remains that there are a few minor points in this respect. It is desirable that Eurostat intensifies efforts to inform itself better on best practices in the field of regional statistics at NSIs and on possibilities of data deliveries by NSIs. Furthermore it is desirable that Eurostat uses more knowledge, competence and experience available at NSIs in the field regional statistics when necessary (see recommendations).

Another point which may be improved in order to enhance the partnership between Eurostat and partners concerns the providing of information between meetings on progress of activities, on new activities and on results of projects (see recommendations).

6.4 Assessment of data quality of Eurostat's regional statistics (user and partner survey)

A relatively strong consensus of opinion exists largely between partners and users as regards their assessment of the quality of the data from Eurostat's regional statistics. Both assess the data quality aspects of accessibility, accuracy and comparability of the data as very good. Both have also a rather positive opinion about the coherence of the data.

Both agree also that the timeliness of the data leaves much to be desired. It is one of the data qualities to be improved according to both, because the regional data are often considered as lagging behind and not sufficiently up-to-date. It is suggested that timeliness of the data may possibly already be enhanced by publishing provisional figures or by reducing the period between data availability in the NSIs and their publication by Eurostat (see recommendations).

User and partner respondents differ considerably as regards their opinion about completeness. User respondents are more critical as regards their assessment of this data quality than partner respondents. The former assess completeness as a quality aspect which leaves much to be desired, whereas the latter qualify completeness as rather positive with some room for further improvement. Anyhow, this data quality needs to be improved. The most outspoken need with regard to completeness of the data for the users is the availability of data at the NUTS 3 level instead of the NUTS 2 level. Meeting this need will be not easy because of Eurostat's dependency on the NSIs as data providers. Discussions with NSI's about options and long-term strategies are probably most obvious in order to arrive at an adequate solution for this problem. A reduction of missing values for special regions or some time series may also be helpful (see recommendations).

The opinion from user and partner respondents differ also as regards clarity. The partner respondents qualify this data quality as very good, whereas the user respondents are rather positive about this quality aspect, although respondents from a non-governmental organisation have a negative opinion about it. Therefore it is advisable to investigate how this data quality may be improved. It appears that metadata should be improved above all. According to the user respondents the metadata should be more taking concepts and definitions into account, be more detailed, regularly updated, and linked to the data they refer to. They are now often assessed as too incomplete, too general, too basic, and too little or even out-dated (see recommendations).

6.5 Checklists

Unit E4 is well aware of the importance which users attach to the labour market statistics at NUTS 3 level and consequently, also of the user need for more labour market statistics at this regional level. This need was confirmed in an interview with representatives of the main user of these statistics: DG REGIO. This DG does not only attach a high priority to qualitative statistics on unemployment and employment, but also, among others, to statistical information on the highest level of education from the Labour Force survey (LFS). The availability of such statistics at NUTS 3 level is particularly important for DG REGIO for the metro-regions and areas based on the urban-rural typology. DG REGIO noted that they need rather aggregated statistics on this topic for these regions in the first place, although they welcome also such statistics at the individual NUTS 3 level. Aggregating available NUTS 3 results on the highest level of education has the advantage that statistical unreliable and/or confidential data may be also involved in the aggregation process¹¹. The outsourced study on the quality of the LFS data at NUTS 3 level should, among others, compare "... *the two sources currently available for the NUTS 3 labour*

¹¹ As a possible intermediate solution for the time being DG REGIO suggests a breakdown of NUTS 2 results on this topic by the urban-rural typology provided that the LFS results are geographically stratified and indications of this stratification is available

market data and to determine which one is more reliable for NUTS 3 purposes". Taking into account the needs of the key users described above it is advisable that a sound methodology is also simultaneously developed for other LFS data at the NUTS 3 level using the NUTS 3 codes already available to a great extent in the LFS micro-data files (see recommendations).

Unit E4 is aware of the fact that timeliness and completeness of the regional market statistics leave to be desired. The idea of the unit to upgrade their timeliness by improving the production process is fully supported. The support for its idea of upgrading the geographical coverage by outsourcing a study for that purpose is sufficiently apparent from the previous comments.

Both projects of the indicators for metro-regions and areas based on an urban-rural typology and the data collection on rural development were still in its infancy at the time of reviewing them. DG REGIO as instigator of the indicators attaches a high priority to this project as has been treated at some length above. DG AGRI assured that the data collection is important for this DG among a whole range of other important statistics.

The first results for metro-regions and areas based at the urban-rural typology did not include aggregations of unreliable and/or confidential statistics at NUTS 3 level. It is advisable to include such statistics in the aggregation process for indicators at the level of these regions and these areas later on. The unit suggested already considering this aspect. Assessment of the several quality aspects for indicators with aggregated unreliable and/or confidential statistics at NUTS 3 level will be then necessary. The unit suggested also considering addressing this assessment if it proceeds to include such statistics in the aggregation (see recommendations).

Documentation of the various stages of the production process is a real issue for the regional labour market statistics as well as the indicators for metro-regions and areas based on an urban-rural typology. This documentation should be taken in hand as soon as possible and implemented in the ESMS files as far as parts thereof are still missing in these files. The documentation of the data production process is important in view of a possible internal transferability of tasks. A better availability of the process documentation in the ESMS files may probably also lead to a saving in time spent for the present assistance to users in the interpretation and use of the statistics produced (see recommendations).

The data collection on rural development was still in progress at the time of the review. The documentation of this project should also be taken in hand directly after the on-going status of the project has come to an end.

7 Recommendations for improvement

7.1 Regional statistics

The first part of the report deals in detail with the Rolling Review process as it was applied to Eurostat's regional statistics, the response of users to the statistics which emerge as well as the views of the partners coordinating the supply of the data. It is valuable to step back from this consideration of the details and assess the system of regional statistics as a whole. The result so far has been a system of regional statistics which has received approval from both its users and partners. This is shown by a lot of positive opinions and comments received from users and partners on the various issues raised. However, there are still some issues with regard to the system of regional statistics which could be further improved (see conclusions). The recommendations for improvements are summarized in table 1.

Table 1. Recommendations for improvements as regards regional statistics

		Priority	Source	Owner	Timing
A. Improvement of Statistical Programmes					
A1	Eurostat should improve the information on the programming as regards regional statistics in the Annual Statistical Programmes of the Commission for other Commission DGS, particularly for DG REGIO as well as for Eurostat's partners.	1	PS/RR	E4/A3	ST/MT/ LT
B. Improvement of dissemination products					
B1	Consider the possibility of developing a regional publication accessible on the Website in which key indicators from all thematic domains are accessed at the same time by several types of regions (NUTS regions at levels 1-3 and other specific regions).	2	US/RR	E4	MT
B2	Further improve the "dedicated sections and Statistics Explained content" in regional statistics.	1	US	E4/TU/B6	MT
B3	Further improve the "explanatory texts" (metadata attached to tables and datasets) for regional statistics.	1	US	E4/TU/B5	MT
B4	Consider ways of improving the accessibility and increase of information about the NUTS.	2	US	E4	MT
C. Improvement of data qualities					
C1	Investigate together with the internal thematic units ways of improving the timeliness of the data.	1	US/PS	E4/TU	LT
C2	Consider ways of improving the completeness of the regional data by exploring options and long-term strategies with the NSIs to arrive at an adequate solution of this problem.	1	US/PS/RR	E4/TU	LT
C3	Improve clarity by increasing the information on more detailed metadata and on metadata which are considered as still missing.	1	US	E4/TU	ST
D. Engagement with users/partners and their needs					
D1	Consider ways of enhancing the information on best practices at NSIs and possibilities of data deliveries by NSIs as well as the capacity to use knowledge, competence and experience available at NSIs.	3	PS	E4	MT
D2	Consider also ways of providing more information to partners on progress of activities, new activities or results of projects between meetings of the WG on Regional Statistics.	2	PS	E4	MT

Priority: 1 is highest priority, 5 lowest.

Source: US (Users' survey); PS (Partners' survey); RR (Expert's view based on the Rolling Review process and interviews with representatives of DG REGIO and DG AGRI).

Owner: unit E4 Regional statistics and geographical information; TU Thematic domain units with regional specifications; A3 Strategic Planning, learning and development; B5 Management of statistical data and metadata; B6 Dissemination.

Timing: ST=short term (within the next 6 months), MT=mid-term (within the next 2 years), LT=long-term (needs more than 2 years for implementation).

7.2 Special production processes

The second part of the report deals in detail with the Rolling Review process as it was applied to a review of the checklists for three projects for which unit E4 is directly responsible. These projects are: (a) the production of labour market statistics at NUTS 3 level and the publication of labour market statistics at NUTS 2 and 3 level; (b) indicators for metro-regions and areas based on an urban-rural typology, and (c) data collection on rural development. After reviewing the three checklists some issues emerged which could be further improved (see conclusions). The recommendations for the improvements are summarized in table 2.

Table 2. Recommendations for improvements as regards the checklists on regional labour market statistics, indicators for metro-regions and areas based on the urban-rural typology and data collection on rural development.

		Priority	Source	Owner	Timing
A. Regional labour market statistics: production process and dissemination					
A1	Ensure the development of a sound methodology for NUTS 3 labour market data other than unemployment and employment using the NUTS 3 codes in the LFS micro-data files, particularly in view of aggregation for larger regions based on NUTS 3 regions.	1	CL/RR	E4	MT
A2	Improve the documentation of the various stages in the data production process (data collection, validation, dissemination and methodology) and implement simultaneously documented parts in the ESMS files which are missing in these files.	1	CL	E4	MT
A3	Establish a pre-announced time table for the dissemination of the annual market statistics at NUTS level 2 and 3.	3	CL	E4	MT
A. Regional labour market statistics: other matters					
A4	Make available sufficient and efficient training possibilities for newcomers.	2	CL	E4/A2	MT
B. Indicators metro-regions and urban-rural typology: production process					
B1	If possible and justified, include unreliable and/or confidential statistics at NUTS 3 level in the aggregation process for indicators at the level of metro-regions and areas based on the urban-rural typology.	2	CL/RR	E4	MT
B2	Assess the several data quality aspects for indicators which include unreliable and/or confidential statistics at NUTS 3 level at the level of metro-regions and areas based on the urban-rural typology.	2	CL	E4	MT
B3	Document the various stages in the data production process (data collection, validation, dissemination and methodology) as soon as possible and implement simultaneously documented parts in the ESMS files which are missing in these files.	1	CL	E4	ST

		Priority	Source	Owner	Timing
C. Data collection on rural development: production process					
C1	Document the various stages in the data production process (data collection, validation, dissemination and methodology) as soon as possible after the on-going status of the project has come to an end.	1	CL	E4	MT

Priority: 1 is highest priority, 5 lowest

Source: CL (checklist); KS (Key users: DG REGIO and DG AGRI); RR (Expert's view based on the Rolling Review process)

Owner: unit E4 Regional Statistics and geographical information; F3 Labour market; A2 Human Resource Management

Timing: ST=short term (within the next 6 months), MT=mid-term (within the next 2 years), LT=long-term (needs more than 2 years for implementation)