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Statistics 4 all

Communication
best practices



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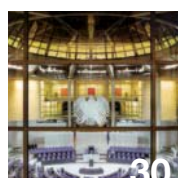
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Editorial

On 24 February 2006, Günther Hanreich, our Director-General, passed away. All of us have been sincerely touched by his loss. A memorial ceremony was organised on 9 March in Eurostat. Commissioner Almunia, Eurostat staff and Mr Hahlen, President of the German Federal Statistical Office, representing the European statistical system (ESS), were present to pay tribute to his memory. Mr Hahlen's words pronounced on this occasion are published in this issue.

Günther Hanreich came to Eurostat in December 2004 with a vision: he wanted to rebuild Eurostat's reputation as a well-organised, highly productive Commission Directorate-General capable of providing leadership for the ESS. Among his priorities were to improve the quality of data and statistical governance within the ESS. Unfortunately he did not have enough time to make it all come true.

One of his main achievements was the adoption of the 'Code of Practice' for national statistical institutes and Eurostat, giving a significant impulse through the cohesion of the ESS members. Within Eurostat, Günther Hanreich had been able to win staff confidence and improve the working atmosphere.

His all too premature death means it is now up to us to continue pursuing his vision. I am sure that, if we mobilise our potential and work closely together, we shall make it.

The new Sigma, relaunched in 2005, was also an important project for Günther Hanreich. The current issue focuses on best practices in the field of communication and dissemination of statistics.

Given the importance of good communication and dissemination practices to promote the use of statistics, we have requested our partners in the ESS and abroad to share their success stories with us. Examples range from renting a databank in Denmark to reaching out to primary school students in Poland or delivering high-quality statistics via the Canadian *The Daily* bulletin, among others.

Most of the articles refer to the Internet as the most used communication channel. Nevertheless, as media play a major role in dissemination, by informing the general public as well as specific target groups, there is a specific section dealing with best practices in this area.

I hope that you will enjoy reading this issue. I look forward to your feedback and comments.

Marie Bohatá

Deputy Director-General, Eurostat

Mourning Günther Hanreich

You will find below the text pronounced by Johann Hahlen, President of the German Federal Statistical Office, on the occasion of the ceremony organised in Luxembourg on 9 March 2006 to pay homage to Günther Hanreich.

Dear Commissioner Almunia,
Dear Ms Bohatá,
Dear colleagues,

The death of Günther Hanreich is a great loss for the European statistical system. We, the statisticians of the 25 national statistical institutes, are very sad. Our deepest sympathy goes out to Günther Hanreich's family, his wife and his two daughters. With the death of Günther Hanreich, we have lost an extremely active and warm-hearted colleague to whom the further development of European statistics and the cooperation between Eurostat and the national statistical institutes as partners was a matter of great concern. We sincerely regret that the time we worked together on the European statistical system was only short. However, Günther Hanreich's initiatives will continue to show their effects in the future, and we will build on them.

In December 2004, that is not more than 15 months ago, our colleague Günther Hanreich became Director-General of Eurostat, the Statistical Office of the European Communities. He took office at a time when the crisis of confidence in Eurostat and European statistics had not yet been overcome. His typical vigour allowed our colleague Günther Hanreich to do just what was required — for instance, visiting the European partner institutes and having intensive expert talks — to rebuild confidence both within the European statistical system and in the statistics produced by the European Union.

In this context I should like to mention particularly the Code of Practice for the national and Community statistical bodies. Günther Hanreich energetically encouraged and promoted the preparation of the code's 15 principles for the statistical work of Eurostat and the national statistical institutes of the 25 Member States of the European Union. Hence the Code of Practice could be adopted by the European Commission as a recommendation not later than in May 2005.

With an equally outstanding personal commitment, Günther Hanreich then initiated the implementation of the Code of Practice. Today, first results and comparative analyses are already available. This is the beginning of a promising process whose underlying principle is 'learning from the best'. The European statistical system will benefit more from this process than it would from any other provisions, however detailed they might be.

I would like to particularly emphasise the friendly and cooperative way which characterised Günther Hanreich's approach to advancing the cause of European statistics in the Statistical Programme Committee, the Partnership Group, and also in personal talks. All of us of the national statistical institutes got to know Günther Hanreich as a colleague for whom partnership and mutual trust was the key to joint success.

We — the heads of the national statistical institutes — are very thankful to Günther Hanreich for this trustful cooperation as partners. We firmly believe that his legacy will live on in the years to come.

Allow me to conclude by reading out a poem by the German poet Rainer Maria Rilke which best expresses my feelings at this moment.

Herbst

*Die Blätter fallen, fallen von weit,
als welkten in den Himmeln ferne Gärten;
sie fallen mit verneinender Gebärde.*

*Und in den Nächten fällt die schwere Erde
aus allen Sternen in die Einsamkeit.*

*Wir alle fallen. Diese Hand da fällt.
Und sieh dir and're an: Es ist in allen.*

*Und doch ist einer, welcher dieses Fallen
unendlich sanft in seinen Händen hält.*

Mr Hervé Carré, new Director-General of Eurostat



Mr Hervé Carré

The Commission appointed Mr Hervé Carré Director-General of Eurostat from 1 May 2006.

Hervé Carré is French and comes from the Directorate-General for Economic and Financial Affairs where he was Deputy Director-General.

An economist by training, he joined the European Commission in that same DG in 1973, specialising in the monetary area. He has since led divisions dealing with national and European Community monetary policies, the EMS, ECU and exchange markets, and international monetary and financial matters.

In 1991, he was seconded to the US Federal Reserve Board in Washington, and, in 1992–93, to the Portuguese Government as adviser to the Minister for Finance.

He returned to the European Commission in 1994, as Director for Monetary Matters and, in 1999, became Director for the Economy of the Euro Area and the European Union. As a member of the Economic and Financial Committee, he was involved in all the negotiations leading to the adoption of the euro. Later on, he was responsible

for the practical aspects of the introduction of the euro notes and coins. During this period, he was also a member of the Committee on Monetary, Financial and Balance of Payments Statistics.

The statistics of the Oesterreichische Nationalbank: new and improved



From left to right: Manfred Fluch, Aurel Schubert, Matthias Fuchs

The Oesterreichische Nationalbank (OeNB) is one of the major Austrian producers of primary statistics. In 2004 it improved its statistical dissemination and modernised its range of statistical services. In particular, the OeNB issued a new statistical quarterly bulletin and redesigned its website. In addition, a Statistics Hotline has been set up to answer questions related to statistics coming from professionals, journalists, universities and private individuals. As a result, users expressed their overall satisfaction with the OeNB in a public survey carried out in February 2005.

Compiling financial statistics is a core task of the OeNB. The broad range of data that the OeNB processes and provides — above all interest and exchange rate data, information on financial institutions, external flows and stocks, and financial accounts data — puts the OeNB at the top of the league of Austria's major producers of pri-

mary statistics, with the likes of Statistics Austria. Special survey expertise and methodological know-how, data timeliness and competent data interpretation, transparency and accessibility as well as user-friendliness enabled the OeNB to develop into a major competence centre for statistics on Austria over the past few years. As the

OeNB complies with national, European and international standards and codes on the methodology, consistency and timeliness of statistics — developed with the bank's active involvement — it is well equipped to secure a consistently high data quality. Moreover, all of the OeNB's statistical information is available free of charge and disseminated with state-of-the-art technologies.

The OeNB restructured, expanded and improved its statistical dissemination in 2004 in response to new content and IT requirements. The upshot of this restructuring project is a new statistical quarterly bulletin and the relaunch of the OeNB's statistical resources on the web. The statistical web pages at www.oenb.at were redesigned with user-friendly dynamic interfaces that provide access to a comprehensive range of data in German and English in the 'Statistical Data' section (located under 'Statistics and Reporting' ⁽¹⁾), a selection of which is also included in the quarterly bulletin. This quarterly (entitled *Statistiken — Daten & Analysen*) is published in German, with English executive summaries, in both print and online editions. As an additional service, a Statistics Hotline was established to answer statistics-related telephone or e-mail queries. On average, the hotline deals with 1 500 queries per year. Banks and financial institutions submit the majority of questions, but hotline clients also include universities, journalists and private individuals.

The OeNB's statistical resources

www.oenb.at/

('Statistics and Reporting')

Statistik.hotline@oenb.at

Statistics-Hotline:

☎ (43-1) 404 20 55 55

<http://dieaktuellezahl.oenb.at>

(information on the OeNB's 'Indicators of the Month'; currently in German only)



The new statistical services, launched in September 2004, were well received from the start and have earned good ratings since. In a public survey conducted in February 2005, the web resources received an average rating of 1.7, and the quarterly publication a rating of 1.8 (on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being the highest score)⁽²⁾. The number of visits and page impressions reached high levels fairly soon after the launch, which is further proof of the high degree of client satisfaction.

The following section explains the motives for the redesign, presents the various statistical resources in greater detail, and provides more information on client ratings.

Changing external conditions called for new and improved statistics

A number of developments motivated the redesign and expansion of the OeNB's statistical resources: the completion of the changeover to euro banknotes and coins, the need to adapt statistics to the new environment created by the establishment of the European monetary union, and the challenge of contributing data for monetary policy-making in the Eurosystem. The ensuing new requirements as well as the OeNB's obligation to provide high-quality and timely statistical information for Eurosystem monetary policy-making, national financial market supervision and national economic policy-making were other important reasons for tackling a redesign. Furthermore, the EU enlargement round in 2004 called for an expansion of the statistics that the OeNB compiles on the new EU Member States, given Austria's function as a gateway between the east and west of Europe. Moreover, a stocktaking exercise had shown that print publications consisting of tables only — the OeNB's former *Statistisches Monatsheft* (*Focus on Statistics* in English) fit this profile — had largely been replaced by electronic tools as primary sources of information. Last but not least, business considerations, including the need to optimise costs and make processes more efficient, added to the need for a relaunch.

⁽¹⁾ For more details, see Fluch, M. and I. Wenko (2004). 'Redesign des Statistikangebots der OeNB', in *Statistiken — Daten & Analysen*, Q 4/04, OeNB, 72–82.

⁽²⁾ For more details, see Fluch, M. and M. Fuchs (2005). 'Beurteilung des neuen Statistikangebots der OeNB durch die Öffentlichkeit', in *Statistiken — Daten & Analysen*, Q3/05, OeNB, 18–27.

The OeNB – The competence centre for financial statistics on Austria

The screenshot shows the OeNB website interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links for 'Glossar', 'Dictionary', 'Feedback', 'Kontakt', 'Impressum und Haftung', 'Sitemap', and 'English version'. A search bar labeled 'Suchbegriff' with an 'OK' button is also present. Below the navigation bar, the URL http://www.oenb.at/de/stat_melders/statistik_und_melderservice.jsp is displayed. The main content area is divided into two columns:

Statistics and Reporting	Statistical Data
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Statistical Publications Statistical Data Release Calendar Economic indicators according to SDDS Standards and Codes Links 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> OeNB, Eurosystem and Monetary Indicators Interest Rates and Exchange Rates Financial Institutions Securities Means of Payment and Payment Systems Prices, Competitiveness Real and Industry Indicators Financial Accounts External Sectors International Comparisons

Approval ratings highest for the relaunch of the web pages

The relaunch involved changes to both content and layout, as described below.

- Meta-information for each table and flash information on individual statistical indicators are provided.
- The integration of historical time series enables users to compare indicators over time.
- Data are updated several times a day through an interface to the OeNB's macroeconomic database.
- A logical structure repeated throughout in submenus facilitates navigation and guarantees a high degree of consistency and rapid retrieval.
- Data search features are user-friendly and easy to operate. The tables are semi-dynamic applications which allow for quick onward processing in other data formats (such as Excel spreadsheets).

The 'Statistical Data' section at www.oenb.at is the gateway to the entire range of data (plus relevant meta-information) provided by the OeNB. It is organised in 10 subject areas. A search tool developed in-house at the OeNB allows users to narrow or expand

their search to particular time series. In addition, a Release Calendar informs users about scheduled updates. As a special service for reporting entities, reporting instructions and other documents that may be relevant for data suppliers have been made available in a dedicated section (of the German version of the website). Finally, statistical news can be accessed in the sections 'Presseaussendungen' (German only), 'Statistical Publications' and 'Die aktuelle Zahl' (the OeNB's 'Indicators of the Month' initiative, currently in German only).

In the abovementioned survey of February 2005, the OeNB's website got very good ratings. Regular users of the OeNB's Internet data resources rated the individual submenus with average scores of between 1.4 and 1.7 on a 5-point scale. The ratings of occasional users were only somewhat less favourable, ranging from 1.8 to 2.0. With regard to individual criteria (including timeliness, accessibility, scope, level of detail), users were particularly impressed by the timeliness of the data, whereas the scores for the presentation of the notes and data navigation imply a potential for improvement.

New quarterly bulletin provides analyses of financial statistics

As user surveys conducted prior to the relaunch showed, there continues to be demand for a statistical print publication in Austria. Therefore, a statistical quarterly (*Statistiken – Daten & Analysen*) was designed to supplement the supply of data on the Internet. The contributions are in German, with executive summaries in English. The new series contains summary reports and selected analyses of Austria's financial statistics as well as a statistical annex. Special issues on specific statistical topics complement the information provided in the statistical series. This publication also received good ratings in the survey, with an average score of 1.8 on a 5-point scale.

Further development and improvement

While all elements of the redesigned statistical resources received good ratings from users, the OeNB stands ready to implement suggestions for improvement received during the survey. Currently work is under way to generate a more sophisticated dynamic search feature that will allow users to customise data retrieval.

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For further information:

www.oenb.at

Cyprus: continuous service improvement

In 1998, Cystat, the statistical service of Cyprus, was one of the first government departments to have its own website. Since then, it has continuously improved the content and design of its website to extend the service offered to its users.

Cystat is the official national organisation responsible for the compilation and publication of most official statistical data in Cyprus. Cystat is mainly concerned with the organisation and completion of various censuses, surveys and statistical enquiries of an economic or social nature, as well as the dissemination of the results with the intention of assisting both the government and the private sector in policy-making and the planning of their activities.

In 1998, the first website included press releases, tables with key figures, a list of publications, statistical links and general information about Cystat. The tables could be viewed and downloaded in Excel and they were categorised by subject. The press releases were also categorised by subject and by date. Although the website was, at the time, a major breakthrough for a government department, several problems were encountered. The most important concerned the cost of updating which was high as it was carried out by a private firm, the lack of a fixed updating time, which meant that users had to check the website regularly in order to see whether new updates were available and, finally, the difficult retrieval of information as it was classified in more than 20 subjects!

Extending the offer

In 2003, as part of the government project 'Development and implementation of web systems for various government departments', the new website was launched. The aim was to ensure that Cystat achieved a dynamic Internet presence through a web system that would provide comprehensive statistical data, services for registered



Costas K. Diamantides

users and publications in electronic format. The new website is updated directly by Cystat staff and as a result the updating costs have been eliminated.

Since its launch, the website of Cystat has become the main source of statistical information. The website's main features include: free and easy access to the most recent available statistical data, as well as historical data, regular publication of releases at 12 noon, and access to information on Cystat's role, activities and announcements.

But the most important innovations introduced concern the availability of services for registered users: the 'Alert' and 'Online Order' services, the availability

of Cystat's publications in electronic format, and the establishment of the Release Calendar.

The 'Alert' service offers immediate notification via e-mail to registered users on the availability of new announcements and data on the website. Currently, around 88 % of the 650 registered users have requested the 'Alert' service, showing a significant demand for this service.

The 'Online Order' service offers registered users the possibility of making an order online for paper publications. However, the number of orders received is not high as payment can only be made by cheque.

Since the end of 2004, Cystat has started to provide free online access to most of its publications in electronic format. The policy is that all new publications are made available electronically on the website. As 'Publications' is constantly one of the most visited pages of the website, it can be seen that there is a high demand for publications in electronic format.

Finally, the Release Calendar is updated every Friday. It refers to the dates and themes of the announcements scheduled for the following week. From the feedback received, the Release Calendar is mostly visited by journalists and the private sector.

Feedback and further development of services

Since February 2005, the average number of visitors per month is 4 500. An average of over 1 200 publications are downloaded monthly, except for the summer months when downloads fall by a third. Although there is not much information on users' satisfaction, feedback from various user categories, such as journalists, politicians, academia and government officials, shows that these services are greatly appreciated.

The rapid technological advances in the area of the Internet allows Cystat to offer more services as well as services of better quality. Some of the upgrades concern the content of the e-mail 'Alert' messages, the introduction of online credit card payment, the development of an online archive for electronic publications, and the creation of subthemes.

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Head of Statistical Dissemination and ICT
Surveys Section Statistical Service of Cyprus

For further information:

<http://www.mof.gov.cy/cystat>

StatBank Denmark: a user-driven development of an online database

StatBank Denmark (Statistics Denmark's free online database) has been systematically developed through the years, by means of recurrent user surveys and usability tests. The output from these has been channelled into targeted improvement of the user interface, resulting in markedly increasing user figures.

The StatBank covers all statistical topics. It consists of 1 000 large multidimensional tables detailed to the level of municipalities. This makes a total of several billions of figures — all free of charge.

A yearly survey to evaluate users' expectations...

Once a year, the users of the output database, StatBank, get the opportunity to express what they like and dislike about the databank. Although we communicate much more frequently with users, this annual activity is a formalised way of collecting information through a web survey. Other important channels of information are training courses, telephone and e-mail enquiries, usability tests and study of usage patterns.

Our survey runs for one week. This means that frequent users will have a higher possibility of being presented with the questionnaire. One out of four respondents uses the StatBank weekly — some on a daily basis. Most users (98 % of the registered users) find what they are looking for. Yet, it is the more unsuccessful users that bring us input for improvements. All this wonderful information can be too overwhelming if not structured in a way that is intuitive to everybody.

Comments range from:

- How to navigate on your site is not evident to me. I am taken to subsites where I do not know what to do.
- It is a bit confusing. I do my best and in the end I am confident that I shall succeed.



Annegrete Wulff

- It is somehow confusing for a beginner to be confronted with all the choices of selection.

Another one says:

- This is a most well-arranged and user-friendly site!

We have realised that a good search facility is crucial as many people are not confident with the way a statistical office structures information. To many users, this means that searching should be possible in everyday terms. The same goes for documentation. The users require supporting information in their own language when and where they need it.

...and results taken into account in an action plan

Although many users express their gratitude and satisfaction with the StatBank, there is still room for improvement. In particular we need to make all the good functionality more visible — also for users who do not visit the StatBank so often. This is reflected in the action plan for 2005.

The action plan 2005 focused on the points below.

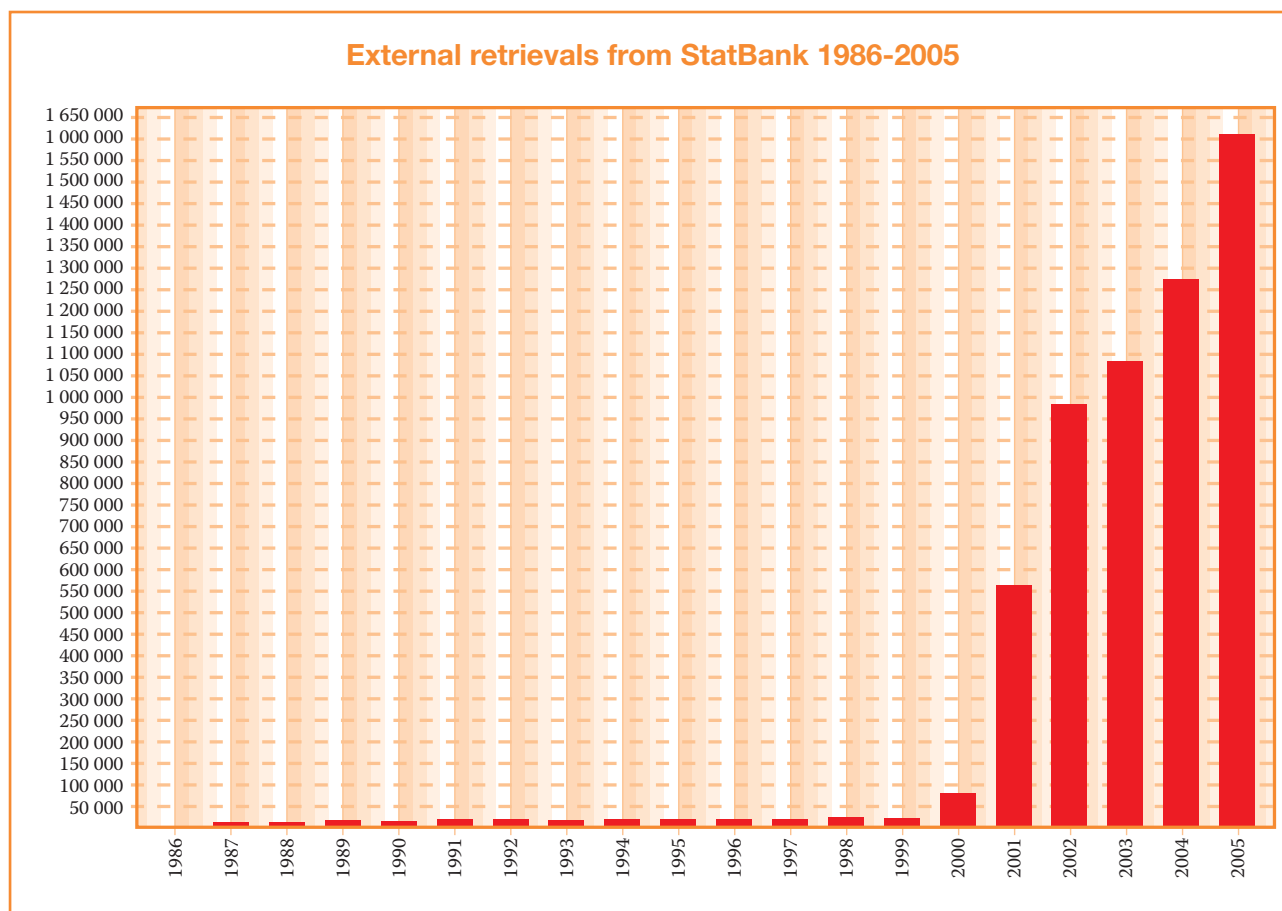
1. The statistical content will be loaded according to the 2006 corporate strategy that says 'the statistical information in StatBank Denmark will be expanded to contain all official statistics.'
2. We will develop an online demo that describes the possibilities of StatBank step by step.

3. We will put the retrieval limit up above the existing limit of 50 000 cells for one single retrieval.
4. We will develop an aggregation facility.
5. We will investigate a possibility for simpler table presentation.

Results of the surveys are available at www.dst.dk/usersurvey

Usage is measured by the number of table retrievals (or downloads). It has increased remarkably, in particular since StatBank became free of charge in 2001. The estimated figure for 2005 is 1.6 million table extractions, approximately 20 times higher than in 2000.

Author: Annetre Wulff
Deputy Head of Dissemination,
Statistics Denmark



StatHost: rent your own databank

Outsourcing has been a buzz word in the IT business for some time. But many companies still throw themselves into the battle of reinventing their own version of ‘the wheel’. Most statistical agencies have implemented an output database system for Internet dissemination, and many private or public organisations also face this challenge. But what about renting a complete system for statistical dissemination, including the hosting itself? Statistics Denmark is now offering a new concept: rent your own databank system to disseminate your own data.

Since the launch of StatBank Denmark (www.statbank.dk) on the Internet in 1999, a number of institutions and organisations from Denmark and other countries have visited Statistics Denmark to gain information on how to set up their own web databank. In the early days of the Internet, there was a certain pioneer spirit in developing a new system. In many cases however, business would benefit from leaving such development to companies which specialise in such services. It might seem expensive, but in many cases it pays off in the long run.

What is the StatHost system?

StatHost is an expansion of the existing dissemination system that is used to run our own web databank: www.statbank.dk. It allows external companies or organisations to have their own data, or data they buy from Statistics Denmark, disseminated by our system. The data will appear on the Internet using their favourite design and layout, with a separate Internet address. From the user’s point of view, it will appear as an integrated part of the client’s original website, with the specific contents and options the client prefers. But data, software and hardware are physically located at Statistics Denmark.

Advantages for the customer

System upgrading and the addition of new features are done centrally. All solutions run on the same core. All

system upgrades and new features are by default simultaneously installed for all solutions. Which features are to be included for each solution are, however, optional. So, if a customer dislikes a new feature, it can normally be excluded from his or her solution as a solution-specific option. There are no technical set-up issues for the customer to deal with. The design and set of features are initially decided for the specific implementation. Statistics Denmark carries out all set-up procedures. This gives the customer time to think about content instead of technical issues.

The same core runs all the different implementations, and thus all solutions are subject to the same level of security and reliability as www.statbank.dk. Statistics Denmark has decided to uphold an accessibility rate of at least 99.5 % for 2005.

Customers who prepare their own data can use comma-separated files (CSV files) or PC-Axis files (PX files). Most customers are capable of creating a CSV file at a minimum, which in many cases will simplify the data-creation process for them, compared with other dissemination methods. Each cube in a StatHost solution is agreed upon and created before actual data are loaded. In the process of creating a cube, the customer will get feedback from databank administrators on best practices for disseminating statistics this way. This will prevent them from making some of the common mistakes of statistical dissemination.



Lars Knudsen

Creating a StatHost customers group

The idea is to create a StatHost customers group with members appointed by the customer, to propose ideas for future development and object to planned changes. This group could be invited for annual meetings and be included in a mailing list. Statistics Denmark started the StatHost business at the beginning of 2005. At the moment of writing, we have set up four StatHost solutions, and have another four potential customers in the pipeline.

Author: Lars Knudsen
Senior Adviser, Dissemination Centre,
Statistics Denmark

For further information:

<http://www.statbank.dk>

Statistical fast food: the way to reach a wide audience

Statistics Denmark has been very creative in trying to bring statistics closer to a wide public. Starting off with short questions of the type ‘Did you know that...?’, which directly address the public, Statistics Denmark publishes, in a more lively way, small pieces of statistical information in the form of answers on the economy, way of life, leisure, etc. Originally intended to increase Internet traffic, these question-answers are highly appreciated both by the Danish population and the media.

Have you ever thought of how many people will benefit from using your statistics, and what a shame it is that not everyone is aware of it? Have you furthermore thought of how wonderful it would be if the national media printed your statistics on a daily basis? At Statistics Denmark, we have dealt with these questions, and one of our answers is to convey the statistical information in brief messages starting with ‘Did you know that...?’

For instance:

- Did you know that 48 % of Danish families had a tumble dryer in 2004? In 1990, only 24 % of families had a tumble dryer.
- Did you know that the number of Danish cars has doubled since 1969? Today, there are 1.9 million cars in Denmark.

A large interest for a quick and easy access to statistics

These small pieces of statistical information were originally created to increase traffic on our website, but have meanwhile proved to be of considerable interest to very different media. They invariably take the form of ‘Did you know that...’ followed by one or two sentences condensing some bit of statistical information on our way of life, business, economics or the like.

Since Statistics Denmark started providing ‘Did you know that...’ free of charge two years ago, a wide range of institutions has come to us with different ideas on how to make them visible. ‘Did you know that...’ has

figured on national television, the national website (www.denmark.dk), a funny revue, a fitness centre and other places. For a long time now, Statistics Denmark has had a free exchange with a major national newspaper; they get the stories, we get the columns. The most recent development is that some media, for payment, now ask us about ‘Did you know that...’ on specific subjects — leisure, transport, family. A fair guess would be that around 100 000 Danes encounter ‘Did you know that...’ each week. But are these small pieces of statistical information even to be considered as knowledge? Or are they just random entertainment?

Infotainment...

If you start scratching the surface, you will find little left but the core story of the figures and a few numbers. However, this is the sort of information people travelling on a bus or surfing a website enjoy reading. While many publications from Statistics Denmark have difficulties in reaching a broad audience, ‘Did you know that...’ is read by thousands each day. When travelling or surfing the web, people do not look for complicated analyses. They look for brief and humorous information they can pass on to a friend or colleague. You can compare the concept of ‘Did you know that...’ with a fast food meal; it is quick and tasty but also easily forgotten. In this sense, there is little doubt that ‘Did you know that...’ is more entertainment than knowledge-based dissemination. ‘Infotainment’ is the suitable word.



Philip Sonne

However, this is not a problem for the trustworthiness of Statistics Denmark, as long as we continue to dis-

seminate serious and well-documented statistics elsewhere. 'Did you know that...' actually shows us that we can disseminate statistics in different ways, without selling out on core values. Being able to communicate with people in unusual situations and with people who are not familiar with statistics only adds to the positive side of the institutional image. Besides, we also hope eventually to convince sceptical anti-statisticians that statistics are neither difficult nor boring. In fact, it is a purposeful way of spending government money.

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For further information:

<http://www.dst.dk/uk>

One-stop shop for euro-area and national statistics ⁽¹⁾

An important task of the European Central Bank (ECB) is to compile and publish financial and monetary statistics for the euro area. It does so in close cooperation with the national central banks (NCBs) of the euro area that provide the national statistical results to the ECB. Even though only statistical indicators for the euro area as a whole are relevant for monetary policy-making, an increasing interest by many users of these statistics in having easier access to the national contributions to the euro-area statistics has been observed. These users include analysts, market participants, journalists and researchers. Up to now, users wishing to access such national breakdowns have been obliged to search 13 different websites: those of the ECB and the 12 NCBs. Responding to this demand, the Eurosystem (the Eurosystem is composed of the ECB and the 12 NCBs of the euro-area countries) has developed a framework for improving access to euro-area statistics.

How to meet the need?

The basic feature of the new framework is that euro-area aggregates and all national contributions are presented in a single set of tables that will be published simultaneously on the ECB's website and on the websites of the participating NCBs, in English and in their national language(s). The NCBs that do not participate in this joint dissemination have introduced on their website a link to the ECB's dedicated web page.

A technical solution enables these data to be disseminated on all the websites simultaneously. This solution is based on Internet technologies and uses the SDMX international statistical standards ⁽²⁾. The ECB and the NCBs participating in this joint dissemination have integrated this system into their own websites in order to present the tables in their own layouts and languages, thus increasing the user-friendliness of the presentation of these statistics. Consistency of the data throughout the Eurosystem is guaranteed by the existence of a single original database, located at the ECB, where the statistical information provided by the NCBs and the ECB itself are stored for the purpose of joint dissemination.

User support for these new tables is decentralised. To this end, all user support lines are announced on all participating websites.

This enhanced dissemination and the innovative technologies used allows the Eurosystem to communicate its statistics more effectively to the media and to the citizens of Europe. It also promotes the Eurosystem as a network of institutions that closely work together.

What is included?

Statistics disseminated under this framework relate to those fields of statistics for which the ECB, supported by the NCBs, has either prime responsibility or a shared responsibility with Eurostat. These fields of statistics are:

- (i) monetary, financial institution and market statistics;
- (ii) external statistics, including international reserves;
- (iii) financial accounts and related statistics.

The ECB has prioritised the joint dissemination of the corresponding national contributions to six sets of

⁽¹⁾ This is the result of development work undertaken by a task force working under the auspices of the Statistics Committee of the European System of Central Banks.

⁽²⁾ Developed under the umbrella of the worldwide SDMX initiative (www.sdmx.org), of which the ECB is one of the sponsoring institutions.



Task Force on Dissemination of Statistics

tables selected on the basis of their economic importance, the degree of harmonisation of the statistics, and the conceptual validity of the national breakdowns.

It is envisaged that, over time, this framework will incorporate more information, so as to further enhance the service of the Eurosystem to the users of its statistics.

Where exactly can data be accessed?

The data can be accessed either via the ECB's website or via the websites of the nine NCBs participating in the joint system. The three other Eurosystem NCBs have a link to the ECB statistics web page on their website. On the ECB's website, these data are accessible in

the 'Statistics' section and the tables are disseminated as a 'second layer' compared to euro-area aggregates figures.

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For further information:

<http://www.ecb.int/stats/services/escb/html/index.en.html>

WebStat: a librarian's alternative to search engines

For five years the information specialists from the Library of Statistics Finland have worked towards meeting user needs with an increasing supply of statistics on the Internet. The outcome of this work, WebStat, is available for all Internet users.

WebStat is one of the customer services of the Library of Statistics Finland on the Internet. It helps the seeker of statistical data to find high-quality statistical sources online and guides the user to assess the usefulness of the data for his or her specific need with the information coming from its search results. WebStat complements the Library of Statistics' catalogue thanks to its regular update of data. The selections and descriptions of WebStat references bring the expertise of library content experts within reach of a broad range of users. Customers, especially students, are encouraged to use this quality search database instead of search engines such as Google. In addition, WebStat is an important daily tool used by the library information specialists, as links to relevant information sources found in the database can easily be added to the e-mail replies to requests.

Worldwide statistics via one interface

Some 3 000 statistical sources freely available on the Internet have been selected and presented in the WebStat service. The statistics are published on the Internet in the form of:

- portals,
- link lists,
- topic and themes sites,
- databases,
- statistical tables,
- graphs and maps.

The data selected for inclusion in WebStat extensively represent high-quality statistics describing society and economy. The selection focuses on Finnish statistics: official statistics of Finland, statistics from other government organisations and unofficial statistics com-



Anja Törmä

plied by industrial, trade, cultural, social and health organisations. Key statistical information sources produced by intergovernmental organisations (IGOs) and international bodies, as well as statistics from national statistical institutes (NSIs), are also included. Statistics produced and published by Eurostat are presented by themes and the data of the databases by subthemes. The selection criteria of the WebStat database complies with the priorities in term of countries and topics of the library's common acquisitions policy. For reasons of information architecture, the topic fields of WebStat correspond to the topic fields of the Official Statistics

of Finland (OSF). The thesaurus terms of the Finnish General Thesaurus are used in various Finnish web services: WebStat, Tilda (the library catalogue of Statistics Finland) and statistics produced and published by Statistics Finland.

National networking for information accessibility

WebStat is part of the national Science Linkhouse service, an information retrieval service with subject-specific collections of Internet resources. The references are maintained in the common database of the Science Linkhouse, which was originally the Finnish Virtual Library project. WebStat references can also be searched from the Nelli portal (National Electronic Library Interface) via the Science Linkhouse. WebStat references containing statistical information on Finland in English are included in the Renardus service, a portal to academic subject gateways in Europe.

The service is available free of charge and has an interface in various languages, including Finnish and English.

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WebStat: <http://webstat.stat.fi>

Tilda: <http://tilda.linneanet.fi/>

OSF: <http://www.stat.fi/>

Science Linkhouse: <http://www.linkkitalo.fi/>

Renardus: <http://www.renardus.org/>

Tilastokeskus.fi: a source of reliable statistical data

Statistics Finland's Internet pages open a window on the world of statistical data. Our service provides the latest data by topic for some 200 different statistics, covering extensively different sectors of society. Most of the statistics belong to the Official Statistics of Finland (OSF). In June 2005, Swedish and English versions of the Internet pages were made available in line with the new structure.

All statistics have a homepage of their own, with a permanent Internet address ([tilastokeskus.fi/name of statistics](http://tilastokeskus.fi/name-of-statistics)). In addition to statistical data, the homepage of the statistics also contains detailed background information related to the activity sector concerned, such as quality and methodological descriptions, concepts, definitions and classifications. In order to facilitate data search, the statistics are grouped into statistical topics according to the topic breakdown of the Official Statistics of Finland (tilastokeskus.fi/til/aiheet_en.html). The grouping and extensive background data on the statistics help the user to structure different subject matters and learn more about each topic.

Exhaustive and timely statistics on the Internet

New statistical data are issued on the tilastokeskus.fi service on weekdays at 9 a.m. as statistical releases and databases are updated. In addition to new statistical data, the website contains other topical information about the statistics and their compilation as well as information about events and new publications.

The 'Organisation' section of the service provides general information about the activities of Statistics Finland. Under the 'Products and Services' section you will find several information services based on statistical data: statistical databases, registers and various thematic services on regional, national and international themes. The 'News' service provides flexible access to the latest statistical data and other news in the field of statistics. It also includes a Release Calendar of statistics, weekly events and news calendar, as well as customer and information services (tilastokeskus.fi/ajk/index_en.html).



Markku Huttunen

The average number of hits per month was close to 190 000 at the end of 2005.

Electronic statistical publication

At the moment, Statistics Finland publishes some 700 statistical releases in Finnish per year. Statistical releases include at least a brief text release, but often comprise a broader review with appended tables and figures. These concise packages then form an electronic statistical publication.

All electronic statistical publications issued on the 'Statistics' pages, whether they contain a brief text release or a broader review, are archived permanently on the 'Statistics' pages. It is thus possible to make permanent references to each statistical publication or to some of its parts, which will remain unchanged in the future. The references can be links on other Internet sites or references in printed articles and publications. For example, the permanent URL for 'Quarterly national accounts 2005, 2nd quarter' is tilastokeskus.fi/til/ntp/2005/02/ntp_2005_02_2005-09-08_tie_001_en.html

Statistical databases

Statistics Finland's statistical databases provide a varied selection of table-format statistical data for different user needs. Free databases contain a wide selection of essential basic statistical data. Chargeable services comprise longer time series, indicator services and extensive packages produced on different topics with more detailed data. Statistical databases can be

found at tilastokeskus.fi/tup/tilastotietokannat/index_en.html

Useful links

By means of the national link collection, you may access the Internet services of the producers of Official Statistics of Finland and other agencies and research institutes. The international link list (tilastokeskus.fi/tup/linkit_en.html) contains the national statistical authorities of different countries, international organisations producing statistics and several other statistical sources.

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Promoting skills in statistical literacy

Statistical literacy is needed in both everyday and working life. It requires practice and knowledge of the basic facts and concepts related to statistics. The promotion of skills in statistical literacy and in the use of statistics is one of the strategic goals of Statistics Finland. It uses three main measures for reaching this goal: training of customers, production of online learning material, and cooperation with educational institutes.

Statistical literacy is needed in everyday life. For instance, there is hardly a news broadcast where statistical key figures or concepts are not mentioned. Those working in the information society field need to have versatile skills. In addition to the basic key figures and concepts, one must also be familiar with data-collection methods and presentation modes, such as tables and graphs. For many years now, Statistics Finland has tried to improve the statistical literacy of its users.

Training of customers

Statistics Finland has been providing fee-based training for its customers for nearly 20 years now. Every year it organises around 30 courses on subjects like statistical methods and sources of statistical information or on topical themes, such as the state of the economy, trends in consumption or unemployment. The courses are primarily intended for researchers, teachers and librarians, or generally for anyone in the public or private sector who has to work with statistics.

Feedback is collected from the participants during every course and taken into consideration when courses are reviewed. Courses are organised as classroom and multi-form teaching, or tailored to customer requirements.

Online statistics course

The services Statistics Finland offers on the Internet include a free online statistics course that is open to anybody and contains learning material for self-study. At the moment, the online statistics course offers lessons on nine modules: statistical literacy and user skills, searching for statistical information, introduction to statistical thinking, introduction to demographics, labour market statistics, national accounts, indices, thematic maps and statistical graphics.



Reija Helenius

The online modules provide an introduction to the backgrounds of statistics, the purposes for which statistics are used and basic statistical methods. Each module is accompanied by exercises and examples. An English version was launched at the end of 2005. The online statistics course is one of the most popular services of Statistics Finland and receives continuous positive feedback from the users of the agency's online services. The modules are also suitable as supporting material for mathematics and social science classes at secondary schools, as self-study material for orientation in statistical science courses at the tertiary level of education, and in general for anyone needing statistical information in their work.

Cooperation with educational institutes

One of the main means by which knowledge about statistics can be increased and their use taught is collaborating with educational institutes. In recent years, Statistics Finland has been particularly focusing on increasing the variety of its forms of cooperation with the university sector. Statistics Finland's experts lecture at universities and guide university students in their thesis work, and a large number of undergraduates work as student internees at Statistics Finland every year.

Since 2002, Statistics Finland has been especially devoted to training teachers of polytechnics within a project financed by the European Social Fund. The courses organised within this context have received highly positive feedback. In addition, it has put together two packages of online learning material to support teaching at polytechnics: sources of statistical information and statistical data-collection methods. An educational pack-

age is currently being compiled on how statistics can be exploited when setting up a new business. Before the compilation of the online learning material started, an extensive survey was made among polytechnic teachers to establish their needs for statistical information. Cooperation with educational institutes is a strategic challenge for Statistics Finland. After all, they are the educators of the future users of statistics, the decision-makers and data suppliers.

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http://www.stat.fi/index_en.html

Calculate your own inflation rate!

After reading the title, you'll probably be thinking 'That just won't do'. And you're right, the purpose of statistics is not to simply come up with one-offs, but rather to provide an overview, for example by giving an average value. However, it is this very average, which appears so simple to us, that causes major problems by running counter to human perceptions. The case of the official inflation rate following the introduction of the euro is a good example of this perception issue. In this context, Destatis, the German statistical office, faced the challenge of explaining inflation figures more clearly and thus developed a tool to show differences between an average inflation rate and individual ones.

The problem of the average has been the butt of many jokes about statistics, not without reason. For instance, 'one hand in boiling water and another in the freezer gives a pleasant temperature.' Concerning the impact of the introduction of the euro on inflation, statisticians in other countries have told us that people generally tend to agree with the statement that 'everything is getting more expensive', while official statistics show comparatively low inflation rates. The introduction of euro banknotes and coins and the 2:1 exchange rate in Germany led to sometimes considerable price increases in restaurants, without causing a significant rise in the average inflation rate.

Consumer indignation over the price rise allegedly brought about by the euro was echoed in the media and used as a reason to cast doubt on the official inflation figures. Even years after the introduction of the euro, for example, a magazine in Germany still publishes its own 'real' inflation rate in an attempt to provide a more accurate reflection of people's impressions.

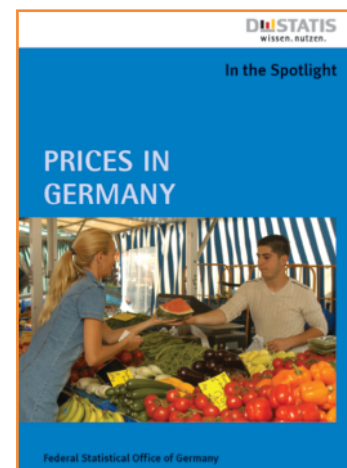
Presenting average statistics versus individual perceptions

We, official statisticians, were therefore faced with the challenge of presenting inflation figures more clearly. Bechtold and Linz (2005, p. 854) say the following on this subject: 'It is essentially a matter of explaining that the consumer price index is an average based on a multitude of individual observations ... It therefore happens that dramatic price increases frequently experienced

by consumers in different fields are scarcely reflected in the overall consumer price index.'

In order to provide the best possible explanation, we appeal to people's natural inquisitiveness. This will undoubtedly be appreciated by anyone who, as a child, ever took their favourite toy apart in order to understand how it functioned. Let's return to the example mentioned at the start using average temperature: imagine that we hand the joke-teller a mixer tap from the bathroom and a couple of thermometers. He or she would soon realise that a pleasant average temperature can in fact be obtained from the right mixture of hot and cold water.

Now let's apply the same principle to the basket of goods used for price statistics, only the other way around. The statisticians' basket of goods uses an average: a little gas heating, a little oil heating and a little central heating, even though each household has only one heating system. And then there are a few cigarettes thrown into the basket of goods: the non-smoker doesn't need them and there are too few for the smoker. Taken together, however, this average basket of goods results in the average inflation rate that we publish.



In the Spotlight – Prices in Germany

A calculator for a personalised inflation rate...

And now, thanks to the Internet, we can offer users a 'mixer appliance' with which he or she can adjust their own consumption habits and immediately see the resulting personal inflation rate and its progression in graph form. It is not even necessary to understand percentage calculations to see, for instance, that non-smokers experience less inflation and that some items, such as phone calls, have become considerably cheaper.

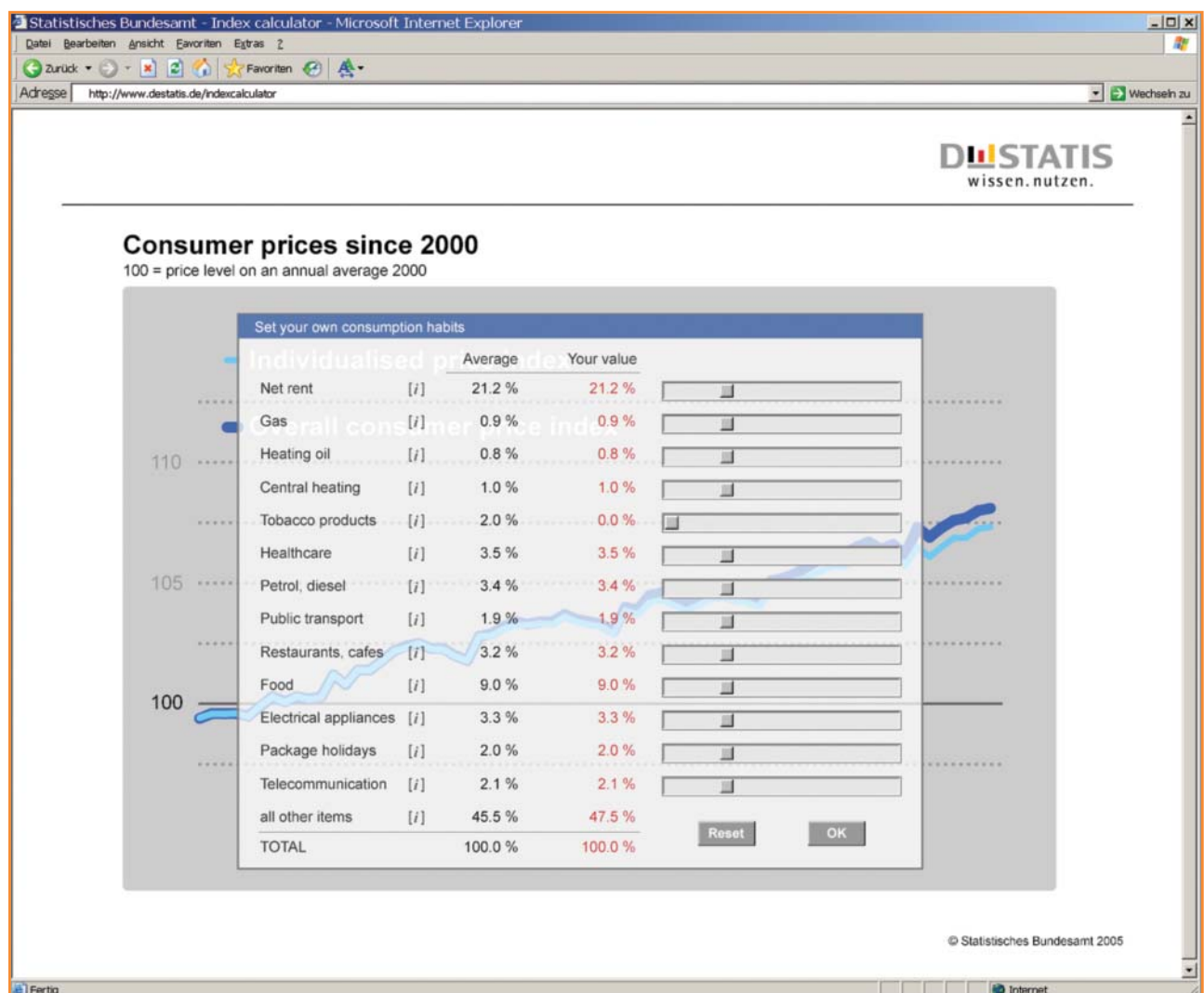
Of course, statistics must not be downgraded to a gimmick and, in order to understand price statistics, simply pushing a few buttons is not enough. The Internet feature described here is therefore only part of a publishing strategy for which each type of media is used for what it does best. The interactive index calculator supplements an introduction to price statistics

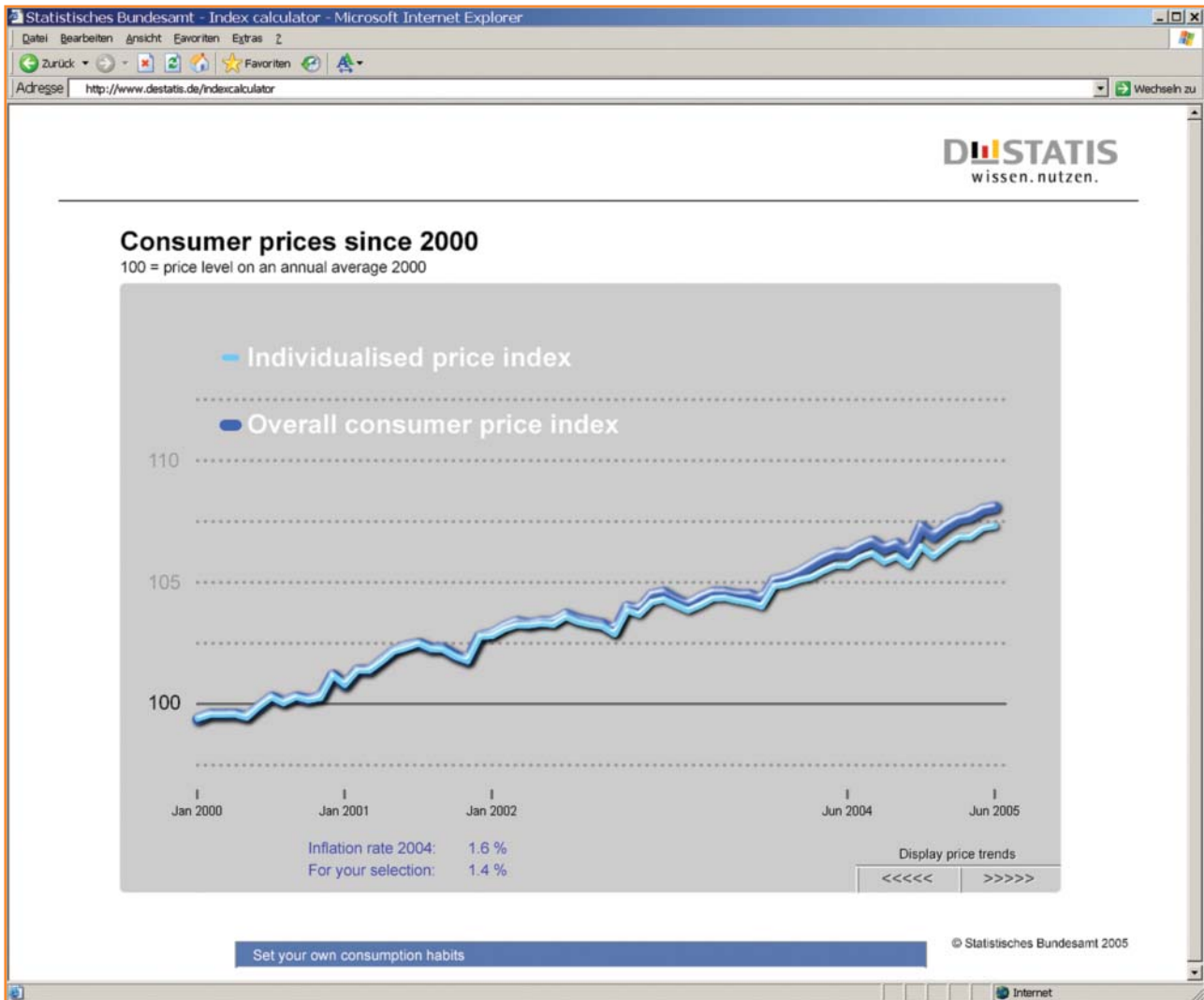
published in printed form ('In the spotlight — Prices in Germany'). The book already contains illustrations of the Internet application and provides a more detailed explanation of the background to the calculation.

...which has been very well received

We took a risk with these products and held our own press conference on understanding price statistics using the aforementioned resources. Initially, we did not present the press with any new figures. The response was nevertheless extremely positive. A great many newspapers and even a television programme reported on our offer, even though websites stopped being a novelty long ago. However, we are still in the early stages of tapping the full potential of the Internet as an interactive medium. At the same time, we do not underestimate the role that the traditional media should play.

This tool is available via the Internet for everyone to try for themselves at: www.destatis.de/indexcalculator (English) or www.destatis.de/indexrechner (German).





It is certainly not easy for the veteran statistician to let the layman play around with his figures — after all, there can only be one inflation rate. But our experience shows that, rather than undermining trust in our information, this actually increases its credibility and people's understanding of it.

Literature

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Bechtold, Sabine and Linz, Stefan (2005), 'Schritte zur Verbesserung der Glaubwürdigkeit des Ver-

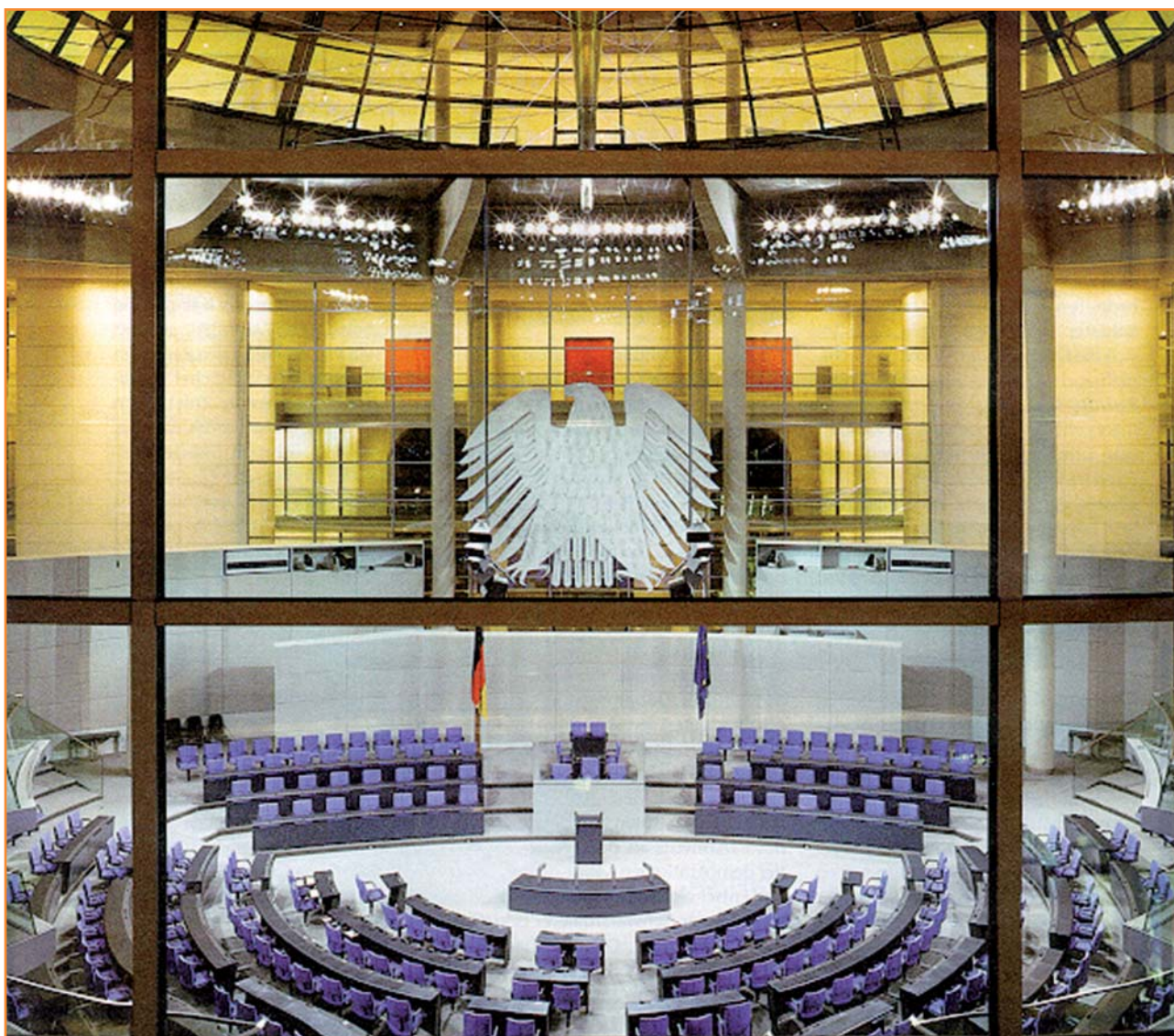
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Statistics centre opens in the Bundestag



Bundestag

The German Federal Statistical Office opened its own service centre for statistics in the Bundestag (the German Parliament) in January 2004, providing members and employees of the Bundestag with an on-site, up-to-date communication and information platform for official statistics. As statistics contribute to so many political issues, they are essential to the decision-making process of members and committees. The geographical and organisational location of the service centre within the Bundestag's scientific services enables the required information to be provided in a customised and user-oriented manner.

The service team is available in the Bundestag every day. Its tasks are to provide individual advice on data availability and applied methodology, prepare customised data tables, send downloads and prepare statistics publications. The team can be contacted in person, via a telephone hotline, by fax or e-mail. Of the approximately 1 100 queries received in 2004, 79 % came from members' offices, 19 % from the scientific services and 2 % from other committees. The demand for statistics from the Bundestag is rising rapidly (+ 20 % over 2003 and + 91 % over 2002). Around half (46 %) of the users in 2004 had previously used the Federal Statistical Office's services when they were not yet available on site. As from June 2005, the centre also offers its services to the German Members of the European Parliament.

A proactive service

As well as dealing with queries, the service centre also works proactively, sending e-mails and posting items on the Bundestag intranet to inform users about new products and trends on statistics. It also regularly organises statistics events for the parliamentary groups, certain committees and scientific services. One of the most recent developments has been to collect statistics in dossiers, which the scientific services of the Bundestag compile under topics for each week of session and make available to the members and committees. For this particular task, the centre's on-site presence in the Bundestag is crucial.

Long-term benefits

In the long term, the service team's interaction with its users in all its different forms could be a major advan-

tage to official statistics in general: it helps increase the acceptability of official statistics and demonstrate the need for objective and neutral data for political decision-making. Moreover, it could have a positive effect on any laws relating to statistics passed by the Bundestag.

Synergies with the EDS

Organisationally, the service centre belongs to the Statistical Office's Berlin Information Point, which was set up in 1999 with the aim of creating a presence in the capital city and serving key customers from the worlds of politics, finance and the government. The Information Point also includes the EDS (European data service), which, in cooperation with Eurostat, provides information on Europe throughout Germany. The integration of the EDS in the Information Point is of benefit to the service centre, since many queries from the Bundestag now have a European context.

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<http://www.destatis.de>

<http://eds-destatis.de>

Development of a national user support system: a challenge for NSSG

The National Statistical Service of Greece (NSSG) is the official provider of statistics in Greece. NSSG is trying to set up a national user support system to cope with the requests not only for national data, but also for European data, in order to provide the users with the most complete as well as comparative statistical knowledge in every sector. At European level, NSSG has been a partner of the Eurostat programme 'User support on European statistics' since September 2004.

NSSG recorded 3 020 requests during the first semester of 2005. Around 20 % of them came from the Library Section with the user being present, 53 % came from the Statistical Data Provision Section (which is separate from the Library Section and serves users by post, e-mail or fax; the user is not present in this case) and 22 % of them came from the External Trade Section after a user request for import/export data. If we included the users who are served by phone, the numbers would be much higher.

A semestrial bulletin to keep users informed

We collect data from our users' feedback and publish them in an informative bulletin each semester of every year, containing, apart from general user data (e.g. sex, occupation, sector of interest and level of satisfaction), their preference for the format of the data requested (printed, electronic, via Internet). Additionally, we include our recent publications (in printed or electronic form) and press releases. We distribute this bulletin to various important recipients, such as ministries, universities, other public services, libraries and various stakeholders. We also provide a lot of our recent statistical data on the Internet for free, as well as some basic publications, which can be downloaded, most of them also in English.



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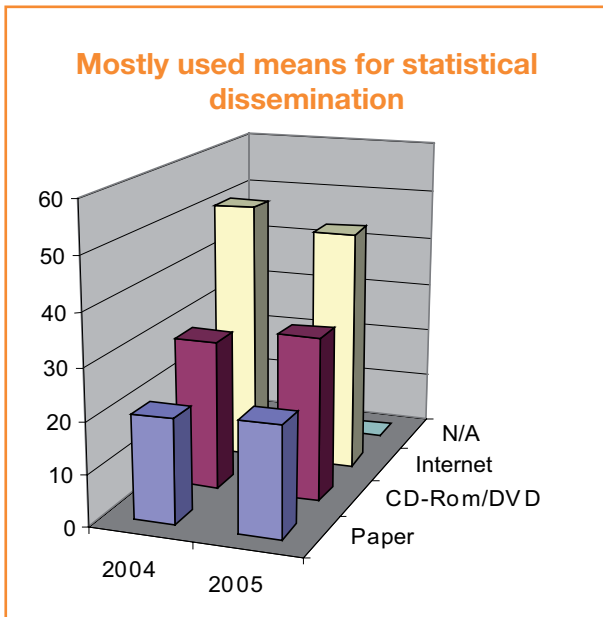
Alexandros Kourakos, Customer Service
Aikaterini Markoulaki, Computer Operator
Spyroula Dimitrakopoulou, Statistician
Maria Karachaliou, Information Scientist

Down from left to right:

Maria Tzanaki, Customer Service
Sotiria Salappa, Information Scientist
Vassiliki Bei, Head of the Library Section

A partner of the Eurostat programme 'User support on European statistics'

As part of the effort to provide more complete and comparative statistical data, NSSG has been a partner of the Eurostat programme 'User support on European statistics' since September 2004. During the first semester of 2005, the European Statistical Data Support Centre of Greece (ESDS), which is part of the NSSG



Library Section, dealt with 209 user requests, i.e. 6 % of the total number of requests, most of which came from students and commercial enterprises. The requests mostly concerned external trade and GDP. Requests increased after our promotional activities in which we presented the ESDS to the press and other media, as well as at exhibitions and in meetings.

Concerning the price policy of our service, the user support is free of charge. NSSG personnel, who are civil servants, are in charge of the user support in the library, on the phone and take care of e-mail requests. As a public service, the pricing of data is based on the price of the medium, the volume of the data and for value added requests on the time spent. The receipts go to the state budget. Concerning ESDS, our policy is to provide detailed guidance to our users for free, since Eurostat's data and publications are available free of charge on the Internet.

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<http://www.statistics.gr>

Promoting European statistics at regional level



ESDS Rome

Ten years ago, ISTAT, the Italian Statistical Institute, established and developed a network of statistical information centres at regional level. At first, their purpose was to improve the accessibility to national data for Italian citizens. Following the increasing demand for European data, the role of the regional centres was enlarged. Today, these centres serve as intermediaries between Eurostat and Italian users. There are 17 of these regional offices plus a central one in Rome.

In Italy, the decree of 1989 that set up the national statistical system assigned ISTAT the task of publishing and disseminating data, analyses and studies carried out by the institute.

A network of statistical information centres

For the purpose of improving accessibility to all its output, following a Department for Public Administration project, in 1995 ISTAT established a network of statistical information centres (CIS) operating in all

regions. Specialised staff were recruited for each CIS and trained in supplying national statistical data and dealing with members of the general public.

This infrastructure had actually been in existence since 1966 but up to 1995 the offices had worked only as ISTAT correspondence offices at a regional level. They had the main task of coordinating the activity of local public bodies (municipalities, provinces, chambers of commerce, etc.) in collecting official statistics and sending them to ISTAT.

Since 1995, statistical information centres have offered the following services:

- sale of publications and computer products;
- assistance for research and statistical data selection;
- personalised data processing: catalogue-featured or personalised products and services;
- databank queries;
- issuing of certificates concerning price indices and other indices drawn up by ISTAT; training in the use of databases and Internet access to all free ISTAT statistics.

In order to improve access to official statistical information and to make it generally more available to everyone, ISTAT established a Data Dissemination Office in the very centre of Rome with direct street access in 1999. With the start of the new free-of-charge dissemination policy and the establishment of the European statistical data support (ESDS) network, the ISTAT department for the management of statistical literacy and information decided that the regional information centres should offer some of the basic services usually only provided by ESDS Rome.

Regional centres as intermediaries between Eurostat and users

However, rather than providing the same services as ESDS Rome, the regional centres simply request its assistance. As regional contact points, they can work as intermediaries between, for example, universities and Eurostat, organise meetings and provide briefings on

European statistics. ESDS Rome has the responsibility for training the regional information centre staff on Eurostat products and services, acting as a 'central support', and Eurostat has no direct involvement with this purely ISTAT initiative. The ISTAT Dissemination Centre, in which ESDS Rome is located, already acts as a support for the ISTAT CIS network.

The role of the regional centres is to primarily direct users towards the right statistical information available online and promote European statistical literacy according to the new Eurostat dissemination policy.

The purpose is to reach a customer base usually through traditional communication tools. They must be considered as 'local points of contact' where anyone can learn how and where to access Eurostat data. Databases are the most requested statistical products by research institutes, universities and policy-makers but these technical products require specialised assistance with frequent 'face to face' meetings.

Finally, a wider knowledge and understanding of European official statistics play an important role in making Italian citizens feel part of the European Union.

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Responsible for ESDS Rome

For further information:

<http://www.istat.it>

New Statec publication: kaleidoscope of the Luxembourg economy

In order to bring statistics closer to a larger public, Luxembourg's National Statistical Office (Statec) published the first edition of an annual series focusing on the economy and society of Luxembourg entitled *The Luxembourg economy in 2003–04: a kaleidoscope in 2005*. With this publication, Statec intends to reach a wide public through an analytical and attractive presentation of recent economic and social developments.

Statec chose a special and infrequent event — the Luxembourg Presidency of the European Union during the first half of 2005 — to launch the first edition of a new series of publications dedicated to the economy and society of Luxembourg. There were three main reasons underlying this initiative. First, there was the desire to provide not only raw figures and databases but also, and especially, analyses which would enable as many people as possible to understand the information.

Second, the publication was also a response to the need to provide a review of the studies and research carried out by Statec or research institutes, sometimes in collaboration. Lastly, there was a need to compile a regular and thorough report on the circumstances and prospects of the Luxembourg economy and society, while reaching out to the general public.

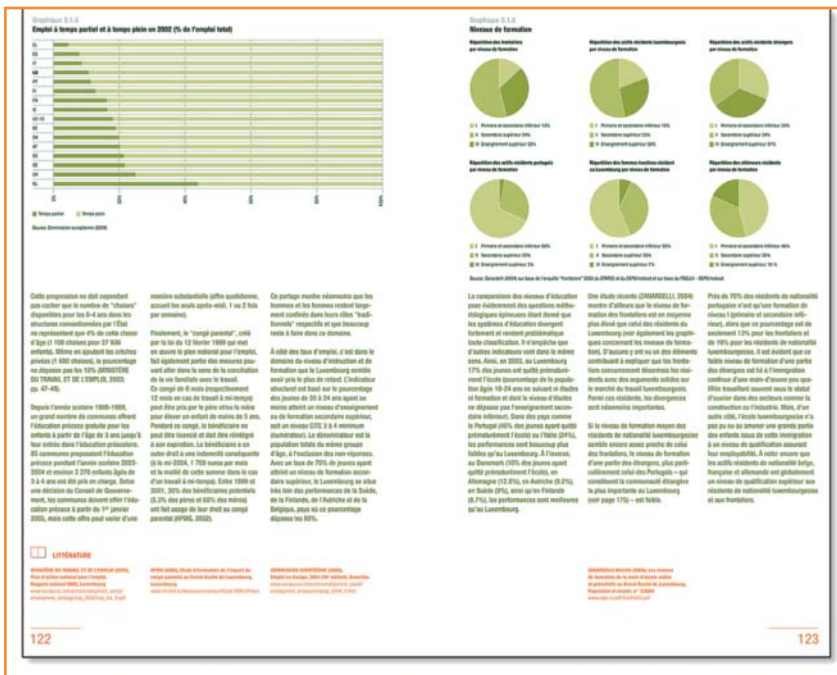
Simple language, but keeping scientific precision

The new publication endeavours to avoid the obscure jargon of economists, the technical terms of statisticians and the wordy language of technocrats while striving to maintain scientific precision. A review of the main events which marked 2004 throughout the world is a recurrent theme in the publication and serves to place the data, comments and analyses in a broader political and economic context.

The publication is divided into two main parts. The first part looks at structural features, together with the short-term picture at national and international level. The second part provides a series of explanations by area or theme. Subjects which are particularly topical for Luxembourg at the moment

— such as the Lisbon strategy, competitiveness, new technologies and research, wages costs, to mention only a few — are explained, analysed and commented on. The second part will be adapted with each edition, as topical or interesting subjects change.

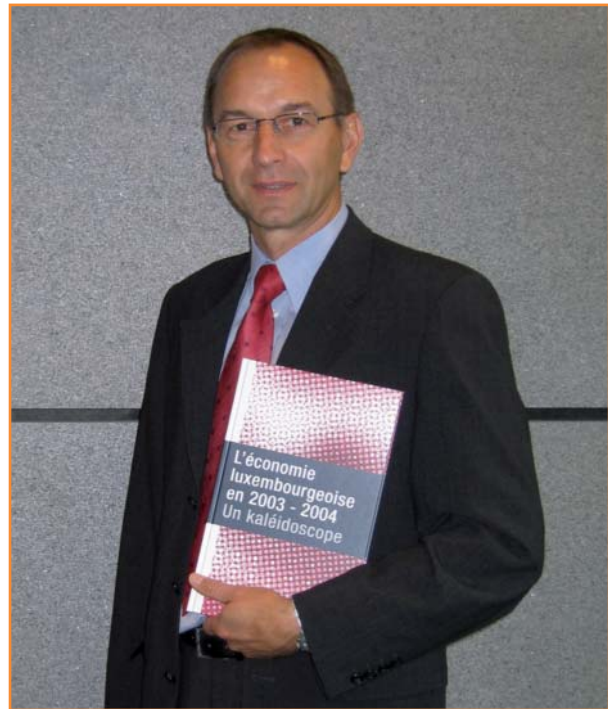
The idea is that this publication should appear annually from now on. As with the current edition, the aim of the new series is to provide up-to-date information. It contains data on 2003 and 2004, with an initial insight into the current year (2005).



A publication dedicated to a broad public

The reader-friendly layout, full-colour printing and more than 150 tables and charts make the publication easy to read. Photographs appear on about 30 pages. The first edition of the publication is available in both French and English. With the aim of reaching a new and broader public, it is only available in bookshops at a price of EUR 29. Technical features such as the format, the quality of the paper and the cover, together with the price, were jointly decided with the country's leading booksellers in order to target the readership as carefully as possible. During the first three months, 300 copies of the publication were sold among a target customer base estimated at about 500 purchasers in Luxembourg.

In view of the fact that the publication date was just before the summer holidays, Statec decided not to launch a serious advertising campaign. It simply gave a press conference and put out a news release, both of which received wide coverage in the press in Luxembourg as well as in neighbouring regions. The aim was to publish a series of advertisements in daily newspapers after the holidays. It was also planned to organise a bigger advertising event at the 'Journées du livre' book fair, which is held every year in Walferdange. Statec's first involvement as a publisher in 2004 met with great success. The large numbers of people at the fair showed tremendous interest in statistical publications and spent a lot of time looking at the publications and asking questions. This differed from the usual reaction at trade fairs or at the student fair.



Guy Zacharias

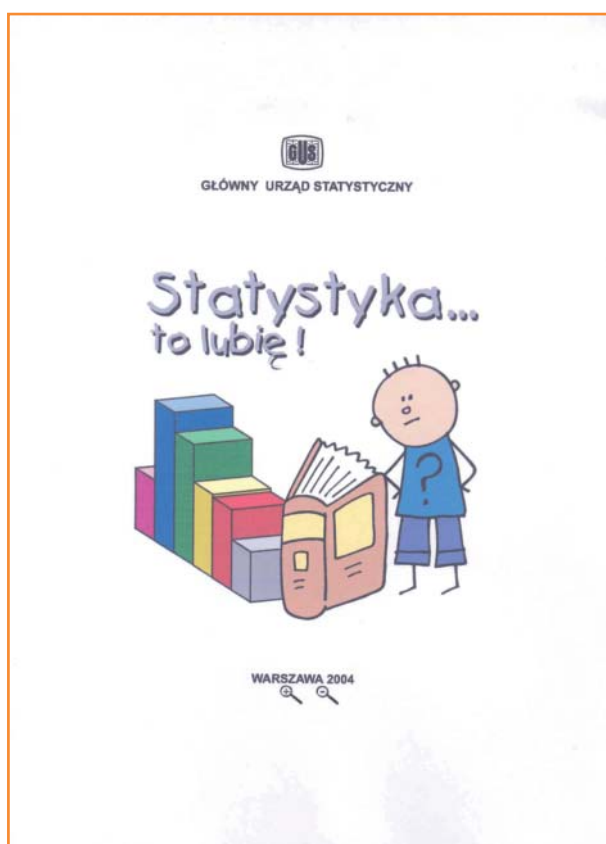
Author: Guy Zacharias
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For further information:

<http://www.statistiques.public.lu/fr/publications/horizontales/kaleidoscope/index.html>

Bringing statistics into Polish classrooms

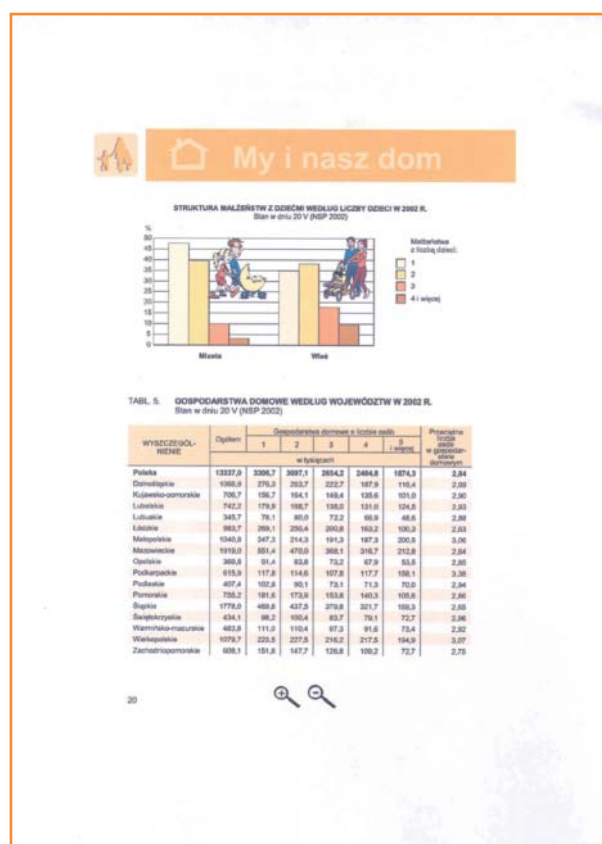
A strategic goal of the Central Statistical Office of Poland (GUS) is to find an efficient way of bringing statistics closer to the younger generation. Nothing new here, although the approach goes somewhat further, from primary school to university students.



Statistics ... I like it, 2004 edition

Statistics...I like it

Our editorial offer has been extended to a special publication for children: Statistics...I like it. This is the result of the common work of GUS statisticians and experts from the Centre of Teachers' Improvement and Practical Education. Statistics...I like it is very much appreciated by the youngest users. The most valued feature is the way in which the topics are presented: in clear and easy language, with interesting



and colourful graphs, icons and pictures to go with the text.

Polish Nationwide Statistical Competition

Another successful initiative of GUS is aimed at secondary school students: the Polish Nationwide Statistical Competition. It has been organised by the Central Statistical Library under the auspices of GUS's President for over 30 years.

The main purpose of the competition is to develop the analytical skills and statistical knowledge of students by using data included in the publication *Concise Statistical Yearbook of Poland* during their maths and geography lessons.

Until 2003, the students answered a questionnaire on statistical data. In 2004, the Presidium of the Central Statistical Office decided to change the formula. They focused on the practical skills of the participants, especially their capacity for individual thinking, ingenuity and creativity. The participants had two months to

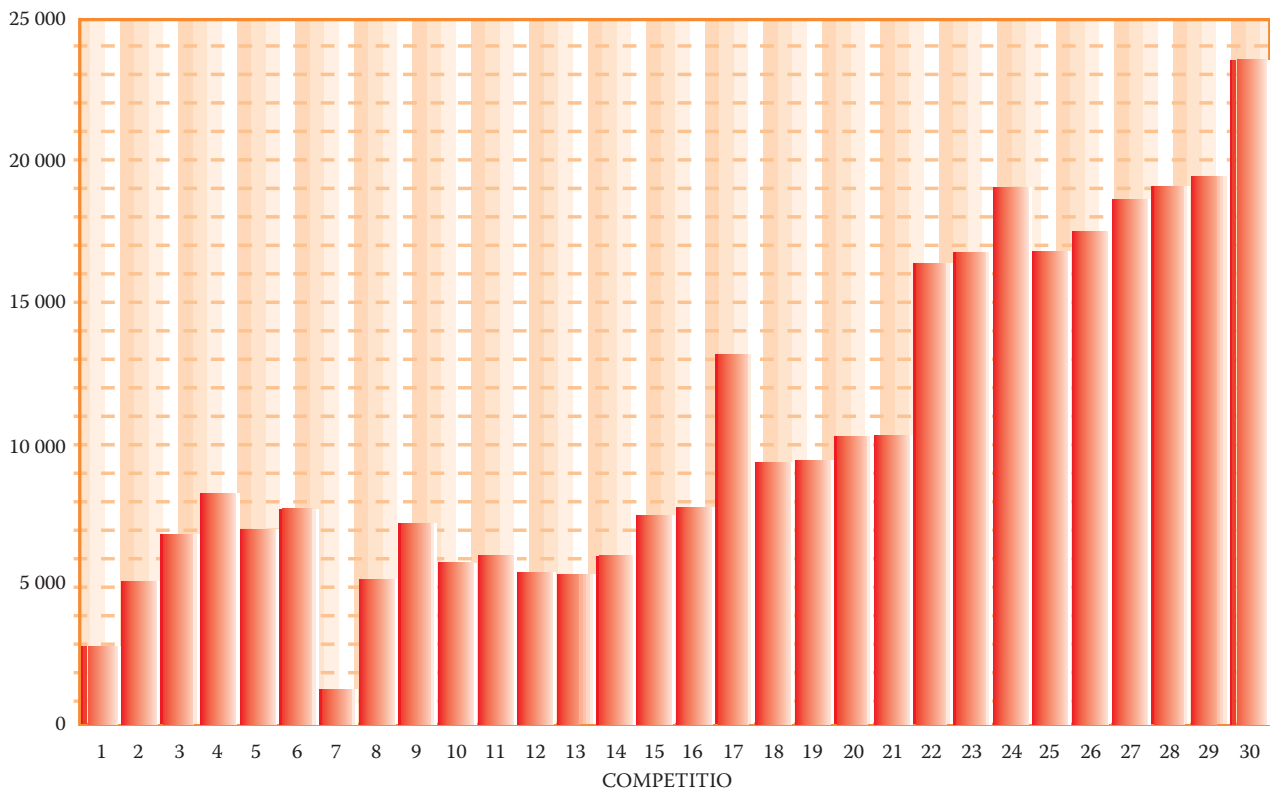
3. What would you like to change in the next edition of the publication? What form do you usually use (book, CD, Internet)? Why?

We were surprised by the positive feedback: by the end of April we had received over 200 essays. The winner was announced at the end of September.

This event is a great opportunity to become closer to young people, one of our biggest user groups. Based on the participants' essays we are able to understand their needs and expectations and to put them into practice. Moreover, it is a perfect way of promoting a

Participation in Polish Nationwide Statistical Competition

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS



submit an essay on one of the three subjects below, all of them from the last edition of the *Concise Statistical Yearbook of Poland*.

1. Assess employment and unemployment in Poland by educational level, age, gender and place of residence and compare the economically active population in Poland with chosen countries of the world, using information from the chapter on the Polish labour market.

2. Provide feedback on the usefulness of the publication at school, the information mostly used, and in which lessons, and the user-friendliness of the statistical tables and charts.

public institution. We consider visibility and availability for the general public as one of the key elements of GUS's mission.

To better understand the statistician's job

GUS also gives presentations to high-school and university students on what the typical working day of a statistician looks like. A basic element of our promotion policy is to organise trips for students of all school levels, paying particular attention to disabled children. These trips enable the young generation to explore the secrets of statistics: the process of collecting and disseminating data, as well as participating in meetings

with GUS's experts. It is not unusual for students who get to know about our work this way to later on participate in the summer traineeships organised by GUS and the regional statistical offices.

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Director of the Dissemination Division
Central Statistical Office of Poland

For further information:

<http://www.stat.gov.pl>

Slovstat: up to 500 000 free data available on the web

Since May 2005, the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic has made its database Slovstat available free of charge on the Internet for both professionals and the general public. The database contains time series of economic and social development indicators concerning Slovakia.

Slovstat was established by the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic and Infostat, the Institute of Informatics and Statistics, in order to present the data of the different statistical domains: statistical infrastructure, demography and social statistics, macroeconomic statistics, business statistics, banking, finance and foreign trade, agriculture, forestry and fishing, and miscellaneous statistics.

The data are presented in monthly, quarterly or yearly time series in table format. For some statistical domains, a detailed breakdown is also available by statistical classifications, for example branch classification of economic activity (NACE), international standard classification of occupation (ISCO), classification of types of constructions (CC), and classification of individual consumption by purpose use (CIOCOP).

The database is based on data processed on the basis of statistical surveys. The data are loaded into the database within eight days after its official publication. Further administrative sources used in data processing come from the agriculture, health, education, forestry and interior departments. Older time series are available under historical data.

Almost 3 500 registered users in the first six months

Users are requested to register. They have the possibility to create their own tables, to display them on their PC, and to create simple graphs and export data from the database. Unregistered visitors are also able to look at the database, although only up to the step of the creation of tables and data export from the database. Since the launch of the free data service, nearly 3 500 users have registered in the database, of which



Maria Schwartzova

13 % were from the public sector, 14 % from the area of science and technology, 15 % from the private sector (enterprises, associations and labour unions) and 44 % from the general public (students and the press).

In total, around 33 000 accesses to the tables of all statistical domains have been realised. The domain of labour and wages has enjoyed the highest number of visits followed closely by the quarterly reports (20 % of total visits each). The next most visited domains are that of demography (10 %) and prices (8 %).

The database runs in Oracle and is accessible on the website of the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic (<http://www.statistics.sk/>) from the base menu where more detailed information can be found.

Author: Mrs Maria Schwartzova, Head of the Comprehensive Analyses and Information Department, Slovstat Public Database Project Manager.

Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic

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For further information:

<http://www.statistics.sk>



Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic

Online dissemination of the Spanish Census 2001

By providing all users with the possibility to directly express their individual needs and to extract for themselves the ad-hoc information they wish, the dissemination of the Population Census 2001 by the Spanish Statistical Institute (INE) over the Internet has been very innovative and welcomed by Spanish users. From the users' point of view, the main novelty of the system is that it offers much more information than any other system designed before and it is easier to retrieve.

Instead of offering the traditional list of tables organised in menus (chapter, subchapter, etc.), users are invited to prepare their own query just by selecting the geographical scope and the variables involved, following a guided navigation in only four steps.

Once a table is created, the query may be refined or modified by navigating the same table without having to go back to a previous menu. The information that the system stores does not consist of a pre-selected set of tables but rather a mixed storage of cubes and micro data, with which nearly all requests can be answered.

Dissemination of the Census: a major challenge for INE

Two objectives were considered as the first priority when designing the system. On the one hand, it had to be able to show the richness of a population and housing census, keeping in mind that society often has a critical view of the cost-benefit balance of a huge statistical operation such as a census.

On the other hand, we needed to build a self-service system. The experience of previous censuses had shown that, no matter how many tables were offered to users in publications (paper, CD, Internet), there were always many requests for ad-hoc information since the number and type of users of the information provided by a census is very wide. These ad-hoc requests are difficult for a department of information (always limited in terms of human resources) to deal with, so the number of requests must be kept to a minimum level if possible, and the system was intended to do so.

The population and dwelling census, referring to 1 November 2001 and carried out in Spain during the period November 2001 to March 2002, produced its first re-



Antonio Argüeso

sults in June 2002. In February 2004, the dissemination of the definitive results over the Internet began and this process ended in November 2004. The system has been set up with data warehouse techniques in accordance with the HOLAP model and using SAS software.


Author: Antonio Argüeso,
Deputy Director-General of Statistics and
Social Analyses at INE

For further information

<http://www.ine.es>

(Population and Housing Census 2001, detailed results) or directly at

<http://atrios.ine.es/censo/en/inicio.jsp>



Español

Census project
Calendar
Publications

Population and housing censuses 2001. Definitive results.

1 *What would you like to do?*

Create tables
See list of tables
Search
See tutorial
Personal Area

[Help](#) [Glosary](#)

Welcome to the information query system for the Population and Housing Censuses on Internet.

Unlike a classical query system in which a determined list of tables is shown, this system offers an unlimited set of tables. It is sufficient to follow four simple steps for which we offer preliminary guidelines. If you require more information consult the [tutorial](#).


NOVELTY:
All the most relevant information is now available on relationships, including the new variables on the group of people resident in family dwellings. If you wish to know how to interpret this data, consult the [explanatory note](#).

- **Step 1.** What do you wish to do? we recommend that you choose "create tables". The section "see list of tables" contains some of the most commonly consulted tables but the large majority of information that the system offers is only visible from the first option.
- **Step 2.** Choose the geographical scope of the query. Currently the lowest level is municipal.
- **Step 3.** Choose the group. Information is offered on persons, buildings, housing, premises, family nuclei and households.

As a consequence of the filtering of the new persons variables, small variations have occurred without statistical relevance in some household data and family nuclei with respect to the previous version.

- **Step 4.** You may create the structure of the table (recommended) or introduce **filters** for example, only to give information for women or some determined ages.

If you wish you may change the **unit of measurement** in which the data is presented to obtain rates, percentages, indices, etc or access the **personal queries** screen which presents all the existing information: the complete list of variables and measurement units and especially, specific relationship data of foreigners, persons over 64, migrants, employed and students.



INSEE Contact: a reception and direction service



INSEE Contact Point

Open since 2003, the INSEE Contact service was set up to deal with the most common requests for statistical information and to help requesters by directing them through what INSEE has to offer, mainly on its website (www.insee.fr). Since September 2004, the work has been extended to assisting French-speaking Internet users from the Eurostat website. The service operates at three locations, with 30 officials providing the reception and direction service. These 30 people dealt with 110 000 telephone calls and 27 000 e-mails in 2005.

Whatever the source – mail, fax, phone or e-mail – the service handles the requests with the help of call-waiting and call-assistance tools providing standard responses.

INSEE Contact was set up as part of INSEE's overall strategy at the beginning of the decade in order to re-define its policy for disseminating statistical informa-

tion to its two main customer groups: on the one hand, the many members of the public seeking straightforward background information, and on the other, institutional users in France (decision-makers, government departments, local authorities, etc.) responsible for making and implementing decisions.

INSEE Contact provides a public service by way of de-

veloping economic and social information and using available techniques to make it more accessible to all.

Change was thus introduced across the board. The set-up was based on three ideas:

- access for all to up-to-date statistical information using the Internet, thus leading to the creation of the INSEE Contact service;
- response to the specific needs of institutions at local level, with the response provided by the regional directorates;
- a solution for those without access to the Internet, resulting in the introduction of a network of partners (public departments, cyber-points) specialising in dealing with such people.

Creating the INSEE Contact service

A survey conducted from 1999 to 2000 revealed how varied practices were in INSEE's regional directorates, meaning that there was an increased risk of providing differing answers. At the same time, the institute's publications were growing and making increasing use of a more widespread means of communication than the traditional channels: the INSEE website at www.insee.fr. The creation of the INSEE Contact service was the response of INSEE's management board to this situation.

Redefining the mission

The main feature of the policy implemented by the INSEE Contact service is the idea of direction. The growing complexity of what INSEE had to offer prompted a shift in first-level response, primarily to the institute's website. This idea of providing direction became even more justified with the decision to place all of INSEE's standard products, including its databases, on the website, and to make them available free of charge.

Direction involves steering clients in line with their request towards sets of information (represented by the main sections of the www.insee.fr website) and explaining that they can continue searching through these sets until they find the information they're looking for or indicate clearly the product or service that they want to have. One of the stated aims is of course to enable requesters to consult the INSEE website on their own, by making all recent information totally and directly accessible.

Emergence of a new skill

The people staffing the service provide 'general' direction and not 'specialised' answers.

Training was introduced and still continues to help the emergence of this new professional skill. The main difficulty with the project, which became apparent as soon as it started, was getting a team together. The officials are split over three locations which are far apart (Paris, Rouen and Strasbourg), and the problem was therefore how to make their response sufficiently uniform to ensure that the same level of quality and the same answers were being given to members of the public.

An ergonomic analysis was conducted and resulted in recommendations which made it possible to avoid differences among the locations. These included:

- fortnightly videoconferences allowing officials at the different locations to mention actual problems encountered at work and to come up with solutions; a yearly seminar attended by all officials; a dedicated intranet service and a weekly newsletter providing ongoing help in keeping officials informed;
- introduction of a standard working week allowing officials in each location three half-days for training, team meetings and joint work to devise rules and procedures;
- the rules governing the distribution of work outlined in an agreement linking the three locations.

Positive initial report

Two years after starting, the INSEE Contact service has achieved most of its objectives. By providing the bulk of the answers to requests for statistical information, the service is now positioned at the heart of a system of relations which it has helped to create. The policy of encouraging web surfers to take an independent approach seems to be bearing fruit. In most cases, an Internet user who gets the proper guidance the first time to the page or pages he or she is interested in will not need help a second time to arrive at his or her destination. By referring people to the www.insee.fr website and providing appropriate directions, the service is in a sense working towards its own demise, given that it is helping to reduce requests from the general public by responding to them, at a time when Internet traffic has increased tenfold.

Relations with second-level help points (experts, regional directorates)

The service cannot answer all the requests it receives. Redirection to experts or regional directorates are necessary in a number of cases — about one in five — more often involving requests by e-mail rather than by telephone. Referral to back-office units for extra expertise or a particular service has meant that communication protocols needed to be introduced.

In the case of the regional directorates, mutual responsibilities are covered in a service charter. The main purpose is to inform the regional directorates about the service's response procedures and to provide indicators on the relevance and quality of the answers which are given.

In the case of the directorate-general experts, who are most often contacted about matters of methodology or the supply of detailed data, a similar initiative will be completed in 2006.

Relations with statistical information producers and with publishers

The tools introduced by the service allow audiences and their focal interests to be adequately heard. They allow sug-

gestions and criticisms to be made. Analysing the questions which are put provides an opportunity to improve the form and content of INSEE publications. The prime beneficiary is the INSEE website, which very regularly benefits from the suggestions for adaptation, correction and expansion which come from the service thanks to public feedback and requests.

Assessment indicators

Since it started and with the steady increase in its workload, the INSEE Contact service has dealt with almost 200 000 calls and approximately 40 000 e-mails. A monthly table provides a breakdown of requests and answers.

The INSEE Contact service compiles quality indicators every three months. These indicators are published and monitored as part of the charter governing the central administration's reception services.

Author: Yvonne Pérot,
INSEE Contact Point

For further information:

<http://www.insee.fr>

One year of free dissemination at Eurostat



Eurostat staff in charge of dissemination

Eurostat's new dissemination policy, based on free and equal access to statistical data for all European citizens, was approved in 2004. It started with the free dissemination of publications in January 2004 and was fully implemented as from October 2004 when the new Eurostat website went online. This article outlines the main actions implemented within the dissemination strategy and key results achieved during the first year.

The Eurostat website is fully integrated in the Europa site of the European Commission. It has played a key role in the electronic dissemination of statistical data and has been designed and enhanced to fulfil all the objectives of the new dissemination policy.

The new IT architecture put into place in June and July 2005 significantly increased the performance and reliability of the Eurostat web pages. Feedback from users confirms this performance improvement. The avail-

ability of Eurostat's website and reference databases reached an average of 99 % in 2005.

Making the website a communication tool

Apart from the actions dedicated to the IT architecture, Eurostat's website has moved from a 'technical' towards a more content-oriented communication tool, making it more relevant as far as statistical content is concerned, as well as more lively and interesting. As

a general principle for the coming years, the objective is to further improve the website's user-friendliness, as well as its functionalities.

The main improvements of the website during 2005 were:

- a new design of the website pages, with improved response time and search facilities, among others;
- functional specifications for a more user-friendly data extraction, which provide a single, integrated approach and enhanced functionalities (graphs, maps, flexible table formats, links to metadata, etc.);
- regular quality assessment of the website, via monthly reporting in order to identify additional improvement areas;
- improvement of the content, by presenting statistics in particularly attractive ways (e.g. 'Statistics of the week');
- automatic upload of website products (publications, data and metadata), ensuring minimal delays in the dissemination via the website.

In the field of Internet cooperation with Member States, the actions carried out during the past year aimed mainly at increasing the accessibility, coherence and user-friendliness of ESS websites as a whole. As a result, the NSI and Eurostat websites now offer a single entry point for ESS news. Instead of being scattered across the various websites, information on ESS news releases as a whole becomes easily accessible for users through RSS at http://epp.eurostat.cec.eu.int/pls/portal/url/page/PGP_RSS

The other cooperation projects, currently in a pilot phase, are set to offer:

- a common set of key European statistics (200 predefined tables) customised for each Member State; and
- a standard keyword system (of some 1 500 keywords) to allow an ESS-wide common search.

Exponential increase of users...

As expected, the number of users has significantly increased with free dissemination and has multiplied by more than five. The number of user sessions in November 2005 reached a peak of nearly one million.

Most of the users (93 %), the so-called 'general public', are anonymous and account for half of the data volume

extracted. The remaining 7 % of users (mainly staff from the EU institutions and external professionals) are registered and extract the other half of the data. Assuming that these users already existed before the free dissemination, this confirms that Eurostat's communication policy has reached its main target group, the general public. As the number of users is constantly increasing, the priority is to better respond to users' needs in order to achieve the highest user satisfaction possible.

Downloads of electronic products increased by a factor of three compared with pre-free dissemination. In November 2005, more than 300 000 publications were downloaded from the website. News releases (39 %) and *Statistics in focus* (27 %) make up the majority of downloaded publications. Publications belonging to the themes 'General and regional statistics', 'Population and social conditions', 'Economy and finance' and 'Industry trade and services' make up more than 80 % of the total downloaded publications.

...and of data extraction

The number of data extractions from the dissemination reference database has also multiplied by five during 2005. On weekends, downloads have increased by a factor of 10. The new external trade interface launched with the free dissemination policy has generated a quarter of all the monthly extractions. Launched in January 2004, the predefined tables available online presented the most commonly demanded Eurostat data in the form of easily accessible tables.

More metadata and user support

One of the conditions for the free dissemination of Eurostat databases was a minimum quality level of data documentation (metadata), as well as a uniform documentation structure based on the SDDS format of the International Monetary Fund. A metadata exercise was launched in early 2004 with the authoring services in order to have SDDS files for every domain available on the web. The SDDS pages have been successively improved even after the start of free dissemination. Their availability has had the expected success with a monthly average consultation of about 80 000 pages. This means that, for every second database extraction, an SDDS file is consulted. The SDDS pages on the structural indicators are, by far, the most consulted metadata.

Free dissemination has increased the usage of Eurostat data and publications, and consequently the number of users needing assistance. User support has been organised in close cooperation with the NSIs. The first year has been a big success, with a monthly figure of about 300 requests received by Eurostat and 2 000 by the NSIs. A 2004–05 annual report will be completed and quarterly reports of activities for 2006 will be regularly dispatched to Eurostat and Member States in order to improve such value added services.

Looking ahead

After a year of free electronic dissemination, the Eurostat website has become the main dissemination channel of Eurostat. The high number of PDF downloads, the large impact of Eurostat news releases as well as the constantly increasing number of users and their requirements for assistance clearly demand from our side an effort to:

- continuously improve the presentation and the explanation accompanying the data. A spirit of dissemination should be embedded in production units;

- better adapt our dissemination strategy to day-to-day European and world news;
- follow up on user satisfaction in order to better respond to their expectations.

The work done in this first year of free dissemination will pave the way for future challenges in consolidating Eurostat's dissemination policy, and further position Eurostat as the main reference source for European statistical data.

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For further information:

<http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu>

The Media Support at Eurostat



Ana Maqueda Lafuente and Louise Corselli-Nordblad from the Media Support team of Eurostat.

Media Support is not specific to Eurostat. Most of the national statistical offices provide the same type of services. However, the uniqueness of Eurostat Media Support is the diversity of the requests both in terms of geographical and language coverage.

‘Could you urgently send me the most recent unemployment rates?’ asks a big news agency in the United Kingdom.

‘Bonjour, je suis en train de faire une étude sur les niveaux de prix dans les États membres. Est-ce que vous auriez le prix d’un litre de lait, d’un Big Mac et d’une tasse de café dans les États membres de l’union?’ demande un quotidien national français.

‘Guten Tag. Ich bin auf der Suche nach Daten über Einfuhren und Ausfuhren der Produkte der Europäischen Union. Hätten Sie so etwas?’ fragt ein deutscher TV-Sender.

‘Buenos días, me gustaría comparar la economía de mi región con la de otras regiones europeas. ¿Qué indicadores podrían enviarme?’ pregunta un periódico regional español.

The variety of questions is endless. These are just some examples of the questions on statistics which arrive at Media Support every day. Media Support is part of the Press Office at Eurostat. The service is assured by two officials who cover eight languages between them, which is very useful when talking to journalists from all over Europe and sometimes from all over the world.

1 700 requests a year

Media Support receives and replies to around 1 700 statistical requests from journalists every year. The service is exclusively reserved for journalists. If there is any doubt whether the person asking for data is a journalist, a copy of their press card is requested.

The Media Support team follows two golden rules. The first one is to never say: ‘No, we do not have that data.’ If Eurostat does not have the data, Media Support always

gives alternative sources as long as the request is pertinent. The second rule is to do the utmost to provide an answer within a very short time delay, often within an hour or two, as most journalists work under tight deadlines.

Journalists either send requests by e-mail or call Media Support directly to discuss whether certain data are available or not. They often have questions on the latest data available — freshness is very important for journalists. Moreover, they often need the advice of the Media Support team. Questions like this arise quite often: ‘I would like to compare the social security systems in the EU Member States — which indicator is the best?’ or ‘Have you got a ranking of the standard of living?’

Most replies within an hour or two

Despite Eurostat’s free dissemination policy, the number of requests from journalists remains steady. Many journalists do not have time to do extractions themselves.

Media Support provides data for Europe’s most important newspapers (both national and regional), as well as for news agencies and TV/radio channels, but also for a lot of smaller specialised newspapers.

Once the request arrives, there are several ways to proceed. If the data are easily available, the Media Support team makes an extraction from the dissemination database and makes the tables user-friendly and readable. It also has to take into consideration the fact that journalists are usually not statisticians, so the tables have to be clear and simple, units have to be well defined and the methodological explanations have to be clear. This is the ‘easier’ kind of request, which is normally dealt with within an hour or two. Those which need special research, either in Eurostat or with alternative

sources such as international organisations, are more time-consuming.

Most of the time, the production units do not need to be involved to answer requests, but when methodological questions or questions on when updated data will become available come up, authors are contacted.

Economic and social statistics most popular

Economic and social statistics are the themes that have been most often requested since Media Support was set up in 1997. Trade in specific products is also quite a popular subject. Sometimes the team gets very specific questions: for example, the number of doctors with telephone answering machines or the number of cats per inhabitant. Such questions cannot be answered with Eurostat data, but Media Support always tries to find the closest available data.

The political context at EU level influences the number and contents of requests. One of the busiest periods the Media Support team experienced was shortly before enlargement on 1 May 2004. It was as if all the media inside and outside Europe had decided to publish special features on enlargement, but all with a slightly different angle.

What makes the work in Media Support very interesting is that it follows current events. When, for example, the crisis on bird flu was in the news, many requests for the number of poultry followed. When there was a big issue with imports of textiles from China, then a mass of questions on EU-25 imports followed.

Author: Louise Corselli-Nordblad,
Media Support Team Eurostat

Systematic press monitoring as a development tool at Statistics Denmark

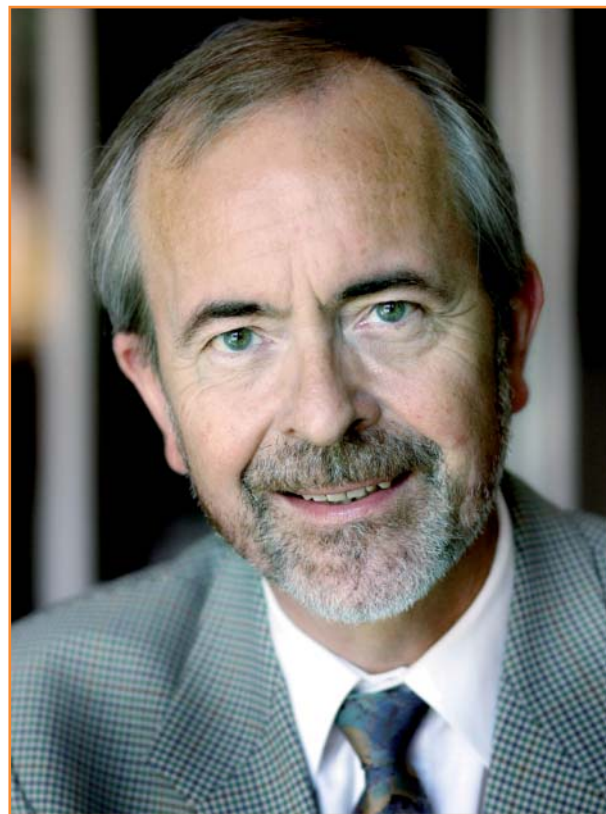
As increasing press coverage is an important strategic goal for Statistics Denmark, the use by the media of every single statistic published is systematically monitored and stored in a database, accessible to all staff. Statistics Denmark draws detailed statistics on the press coverage of all its departments and divisions from this database. This knowledge is used as an internal development tool for statistics and news releases in order to increase press coverage of all the departments.

It is an important strategic goal for Statistics Denmark that our figures are used by the press. Consequently, we have decided that the number of press citations should increase from year to year.

Our press monitoring is carried out by a commercial company, which scans all printed and electronic media for articles mentioning Statistics Denmark or one of our publications. The company monitor all Danish newspapers, most magazines, television news and news broadcasts from all national and local TV and radio channels. In total, this represents more than 800 printed media plus 75 radio and TV channels.

The articles are forwarded to us, not in the form of cuttings, but in the form of summaries, stating the date, media, placing and journalist. Previously, the press cuttings were copied and circulated at Statistics Denmark, which was a very slow and inefficient process. For some years now we have used e-mail — hence today's press summaries are received in the morning by the Dissemination Centre, edited and forwarded to Statistics Denmark's management and all other interested staff members at 10 a.m. The summaries are stored in a database, together with metadata, such as date, media, journalist, etc., and the internal e-mail is created automatically from this database.

If necessary, comments are added to the summaries by the Dissemination Centre before circulation — especially if there is something unusual in the article. It may be a misunderstanding of our figures or some form of criticism, which we invariably act upon.



Leon Ostergaard

1 400 press citations per month

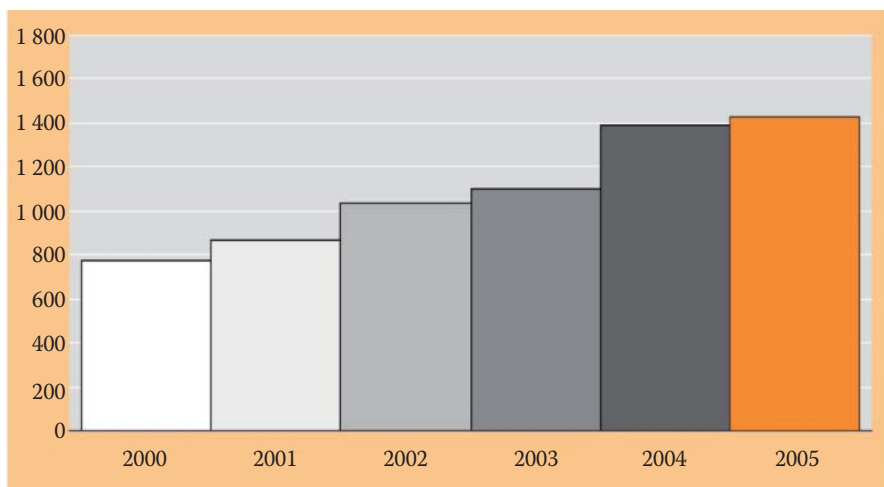
The number of press citations is counted month by month and the press statistics used internally as a benchmark of our performance. As a matter of fact, the number has almost doubled in five years, running now at an average number of press citations of more than 1 400 a month. Fortunately, most of them are

simple, matter-of-fact articles, just citing some of our figures.

A couple of years ago, we decided to make better use of this information resource, and we started to add a new piece of information to the summaries, namely the particular publication which was ‘responsible’ for the press citation. Most of the citations — maybe as many as 90 % — could be directly linked to a statistical publication issued by Statistics Denmark the same day or a couple of days earlier. Most of the remaining citations — not stemming directly from a publication — could at least be linked to a certain statistical division at Statistics Denmark.

our database containing press summaries very detailed statistics on the press coverage achieved by all the statistical divisions and departments. This statistic is published internally at the end of each month, including figures on the development of our press coverage in every single media, which of this month’s statistics got the best coverage — and which got the least coverage!

For some years, increasing press coverage has been part of our contract with the government. Starting from January 2005, it has become part of our internal contracts that each of the statistical departments has to improve press coverage as well, and this is easily monitored through our monthly press statistics.



Number of press citations per month, average

A priority given to news releases

The press database is easily accessible to all staff members, implying that the statisticians can always check the press coverage of their recent publications and learn from this. The database is also used more systematically in preparing for internal workshops between the Dissemination Centre and the statistical divisions on improving the statistical news releases. Another way of using the database has to do with the fact

The advantage of this is that the staff in the statistical divisions can see from the daily press mail exactly what has come out in the form of press coverage of their own statistics published the day before. They can compare their own headlines with the ones chosen by the media, and check whether there are errors or misinterpretations.

Through our internal production system, every statistical publication is linked to the appropriate statistical division and to the staff member directly responsible for the publication. This implies that we can draw from

that news releases have to be prioritised on our website. On a single day, we may publish one, two, three or as many as six news releases, and here we refer to the press coverage achieved by these releases recently. The most interesting ones are placed at the top, with a text and a graph — the least interesting for the press are placed at the bottom, with just a headline and a link.

Author: Leon Østergaard,
Head of Dissemination, Statistics Denmark

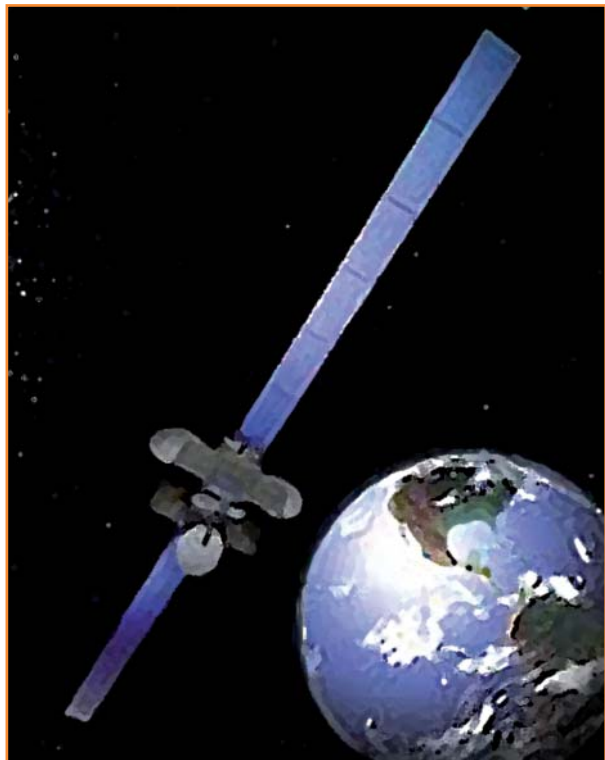
Simultaneous dissemination by satellite to the media

The aim of the dissemination strategy of Destatis, the Federal Statistical Office of Germany, is to provide the public with extensive real-time information. The approximately 600 press releases published each year by Destatis contain a great deal of information with immediate and sometimes dramatic effects on the financial markets and society. Particularly in the case of business news, it is crucial that accurate, stock-market-relevant information on finance and the economy (such as gross domestic product, price indexes) is sent to the news agencies simultaneously, so that they can then properly edit this information for the market participants.

Statistical offices have an especially important responsibility, as their business news is virtually the lifeblood of the finance markets. In line with a European initiative, this role has now been anchored in legislation. The German law on the improvement of investor protection of October 2004 transposes various EU directives concerning the requirements of the publication of capital-market information. Under this law, statistical offices must, as public bodies that disseminate business information, ensure that all market participants receive the same information at the same time, so that no one can gain a competitive advantage.

News by satellite

The Federal Statistical Office has been circulating its information via satellite or broadcasting since October 2001. Thanks to this technique, we provide the German media with up-to-date press information simultaneously and cheaply. The satellite allows us to reach some 320 news agencies, radio and television channels and newspaper desks in Germany. In their role as communicators, they then relay the latest statistical results to the general public. Thanks to the transmission via satellite, the news' recipient does not have to actively seek the information. The broadcasting procedure can therefore be described as a push medium. Another advantage of this procedure for journalists is that information can be integrated seamlessly into their own content management systems and further processed.



Destatis online services

In addition, the Federal Statistical Office also offers Internet and e-mail press services. In the spring of 1996, it became one of the first German authorities to have a website. For almost 10 years, we have been offering the most recent online statistical results to users in the fields of business, politics and government and to the general public at <http://www.destatis.de>. This information is usu-

ally made available every morning at 8 a.m. in a full German version and a summarised English version.

In addition to the Internet, Destatis has been offering its clients an individual service in the form of e-mail press releases over the last four years. The users may select the topics on which they would like to automatically receive the latest press releases from over 70 statistical fields at <http://www.destatis.de/presse/deutsch/majordomo.htm>.

By early January 2006, the distribution list had a total of 4 500 e-mail addresses, and the number keeps growing.

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<http://www.destatis.de>

Norway ‘Today’s statistics’ and theme pages

Statistics Norway publishes on its website around 800 ‘Today’s statistics’ a year, based on 300 different statistics, in which the information is presented in a short article with relatively simple figures and tables. In order to provide a more complete overview of the information available, the theme pages were launched in 2003. This is a portal with links to different types of statistics and analyses, organised around 34 areas that cut across the somewhat production-oriented ‘Today’s statistics’. The theme pages and the daily statistical news complement each other. However, to find the right balance between them is still a challenge.

On 15 August 2005 at 10 a.m. sharp, news from the labour force survey was published on www.ssb.no. The headline ‘116 000 unemployed’ was laid out on the front page as a ‘Today’s statistics’, followed by a short lead describing how there had been an increase in the unemployment rate since last year and that women accounted for all of the increase. At the same time, an e-mail message with the same information, along with other statistics released on the same day, was sent to our e-mail subscribers.

The statistics releases are announced in the Advance Release Calendar, where all releases of new statistics are announced up to four months in advance. No one has access to the statistics before they are published, and the calendar is an important tool in maintaining this principle and securing our independent role in society.

International contacts and cooperation are becoming increasingly important and given high priority in Statistics Norway. All the ‘Today’s statistics’ are published in Norwegian and English, and the calendar as well as the subscription service are available in English. In addition, the Norwegian media receive an updated calendar by e-mail every second week.

An effort to tell a story about the data

Clicking on ‘Today’s statistics’ from the front page opens the article, which is the result of a close cooperation between our statisticians and the two journalists in our Communication Department. The statisticians write a first draft, which is edited by the journalists to make the story accessible to a wider audience. The aim is to focus on newsworthy findings, how these findings affect people’s lives, and to write in everyday language.



Frida Eeg-Henriksen

Rather than just recite data in words, we want to tell a story about the data. To achieve this, our journalists also provide regular courses in article writing for statisticians.

The names, e-mail addresses and telephone numbers of the statisticians responsible for a ‘Today’s statistics’ are always included at the end of the article. This is in line with our policy that those who have in-depth knowledge of the statistics are best suited to answer

questions from the media. On the day of the release, they must be available by e-mail and telephone. In addition to this decentralised spokesperson system, our journalists answer questions from the media on subjects that cut across a broader range of statistics. All this reflects the high priority given to the general public and the media in Statistics Norway.

'Today's statistics' articles are accompanied by links to fixed and user-friendly HTML tables and corresponding data in our output database, StatBank Norway. Links are also provided to previously published 'Today's statistics' articles and other publications within the same subject area, as well as metadata ('About the statistics' documenting methodology and quality).

For example, the aforementioned labour force survey release was accompanied by 20 HTML tables with variables such as employment and unemployment by gender, age, working hours per week, etc. The users also have the opportunity to create their own tables, for instance with time series from StatBank Norway. The bank is still partly under development, and thus perhaps best suited for expert users.

Topic breakdown: the theme pages

We are aware of the danger that the 'Today's statistics' system may be too fragmented for some users. The lack of overview can be a problem — and is certainly a challenge. To overcome this, Statistics Norway launched its 'theme pages' in 2003. Twenty-nine themes were available by February 2006, and this will be extended by a few more by the end of 2006. The themes have been selected based on what we see as broad user needs and societal interest, for instance the information society, gender equality, transport, work, education, health, and national accounts. The front page contains fixed lists of easy-to-understand key figures, new findings, tables and maps. It also has links to related 'Today's statistics', as well as analysis and research from Statistics Norway and external sources.

At the beginning of 2006, the 'Immigration and immigrants' (http://www.ssb.no/innvanding_en/) and the 'Gender equality' (www.ssb.no/likestilling_en/) theme pages were translated into English. From the latter, you can click your way to 'Today's statistics' articles on population, education, employment and unemploy-

Labour Force Survey - Microsoft Internet Explorer

Adresse http://www.ssb.no/english/subjects/06/01/aku_en/

Statistics Norway
Statistisk sentralbyrå

Statistics by Subjects StatBank Magazine Research Useful Publications About Statistics Norway

Main page » Statistics by Subjects » 06 » 01 Labour force participation

Latest article
Previous articles
Tables
More tables in StatBank
About the statistics

Labour Force Survey Q2 2005

116 000 unemployed

The unemployment rate was 4.8 per cent in the second quarter, an increase of 0.2 percentage points from the second quarter of last year. Women accounted for all of the increase. The figures are taken from the latest Labour Force Survey (LFS) carried out by Statistics Norway.

Seasonally adjusted figures: Unchanged unemployment

Unemployment in May stayed unchanged from the previous month, according to seasonally adjusted figures from the LFS. However, the unemployment rate increased by 0.2 percentage points from the first to the second quarter of 2005. In the same period, there were no significant changes in the number of employees.

The seasonal adjustment method is a favourable method of revealing the current development in the labour market, and serves as an alternative to comparisons with the corresponding quarter in the previous year. Seasonally adjusted figures are presented in a separate article.

The number of unemployed people increased by 5 000 from the second to the third quarter of 2005, to 116 000. The total unemployment rate was 4.8 per cent, the rate for men 5.0 per cent and the rate for women 4.7 per cent. Women accounted for all of the increase, while the figure for men stayed approximately unchanged.

The proportion of long-term unemployed fell from 27 to 25 per cent from the second quarter of last year. Long-term unemployment is defined as unemployment that has lasted for at least six consecutive months.

Fewer in temporary employment

The number of temporary employees was 201 000 in the second quarter of 2005, a decline of 12 000 from the second quarter of 2004. This represents 9.5 per cent of all employees. Temporary employment is most common in the primary industries, health and social work, and education. The manufacturing industries, transport and communication, and public administration and defence have relatively few temporary employees.

97 000 underemployed

The number of underemployed, i.e. part-time employees who want to work more hours, fell from 100 000 to 97 000 from the second quarter of 2004 to the second quarter of 2005. The underemployed represent 15.8 per cent of all part-time employees, compared with 16.1 per cent in the second quarter of 2004. The majority of the underemployed work in health and social work or retail trade. Half of all part-time employees work in these two sectors.

Actual hours worked for the unemployed and underemployed amounted to 136 000 man-weeks (full-time work) in the second quarter of 2005, approximately unchanged from the corresponding quarter of 2004.

Labour force participation slightly down

Total labour force participation fell from 73.0 per cent in the second quarter of 2004 to 72.6 per cent in the second quarter of 2005. The decline was strongest among women, and particularly young women (age groups 16-19 and 20-24).

Seasonally adjusted LFS, registered unemployed and registered unemployed plus government measures to promote employment. Seasonally adjusted figures, three-month moving average, 1999-2005 (see text)

Lokal intranett

ment, income and wages, political participation, health and social conditions, as well as crime. The English translation of the remaining themes will be in place in the course of 2006.

It is our impression that those who have discovered the theme pages greatly appreciate them. We have received a lot of enthusiastic feedback. These pages also seem to be very suitable for educational purposes.

Free online dissemination

The Internet is the main distribution channel for official statistics in Statistics Norway. Since the launch of our website in 1995, free dissemination has been a focal point of Statistics Norway's dissemination policy. Official statistics are considered a common good for society,

and everything on our website is available free of charge. This also includes StatBank Norway, which has often been a chargeable service in other countries. Paper publications, which are sold at cost price, are also available free of charge on the website, mostly in PDF format.

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For further information:

<http://www.ssb.no/english>

The monthly press conference: a key event in Polish socioeconomic life



Press conference in Central Statistical Office of the Republic of Poland

One of the main components of the Central Statistical Office of Poland (GUS) mass media service is the monthly press conference. The idea is that all users have equal access to statistical information at the same time, based on the same rights, which lies at the roots of the news conference system.

For over 12 years, press conferences have been held on the date of publication of 'Information on the socio-economic situation of the country'. In general it is the 16th or 17th working day of the month. The conference always starts at 10 a.m. The use of transparent, regular and predictable procedures has developed the conviction, in the media, that GUS shows strict respect

for the fundamental rules of non-discriminatory, equal and simultaneous access to statistical information.

The invitations to the press conferences are sent out by e-mail and fax several days in advance to the press agencies, radio and television. They receive information about the topic of the conference, the leading person and the materials which will be distributed during

the conference. The early notification of the information to be delivered at the news conference is of great importance. When the press conference starts, the materials are also published on the GUS website and sent to subscribers.

An exceptional feature of the press conferences is that they are open to the general public, as no accreditation is required. On average, more than 40 journalists participate in each press conference.

Deep impact on the media

The press conference's organisation is very important to the perception of its subject matter. The preparation process for each event is well defined. The conference is always conducted by the president or the vice-president of GUS.

During the first part, the leading person presents the socioeconomic situation of the country for the period in question, richly illustrated by charts. The second part is reserved for the journalists' questions. Then it's the turn of the GUS experts, whose participation is obligatory, to answer all questions and problems. If requested, there is time for interviews with the GUS management and statisticians after the press conference.

Every conference is recorded in audio and video system, passed on to the 16 regional statistical offices and

published in the main news services, press and television. For the last few years, GUS has also cooperated with the educational television Edusat, which records and broadcast conferences via TV sat.

The opinions and reactions are monitored and analysed by GUS's press team. In case of misinterpretation of the statistical information, the Press Office undertakes to correct any mistake. However, any media attacks regarding GUS data have never been noticed.

The GUS press conferences are one of the most highly regarded events of this kind in the Polish public administration. Openness and good relations with the media are emphasised. Using the experience of world and European statistics and adjusting them to Polish conditions and needs undoubtedly fosters the positive perception of the statistics by the general public.

Author: Artur Satora
Director of the Dissemination Division
Central Statistical Office of Poland

For further information:

<http://www.stat.gov.pl>

‘A feverish social drama of life and death’: the Swedish *Statistical Yearbook*

Hundreds of articles in the press nationwide, several reports on radio and TV and a spot on the national radio every day — this is the result of the latest release of the annual *Statistical Yearbook of Sweden* in January 2005. Sigma spoke to Statistics Sweden’s most ‘media wanted’ person, Lillebror Alin — the man behind the book — about his successes in communicating statistics.

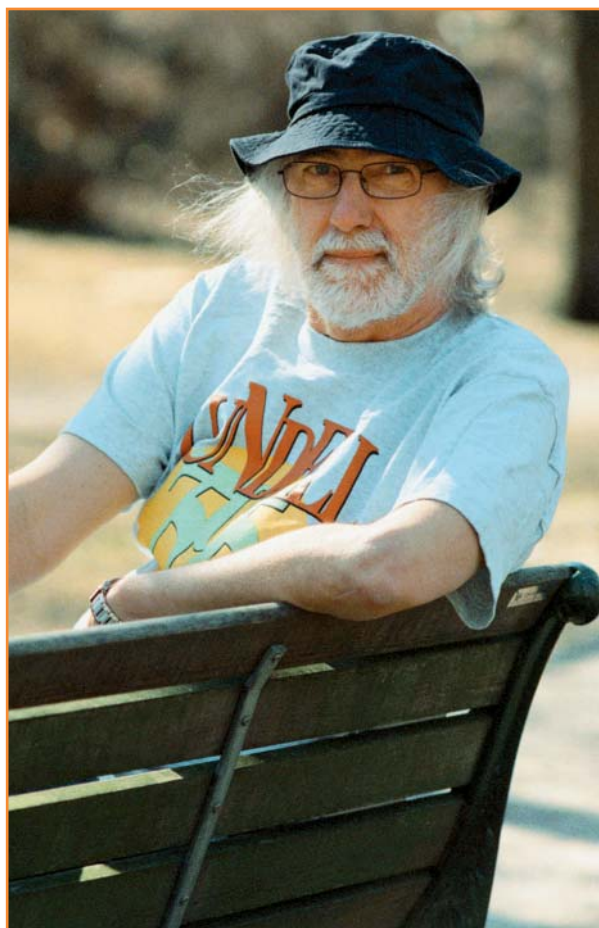
Mr Alin has been responsible for the Swedish annual *Statistical Yearbook* since 1997. He ensures that the contents have continuity at the same time as focusing on different contemporary phenomena in society every year. The 2005 edition consists of 800 pages of tables, graphs and text and it received an outstanding amount of publicity this year. It has been published since 1914 and the last edition sold about 4 000 copies.

‘The release of the yearbook always gets attention from the media, but it is great that the statistics we all work with in Statistics Sweden on a daily basis got the attention and had the impact it did this year. If our figures don’t reach the citizens and become the basis for facts and decision-making in people’s daily and professional lives, I believe we should give up the production of statistics. I would like a yearbook which is inexpensive and reaches many,’ says Mr Alin.

‘30 laps around the equator and 170 000 football fields’

Mr Alin explains that to him there were two reasons why the media response was so big in 2005: a catchy press release and fortunate timing.

‘To succeed you first have to write a press release that journalists like. A catchy headline is a good start that allows the journalists to swallow the bait. This year the headline on the press release was “30 laps around the equator and 170 000 football fields”. It must have made the journalists wonder what it was all about...’



Lillebror Alin

In fact the first part of the title refers to the sum of the lengths of the Swedish road network, the total lengths of the streams and of the coasts and beaches in Sweden. The second part refers to the fact that arable land

has decreased by an area comparable to 13 000 football fields a year, which for the period 1990–2003 becomes 170 000 football fields.

Mr Alin also likes presenting figures and making comparisons that are rather unorthodox, but that appeal to journalists. In the latest press release you can read: ‘There are almost as many cattle in Iran, as pigs in Italy, as sheep in Greece, as goats in Brazil as there are inhabitants in Sweden. That is around 9 million.’ He has also made a list of data about the number 17 (17 SMSs were sent on average per client and month in 2003, 17% of those aged 75–84 have a computer at home, 17 kg of chocolates and sweets are eaten on average by each person every year, etc.). This list is matched by a subtitle which includes the number 17 and is a play on words in Swedish meaning ‘there are darn many statistics’ (sic). This was picked up by a number of papers as well.

‘The second and probably biggest factor why the yearbook became such a success this year was the time of the release. It was published on 11 January and came after the tsunami catastrophe in south-east Asia. When we published, the media was looking for something lighter, but not too light. The statistics in the yearbook were perceived as being at just the right level for people to enjoy.’

‘... so good, so exciting, yes even funny!’

Following the release the media went ‘mad’ and as a result there were at least 10 radio and TV reports, and more than 100 articles in the press.

‘It started with an interview on Radio Stockholm which was discovered by other journalists and then things went crazy. It was rather unexpected. I have had many contacts with journalists over the years, but this was incredible. The biggest tabloid, *Aftonbladet*, which has around half a million daily readers nationwide, published two big articles and the daily *Göteborgs-Posten* dedicated half of their Sunday supplement to the yearbook.’

Mr Alin has also started doing daily spots on national radio. Each spot is around 60 seconds long and covers any topic. He gives an example: ‘Last year, Swedish

private cars were driven on average 15 000 kilometres. This makes the total distance covered by the country’s 4 million private cars 60 billion kilometres. It sounds a lot, so to get a better perception of how far this is, I have calculated some comparable measures. I have, for example, calculated how many laps around the equator it would be. What do you think the result is?’

‘Swedish cars are driven a distance that represents 1.5 million laps around the equator, or 78 000 return trips to the moon, or 200 return trips to the sun. In fact, the distance Swedish private cars cover is 10 times further than the distance between the sun and Pluto. And Pluto is the outermost planet in our solar system.’

When asked about the best quotes in the media, Mr Alin mentions journalist Martin Ahlquist of Swedish National Radio Channel 1 who said ‘... so good, so exciting, yes even funny!’ when referring to the yearbook. And a quote in *Aftonbladet*: ‘Finally it is here. The bible for all wise guys — the annual *Statistical Yearbook*.’

‘But the most special statement was probably made by Åsa Lindeborg, a cultural journalist who writes for *Aftonbladet*. She must have read the book from cover to cover! She ends her article reflecting over the fact that she and others have been waiting for the next outstanding contemporary portrayal since 1975 when an exceptional novel was published and that everyone says it will never come. “But it does! Every year the Statistical Office in Sweden releases a feverish social drama of life and death, neatly presented in hard numbers and cold facts”.’

Author: Lillebror Alin is the man behind the Swedish annual *Statistical Yearbook*

For further information:

<http://www.scb.se>

The success of a weekly e-zine

In 1998, Statistics Netherlands started a weekly e-zine (called the *Webmagazine*) on its website consisting of four short articles. Soon it became clear that the formula of this magazine was very successful. The articles receive a lot of media coverage and are often accessed on the website of Statistics Netherlands. As a result, the magazine has obtained a prominent place in the publication policy of Statistics Netherlands. Last year the 1 500th *Webmagazine* article was published.

The concept of the magazine

The *Webmagazine* of Statistics Netherlands is designed for the general reader who has no special knowledge of, or interest in, statistics. Basically, the magazine consists of four to six short articles. It is released on Monday mornings at 10.00 a.m. on the homepage of the Statistics Netherlands website. About 200 articles a year are published in the magazine. The selection criteria are:

- newsworthiness,
- timing,
- relevance for the target group,
- quality of the figures (recent and well-analysed), and
- variety of subjects.

Every *Webmagazine* article has a fixed format of 300 to 350 words and three graphs at the most (no tables). Accessibility of the articles receives a great deal of attention in the editing process. Texts are short and simple. Long sentences, verbosity and technical jargon are avoided. If technical information is unavoidable, it is not in the main text but in texts linked to it. Titles and subtitles must be short and to the point. The same goes for graphs, which are therefore restricted to a maximum width.

The *Webmagazine* is translated into English and published on Tuesday on the English section of the website.

Coverage by the media

In 2004, some 230 *Webmagazine* articles were published in 51 weekly editions. On average, the *Webmagazine* articles received 38 000 online visitors a month. In addition, there were 3 500 subscribers to the *Webmagazine* list server service.



Sebastiaan van den Elshout

Even more significant is the indirect impact of *Webmagazine* articles. The Dutch media show a great deal of interest in the information presented in the *Webmagazine*. The 230 articles published in 2004 yielded 550 items in the Dutch press. Only newspapers were monitored systematically. There is, however, also considerable use of the magazine in radio and television broadcasts.

Comparison with press releases

In addition to the *Webmagazine* articles, Statistics Netherlands publishes about 150 press releases a year. The press releases deal predominantly with key economic and social indicators, for example economic growth, the consumer price index (CPI), consumer confidence, price and volume trends in important economic sectors, unemployment figures, etc. Such data are often published on a monthly or quarterly basis. The information published in the *Webmagazine*, however, is more diverse, non-recurrent, and often deals with topics that go beyond the scope of the press releases.

The *Webmagazine* is continually brought to the notice of the media in a professional manner. Every week, editors of newspapers and of radio and television news programmes receive an e-mail about the latest edition of the *Webmagazine*, specifying the titles of articles plus a link to the website of Statistics Netherlands. The Dutch Press Agency (ANP) also plays an important part in the distribution of *Webmagazine* articles. The ANP disseminates weekly news reports based on the *Webmagazine* among Dutch journalists. The articles are subsequently published in the newspapers. The press can contact a spokesperson for every article published in the *Webmagazine*.

Editorial process

A senior editor and three editors make up the editorial staff of the *Webmagazine*. The editorial staff is part of the Communication and Presentation Department which looks after dissemination. Contributions to the *Webmagazine* are drafted by the Statistical Departments.

The core activity of the editorial staff is to edit the *Webmagazine* articles received from the Statistical Departments. *Webmagazine* articles may have a huge impact and therefore the editorial process is carried out meticulously. The responsibilities of everyone involved are laid down in a protocol. The Statistical Department is responsible for the statistical content of the texts, whereas the *Webmagazine* editors must see to it that the texts are accessible to the average reader.

Author: Sebastiaan van den Elshout Manager,
editorial staff of Statistics Netherlands

For further information:

<http://www.cbs.nl>

The October 2005 editions of the *Webmagazine*

4 October

Exports driving force behind economic growth in 2004

Largest job losses in South Holland in 2004

More trade with Turkey

Sector business services confident about the future

Slightly fewer traffic deaths in first half of 2005

11 October

Money contributes to happiness, but health is considered more important

Dutch car fleet older, heavier and less colourful

Collectively agreed wage rises up again

Government spending down slightly in 2004

Turnover in clothes industry down again

18 October

Young men heaviest drinkers

Some hundred fatal work-related accidents each year

Few women educated in technical fields

Beauty parlours on the increase

25 October

Bankruptcies leave 1.9 billion in unpaid debts

More foreigners run their own business

Imports of poultry meat from avian flu-infected countries almost banned

Tenfold increase paprika pepper harvest over last 25 years

Behind locked doors



Press briefing

How do you tackle the problem of journalists clamouring for immediate sight of new data and keep to the principle of fair, equal and orderly release? How do you try to ensure that when journalists write their first story they don't misrepresent the data in their hurry to be first with the news? In the United Kingdom, for the past 12 years, one answer has been to lock up the journalists!

In the days before websites, the UK Statistical Office printed hundreds of statistical first releases on paper. Journalists and couriers would wait outside the office doors ready to grab the releases on the stroke of release time. On some days, when there was more than one release and much interest, there were appalling scums and near fights on the doorstep. Clearly this was not an orderly release!

The 'lock-up' system

The Press Office suggested trying a system known as the 'lock-up'. This system had already been tried successfully by the US Department of Commerce for some

releases. It was clear that the journalists who wanted the data instantly were the broadcasters (mainly the BBC) and news agencies, such as Reuters, Dow Jones, Press Association, AFX, Market News, and Bloomberg.

The Press Office talked to the agencies to find out what they needed at release time. It was clear they were happy with equality of access but wanted to be able to put out the data at exactly the release time. Most wanted to do this electronically.

Agreements were drawn up whereby agencies would be allowed into a lock-up briefing if they could provide evidence that they operated as a genuine news

agency and not merely as general information service providers.

They were allowed to rent space at desks within the Statistical Office where they could set up their own equipment in the media briefing room to key in the data and send it electronically to their headquarters. They paid a rent for this facility but were never charged for data.

Functioning of the system

So how does the lock-up actually work? Named journalists from the agencies come 45 minutes before release time and are let into the briefing room. They check their equipment and ensure that their link with the outside is disconnected. This is indicated to the supervising press officers by a simple system of a red light for disconnected and green for connected.

Press officers also require that all mobile telephones and pagers are switched off completely and placed visibly on the desk. When all the journalists are in the room and all the lights are red the door is 'locked' — no one is allowed out of the room until after release time.

The data are then handed round on paper releases along with any necessary supporting material. A specialist statistician explains the data, points out any trends or record highs or lows, and answers questions from the journalists.

Most of the time is spent with journalists keying the data into their systems to fit their templates and specifications. At 9.28 a.m. journalists are allowed to call their offices to alert them that the data are coming. They are to say only who they are and that they are at the ONS. Words such as 'down' at ONS or 'up' at ONS could be code or hints and are not allowed!

From that point they are also forbidden to talk, except for a 'one minute' alert on the phone. At precisely 9.30 a.m. a buzzer is sounded and all journalists immediately open their switches and send their stories and data.

Safety measures

Obviously there have to be safeguards and contingency plans — what happens if there is a fire? What happens if someone is taken ill? And there have to be sanctions available too for anyone who breaks the rules. A minor infringement can mean a ban for the journalist; something more serious like sending the data a few seconds too early can mean a ban for the whole organisation. Leaking market sensitive data early can lead to investigation by the national and independent Financial Services Authority whose powers are strong.

The lock-up system has been running in the UK now for 12 years with very few 'incidents.' It has much improved the orderly release of data and has also improved the accurate coverage of the data.

ONS Chief Press Officer Ian Scott says: 'Before we set up the lock-up system we had anarchy on our doorstep at release time. Now we have order and, we hope, some enlightenment!'

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United Kingdom

For further information:

<http://www.statistics.gov.uk>

The Daily: an evolving success story at Statistics Canada

At 73 years of age, Statistics Canada's venerable official release bulletin lives up to its name. *The Daily* is Statistics Canada's first line of communication with the media and the public, and has evolved over time from print to electronic format. It is agency policy that every new product or data set must be announced to the public through *The Daily* in one form or another, whether through an analytical news release or simply a listing for a new product.

The Daily has never missed an issue — despite strikes, computer viruses, ice storms and a blackout in 2003 that plunged eastern North America into darkness. A print version had to be faxed to some news agencies one day during the blackout, which closed the agency for six days in August 2003. But the publication did not skip a beat.

The team that produces *The Daily* has successfully maintained its traditional publishing record since 1932. And that has meant ensuring its appearance on the home page of the agency's website (www.statcan.ca) every working morning since 1996.

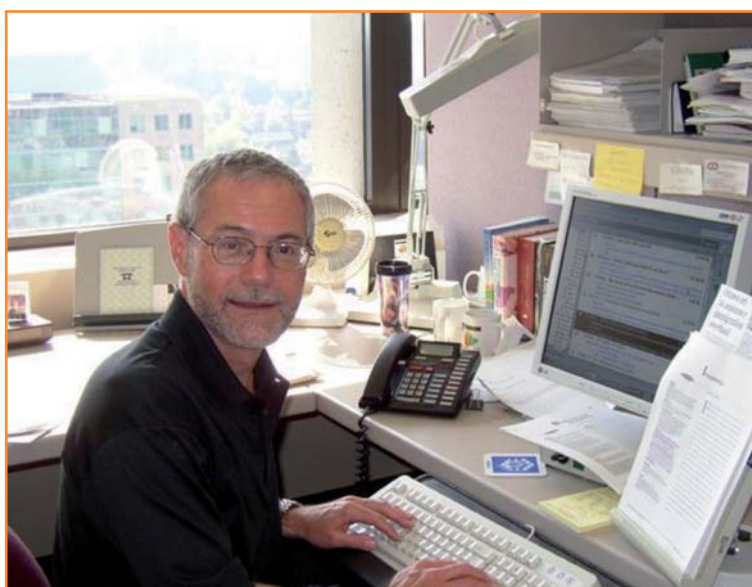
It is published every working day, except during the Christmas break, in Canada's two official languages, English and French.

There are some 245 issues each year, carrying 1 300 news releases, including 100 analytical studies. News releases are written in journalistic style, and targeted at general news journalists. The goal is to obtain positive, accurate and informative media coverage.

Chris Jermyn, an editor at The Canadian Press, Canada's major domestic news agency, has handled copy from *The Daily* for years. 'It's indispensable for my job,' he said. 'It's reliable. It's there every day. There's a huge demand for it. And it's online — that's the main thing.'

From paper to the web

From humble beginnings as a typewritten fact sheet, *The Daily* has evolved into a fully electronic document,



John Flanders

with news releases that put the stress on context, story line and analysis.

The transformation gained real momentum during the mid-1990s when Chief Statistician Dr Ivan P. Fellegi created a Senior Editorial Review Board, with himself as chairman, to review all major releases. To their credit, senior managers bought into a whole new culture in writing for *The Daily*.

In an October 2005 interview marking his 20th anniversary as Chief Statistician, Dr Fellegi pointed to changes in *The Daily* as among the achievements of which he is proudest. 'Our output used to be primarily publication-based; today it is web-based,' Dr Fellegi said. 'But I think that was completely inevitable, given the

changes in technology and cost structures. What was not inevitable is the fact that our outputs are truly user-friendly, very much the opposite of 20 years ago. We transformed *The Daily* (and other outputs) into highly readable products by emphasising the “storyline.”

The most fundamental change in *The Daily* occurred in 1996 when it made the transition from a paper product to an Internet product. The agency continued to distribute a paper version until the 2003 blackout when the demand for the print version no longer justified its production.

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The Daily
Statistics Canada

Thursday, April 20, 2006
Released at 8:30 a.m., Eastern time

Releases

Consumer Price Index, March 2006	2
The 12-month change in the Consumer Price Index held steady at 2.2% in March. Excluding energy, the Consumer Price Index rose 1.7% between March 2005 and March 2006, up slightly from 1.6% in February.	
Electronic commerce and technology, 2005	6
Online sales recorded their fourth consecutive year of strong double-digit growth in 2005, but e-commerce still accounted for just over 1% of total operating revenues for private firms.	
Current economic conditions	9
Travel between Canada and other countries, February 2006	9
Construction Union Wage Rate Index, March 2006	11
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STATISTICS CANADA

Extending the service

The evolution into a fully electronic document has led to several improvements through the years.

- **Metadata:** Readers can access the underlying survey metadata for each release through an electronic link to definitions, data sources and methods. This initiative has significantly increased the quality of the agency’s reservoir of meta-information, since survey managers pay more attention to keeping the information up to date.
- **Electronic subscription service:** Since 1996, Statistics Canada has offered an electronic subscrip-

tion service for *The Daily*, via a ‘listserv’. This currently provides the complete *The Daily*, in plain text format, to some 8 000 subscribers. To better meet the needs of clients who have only specific areas of interest, however, the agency introduced a service that offers clients a choice of 27 subject areas to select. Subscribers receive advance e-mail notice of new releases and products in their selected subject areas. *The Daily* now has almost 6 000 subscribers to this new service. Surprisingly, there has been little migration from the listserv to *The Daily* by subject, and both client groups continue to grow. In addition, in May 2005, *The Daily* launched RSS feeds and now this service has more than 400 subscribers.

- **Gateway to detailed analysis:** The primary goal of *The Daily* is to provide the media with concise, analytical releases. In reality, however, it must serve more than this one specialised audience. It does so by using a ‘gateway’ approach. That is, most news releases contain electronic links through which clients such as financial analysts, academics and so on who wish for more complex analysis can access full research reports or analytical papers.

The Daily Calendar

Journalists and other clients are not the only people to have benefited from the electronic format. It has also made life easier for our subject matter partners, who are required to book releases and submit them electronically for publication.

They do this by accessing the Daily Calendar. Authors can see at a glance, from their own computer screen, what news releases are being released on any given day, whether their release would be competing for audience attention with data from other divisions, and where there are open spaces that can be booked.

If they so wish, authors can book their space a year in advance. The new calendar puts a limit of two major releases plus five smaller, less newsworthy, releases, each day. As a result, the agency provides a more even distribution of releases throughout the year, which makes for better news coverage.

‘The new system is very user-friendly, and getting the hang of it only took a short time,’ said analyst Russell Kowaluk, who writes the ‘Monthly survey of manufacturing’ release.

Using the calendar, *The Daily* editors also produce an annual set of publication dates for key economic indicators, as well as a weekly list of upcoming releases, that are faxed and e-mailed to scores of journalists and government officials.

To make life easier for the editors, the system also features software that allows side-by-side comparison of English and French texts, including text structure, numbers and tables.

Not bad for a publication that's been in the forefront of disseminating data for 73 years.

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<http://www.statcan.ca>

A modern statistical office, putting customers first

Alongside the charming old town with its refurbished medieval buildings and cobble-stoned streets, Tallinn is a bustling modern city — with new buildings going up by the month — and a busy port. According to an old saying, ‘Tallinn is built on salt’, referring to the port’s important role in the transit of salt from Spain to Russia in the Middle Ages. Today it is more likely to be oil, fertilisers and coal transiting Tallinn’s port — reputedly the second most important in the Baltic — and, in spite of the difficulties caused by ice during the winter months, the port remains part of the pulse of the city.

A short walk takes you from the old town of Tallinn to the offices of Statistics Estonia, situated on one of the main axes of the city. The temperature outside was a bone-chilling – 15 °C, but the cold was quickly dispelled by the warm welcome *Sigma* received from the Director-General and his staff.

Priit Potisepp is not a typical Director-General for a statistical office. For a start he is an economist who, before being appointed Director-General at the end of 2004, had not previously worked in the public sector nor on statistics. Secondly, at 38 years old, he is the EU’s youngest Director-General. So *Sigma* was intrigued to meet this newcomer to the world of official statistics.

Statistics are meant to be used, not hoarded

Coming from the private sector, it is perhaps not surprising that Priit Potisepp’s leitmotif is to put the ‘customer’ first — promoting a culture of making data more easily available and understandable to the outside world — a major shift from the situation in Soviet times. The Press Officer, Anu Ots, outlined the co-operation Statistics Estonia has developed with the press: news releases are designed to tell a story, the geographical information system presents data in an understandable manner, and press conferences present key publications to journalists. As a result, the press covers about 90 % of the office’s news releases, with statistics on prices, wages and trade being most often

quoted. In a survey of journalists, the office scored highly on meeting expectations and was rated highest among government agencies for openness.

The central location of the office means that the library and information centre, which is open to the general public, is well used. Anne Nuka, Head of the Information and Marketing Service, is rightly proud of the service offered by the centre. As well as providing access to their own publications and data, the information centre has a wide range of statistical publications from other countries and international organisations, and, since 1 October 2004, provides support to users interested in EU statistics. Visitors are shown how to access databases and make tables, and are helped to understand the data. This service is much appreciated by researchers, students and members of the public in general. For those unable to come to the office, a telephone and e-mail service is available. Moreover, a school corner on the office’s website has been developed to awaken interest among young people in statistics, the stories they can tell, and how to use data.

Data providers are customers too

But for Priit Potisepp, data users are not the only clients; the data suppliers and their needs are extremely important — where would a statistical service be without them? Other statistical offices will recognise the litany of complaints from businesses — too many requests for too much data, same information requested in different questionnaires.

Statistics Estonia decided to tackle this problem with technology. Estonian society has embraced modern



Statistics Estonia

technology — some 75 % of tax returns are online and more than 60 % of Intrastat questionnaires are submitted electronically. Therefore, Statistics Estonia consolidated their questionnaires and, on the day of Sigma's visit, launched a web-based data input channel to enable enterprises to complete questionnaires online. These are pre-filled as far as possible with data already received from the enterprise, to reduce the amount of data to be input. Data submitted in this

way are protected by the same security system as Internet banking.

Building on his experience as the person responsible for Hansabank's call centre, Potisepp has set up a call centre to support data providers, particularly providing help in completing the online questionnaire. By centralising calls he hopes to be able to answer questions immediately, to identify problems and to improve the quality of questionnaires and responses.

Statistics Estonia

Although there are records of statistical activity in the region now known as Estonia dating back to the 13th and 19th centuries, the first true statistical office was established in the new Republic of Estonia on 1 March 1921. From then until the Soviet occupation (1940), the bureau was led by one man, with a staff of 180. Today, Statistics Estonia is a far cry from this early office and its Soviet-style successor. A first reform in 1993 expanded the office to embrace the needs of a market economy; a second reorganisation in 2004 brought in new management, reduced staff by about one sixth, and regrouped services and processes to improve efficiency. This 'new look' office now employs 350 people; 87 % are women, and 85 % are educated to university level. The average age of staff is 44 — one in five is under 30, two in five are over 50. Staff turnover is high; 39 % of staff have been in the office for less than five years, and only 10 % have been there for more than 15 years.

Confidentiality concerns

Using Statistics Finland as a benchmark, Priit Potisepp would like to use administrative data more widely in the production of statistics. Until recently this was hampered by Estonia's Personal Data Protection Act, which did not allow access to data linked to personal identification codes, to the extent that the Data Protection Inspectorate (DPI) even prevented the production of population statistics in 2003–04. After long negotiations undertaken by the previous Director-General, an amendment to the Official Statistics Act was agreed in 2004: this specifically permits the use of personal data for the production of statistics, and requires the Statistical Office to explore the use of administrative data as an alternative to surveys, paving the way for Statistics Estonia to use business registers and other administrative data to produce statistics. However, the DPI fears the creation of huge profiles of individuals, and places severe limitations on access to personal data. Statistics Estonia takes confidentiality seriously and the 2004 reorganisation drew all data collection and data entry processes into one unit, limiting the number of people who have access to individual data.

Remaining challenges

Preparation for accession to the EU was a tough job for Potisepp's predecessor and for Mare Zaneva, the head of international cooperation. She outlined some of the challenges: responding to increasing numbers of international questionnaires, and managing the Phare programmes and grants. Grant management, of course, remains a challenge and is now almost a full-time job. Her section also ensures an Estonian presence at important international meetings.



Priit Potisepp

The remaining challenges include the implementation of NACE Rev. 2 and the heavy emphasis on agriculture statistics. But perhaps the biggest challenge is in attracting and retaining good quality staff. In contrast to the banking sector, Statistics Estonia is chronically underfinanced. An unfair comparison? Not according to Potisepp — the considerably higher wages offered to numerate graduates and IT specialists by banks, insurance and research companies makes it difficult for him to hire the specialist talent he needs. Even in the short time that he has been in office, he has lost staff to the competition. At the same time, he appreciates the skills and experience of his older staff. However, with 40 % of his staff over 50, he is aware of the need to find

Priit Potisepp

Priit Potisepp graduated in Economics from Tallinn Technical University and continued his studies at the University of Kiel in Germany. This German experience was unusual in 1990, and he was quickly snapped up by the largest life insurance company in Estonia. Following a takeover, he found himself Chairman of the Management Board of the insurance subsidiary of Hansabank, one of eastern Europe's most successful banks.

After 10 years in insurance, he moved to the banking side of the business, but when in late 2004, he received the unexpected call, or rather the SMS, from the finance ministry to ask him to take over the country's statistical office, he embraced the opportunity to gain experience of the public sector.

Adjusting to the huge cultural difference, the speed and bureaucracy of the public sector, has been tough, but he is enjoying the challenge of putting his own stamp on the statistical service, including a new logo and a change of name to Statistics Estonia.

and train their replacements over the next 10 years. He would like to arrive at the situation he witnessed in the Austrian Statistical Office — younger people with energy, new ideas and the willingness to embrace technology and change, tempered by older people with experience and in-depth knowledge of their subject.

And given the enthusiasm he brings to the job, it is not difficult to believe that he will achieve this goal.

Author: Rosemary Montgomery
Eurostat Press Office

Estonia

Situated on the Baltic between Latvia and Russia, with flat lowlands and marshes in the north and hills in the south, Estonia emerged as an independent country in 1918, after centuries of Danish, Swedish, German and Russian rule. Independence was, however, short-lived. It was forcibly incorporated into the USSR in 1940, regaining its freedom only in 1991, with the collapse of the Soviet Union. Since the departure of the last Russian troops in 1994, Estonia has transitioned effectively to a modern market economy and has pegged its currency to the euro. The economy benefits from strong electronics and telecommunications sectors and is influenced by developments in Finland, Sweden and Germany, three major trading partners.

Satisfaction in a job well done

Sigma also spoke to a statistician with more than 10 years experience of the office. Merike Põldsaar was one of a large number of young recruits who joined the office in 1993, at the time when the office started to produce statistics corresponding to the needs of the country moving from a planned economy to a market economy.

Merike started work in the newly formed Enterprise Statistics Department and has seen it build up a solid base of enterprise statistics required for a modern market economy and for EU membership. She is now principal analyst in the service responsible for annual enterprise statistics.

Why did she choose the Statistical Office?

On leaving university with a degree in economics which included some statistics courses, Merike applied for several jobs, but the Statistical Office was the first to recognise her potential and to offer her a job. She did not know what to expect, but has not regretted her choice. Arriving at a time when the office was changing and expanding, she was able to witness and be a part of that change.

What has been the most interesting part of the work?

Merike has enjoyed the challenge of developing enterprise statistics in preparation for entry into the EU, harmonising definitions, designing questionnaires, working together with other Baltic countries, participating in working groups, and international meetings. These have allowed her to develop her own skills and understanding, to become an expert in her field. She takes satisfaction in some of the simpler ideas that have led to improved results, such as the colour cod-



Mare Zaneva and Merike Põldsaar.

ing of questionnaires, and rewarding enterprises who respond on time by providing them with financial key ratios for their sector, an idea taken from Statistics Sweden who provided considerable support during the transition years.

Does she see her future in Statistics Estonia?

Most definitely, yes. She is looking forward to working in new areas, such as FATS and the new surveys on services. And maybe even to pass on all she has learnt by participating in the new task force being set up together with Statistics Sweden to help the statistical offices in Bulgaria, Albania, and Serbia and Montenegro.

Author: Rosemary Montgomery
Eurostat Press Office

A commitment to training and career development

Riga stands on the mouth of the Daugava River, where it flows into the Baltic Sea. The city was founded in 1201 by Albert von Buxhoeveden, a German canon, who arrived with 20 shiploads of crusaders to convert the pagan Latvian tribes to Christianity. In the Middle Ages, Riga was a major centre of the Hanseatic League, deriving its prosperity from trade with central and eastern Europe. Today, the historic centre of Riga is a Unesco World Heritage site, selected particularly for its Art Nouveau architecture, which is unparalleled anywhere in the world, and its 19th century architecture in wood.

When *Sigma* went to visit the offices of the Central Statistical Bureau (CBS) of Latvia, the streets of Riga were covered in snow, and the Daugava River was frozen over. Inside there was a warm welcome from Mrs Aija Žigūre, President of CSB, and Mrs Vija Jace, Head of the EU Affairs Coordination Division.

Officially established in September 1919

Mrs Žigūre started by telling us about the history of CSB. 'The State Statistical Board of Latvia was established on 1 September 1919, but statistics, mainly population censuses, had been published in the territory of Latvia since at least 1774. In 1919, the office began with departments for demography and agricultural statistics; by 1940, we had added general statistics, foreign trade, domestic trade, labour and industry, and had carried out a number of population, agriculture and business censuses.'

'From 1940 to 1990, the Latvian Statistical Office was part of the Soviet statistical system, and all the methodology, principles of organisation of work and design of questionnaires were under the control of the statis-

tical office of the Soviet Union. The Latvian office was responsible for collecting and verifying data before sending it to Moscow. We also published Latvian data for the use of the regional authorities. There were very strict deadlines, and although we worked in Latvian, it was essential to know Russian. Our data was published in Russian and Latvian.'

'After independence in 1990, the office went through a lot of change and restructuring. Between 1992 and 1995, there was a joint EFTA/Eurostat cooperation programme for the statistical offices of the three Baltic States. In 1995, the Baltic States and Eurostat signed the common declaration, and CSB joined the regional statistical cooperation programme, which was financed from Phare funds. The Phare programmes helped us with technical support and equipment.'

'We had bilateral cooperation with all the Nordic countries, but the Finns in particular were our first partners. Our main partners were Statistics Finland for dissemination, Statistics Denmark for social and business statistics, and ISTAT for calculating indicators of the hidden economy.'

Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia

The Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia has about 440 employees, plus 120 further persons working on contract as interviewers, etc. Around 330 employees work in the central office, with 20 staff in each of four regional Data Collection and Processing Centres, and 22 staff in 22 regional information centres.

More than 70 % of central office staff have degrees (22 master's and two doctorates amongst them), and 50 % of staff in the regional offices have degrees.

About 85 % of the employees are women. Nearly 70 % of staff are over 45 years old, and just over 20 % are less than 30.



Aija Žigure

‘The Official Statistics Law of the Republic of Latvia was adopted on 6 November 1997, and strengthened the independence of CSB and its role in the collection and compilation of official statistics.’

Preparing for enlargement: the statistical chapter closed in three months

The next big challenge for CSB was preparing to join the EU. Sigma asked how enlargement went. ‘The enlargement process was a learning period for CSB. We became part of an international world, and our experts began to attend working groups as observers,’ Mrs Žigure replies. ‘We had to assess our own systems, and the screening process examined all areas to assess how they complied with EU standards. However, although it was a complicated process, the support we received from Eurostat and the European statistical system worked well. The statistical chapter was opened on 28 March 2000, and closed on 14 June 2000.’

Asked whether things have changed for CSB since enlargement, Mrs Žigure answers, ‘Both yes and no. We have participated in meetings ever since the association

agreement was signed in 1998, but now our participation is more active, and our tasks and responsibilities have increased. We have to fulfil the requirements of all the regulations, and this is perhaps more demanding for the new Member States than for the old. As a small Member State we have advantages in flexibility, but perhaps suffer from a shortage of human and technical capacity to manage change.’

We move on to the strengths and weaknesses of CSB. Mrs Žigure tells us, ‘A particular strength is the high level of education and professionalism of our staff. We place an emphasis on training and career development. Then we have good cooperation with international organisations, and with other Latvian government departments, both as suppliers and users of our data.’

‘As for weaknesses, like the whole of the public sector we suffer from high staff turnover, with young people moving into the private sector or abroad because of the salary differences. Although the quality of our staff is high, we do have a problem with the age structure. And although we have sufficient economists we don’t have enough statisticians. This means that the whole area of human resources, particularly training and development, is important for the office.’

Dissemination has become a significant issue for all statistical offices. On this subject, Mrs Žigure says, ‘Our strategy is to reduce the number of paper publications and increase the use of the Internet. All our publications are available in electronic form and annual data and short-term industrial data are free of charge on our website. We are improving our website to make it more user-friendly, with better navigation and better indication of what’s new. As for languages, our website is in both Latvian and English, as are 70 % of our publications.’

Asked about the public profile of CSB, Mrs Žigure tells us, ‘Our public profile is good. People trust our data and use it. The media use our press releases, and press conferences on the inflation rate are well attended. And although the inflation rate is high, the media don’t chal-

Aija Žigure

Mrs Žigure joined the Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia in 1972, as a student trainee, while still studying economics and statistics at the Latvian State University. After graduating, she continued to work at CSB in various jobs. Towards the end of 1993, she became Director of the Price Statistics Department. At the beginning of 1995, she was appointed Vice-President of CSB, and has been President since 1998.

lenge the data. We have a policy of informing those concerned in advance of changes to our surveys, for example the labour force survey and the household budget survey, where we produced a leaflet explaining the changes.'

Quality: a major challenge for the future

Sigma also asked Mrs Žigure about the future challenges facing CSB. 'Quality is a major challenge. We have various projects to improve quality. Germany is our partner in introducing a total quality management system to the office, and we are introducing the balanced score card system to assess process and the results achieved, and improve our financial management. And we will introduce the principles stated in the European Statistics Code of Practice,' she says. 'We are also working in the IT area. We will introduce more data collection online through the Internet. We have more than 100 questionnaires, and 38 are available online. We also aim to increase the electronic dissemination of publications.'

'Improvement of the human resources training and development policy is also important, including strengthening the role of planning, introducing competence analysis and creating a training needs database.'

And how would she describe the management style of CSB? Mrs Žigure replies, 'Latvia is a small country, and we are a small office. This means we can have a more



Blackhead Houses in Town Square, in Riga

democratic management style, and I can be open to staff; I can consult and discuss before making decisions.'

Finally, Mrs Žigure's own CV demonstrates the commitment of CSB to training and development: she herself is currently studying for a doctorate at the University of Latvia

Author: Tim Allen
Eurostat Press Office



The Baltic Sea

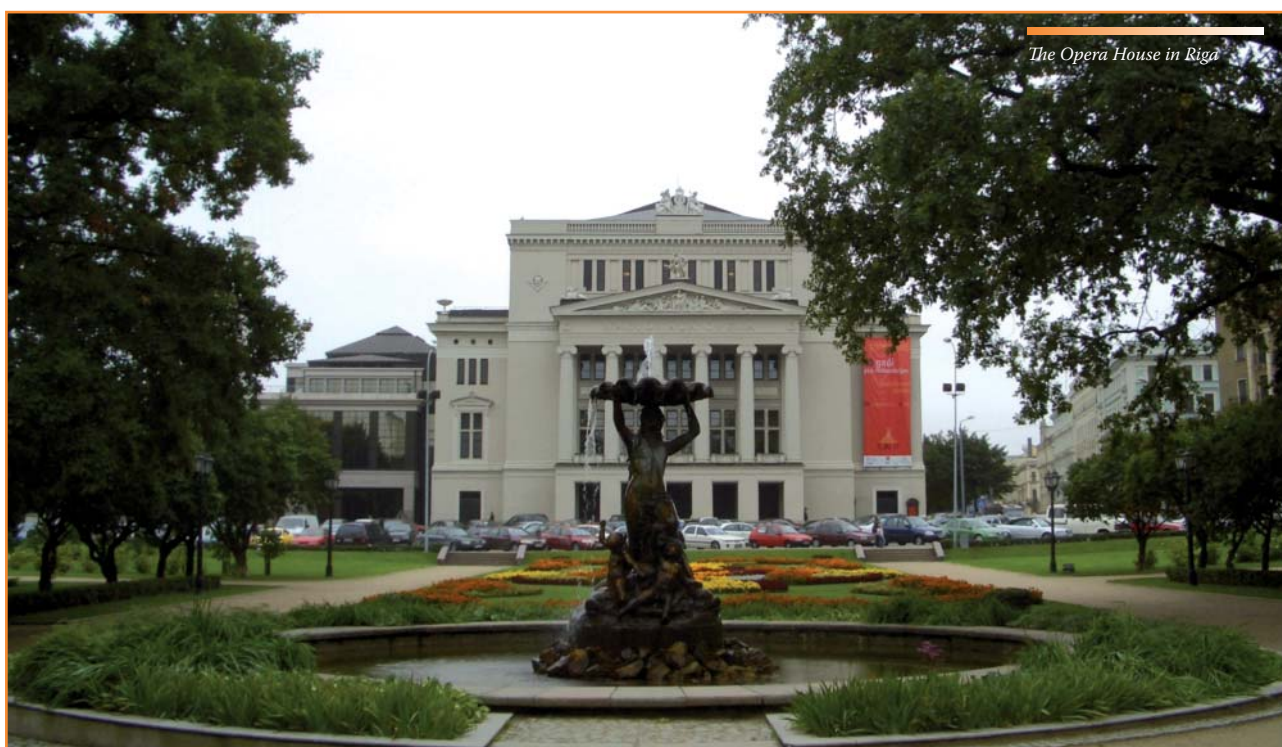
Latvia

Latvia lies on the Baltic Sea, and is the middle of the three Baltic States, with Estonia to the north and Lithuania to the south. To the east, it borders Russia and Belarus.

The proto-Balts, the forefathers of the Latvian people, arrived in the area some 4 000 years ago. By the late 1100s, traders from western Europe were using Latvia's longest river, the Daugava, as a trade route to Russia. In the 1200s, Livonia, today's Latvia and Estonia, was under German rule. After the Livonian War (1558–83), the area came under Polish–Lithuanian rule. In 1621, during the Polish–Swedish war (1600–29), Riga came under Swedish rule. At the beginning of the 1700s, the Great Northern War broke out, and by the end of the 18th century, all of Latvia's territory was under Russian rule.

After the First World War, Latvia became independent. During the Second World War, Latvia was occupied first by the Soviet Union, then by Germany. After the war Latvia remained under Soviet occupation. A major step toward restoration of independence was taken on 4 May 1990, when the Latvian Supreme Council adopted a declaration calling for the restoration of independence following a transition period. On 21 August 1991, the parliament voted to end this transition period, restoring Latvia's pre-war independence. In September 1991, Latvian independence was recognised by the USSR.

Several reasons for young people to work at the statistical office



The Opera House in Riga

Sigma met two young statisticians, whose responses underline CSB's commitment to training and career development.

Elina Apsīte works in the Enterprise Finance and Structural Statistics Section. She went to a School of Business Administration, studying management. She says, 'With that background, I didn't think of joining the government sector at first, but jobs in the private sector were not easy to find if you had no experience. Then I saw a newspaper advert for the Central Statistical Bureau, and applied.' Elina agrees that there is a salary difference with the private sector, but notes that her job has advantages. 'In the government sector I can prove myself. I can plan my own job and I have respon-

sibility for my own projects.'

Mārtiņš Liberts works on sample surveys, mathematical methods and seasonal analysis of time series in the Mathematical Support Division. He has a degree in mathematical statistics, and is currently studying at the University of Latvia for a master's of mathematics. He has been at CSB for six years and says that, 'I always wanted to work in this field — CSB was the perfect opportunity for me, as there aren't many other places to choose from!' He particularly appreciates the support for his continuing studies.

Author: Tim Allen
Eurostat Press Office

Now it's our turn to give assistance

Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania, is situated in the east of the country, on the banks of the Neris and Vilnia Rivers. Vilnius has been the capital of Lithuania since the 14th century, except for a break between 1919 and 1939, when Kaunas, the second biggest city, was the capital. Vilnius has an old town with a unique and authentic architecture, which has been declared a Unesco World Heritage site. Today Vilnius has a little over half a million inhabitants and has become a modern city, which through careful renovation has a special atmosphere with a mixture of past and present.

The Statistical Office of Lithuania is strategically situated in the centre of Vilnius, close to ministries and the parliament. After a short walk through a Vilnius dressed in winter clothes, with a temperature of -6°C , Sigma arrives at the office, which is situated in a building from the early 20th century. On entering the building, the cold immediately disappears: it is warm, both in terms of the newly redecorated offices in light wood and glass, and the friendliness of the staff.

More than 85 years of history

Mr Algirdas Gediminas Šemeta has been Director-General of Statistics Lithuania since 2001. Even if he is young, only 43 years old, he already has a long career behind him. He has held several posts of high responsibility in Lithuanian public administration since independence in 1990, in particular as Minister for Finance from 1997 to 1999. Mr Šemeta starts to recount the history of the office. It celebrated its 85th anniversary in September 2004, but in fact some statistics were already in place in 1528, when the first farmer census was mentioned. In 1919, when the independence of Lithuania was declared and the General Department of Statistics was set up, important activities started, such as the first population census and the law on statistics was passed. The independence of Lithuania ended with the Soviet occupation in 1940 and the Lithuanian Statistical Office became a part of the Soviet statistical system. 'The methods and processes were quite different at that time, when statistics were not for the public, but a tool of control for the State,' says Mr Šemeta.

On 11 March 1990, Lithuania became independent and, within a month, the Lithuanian Department of Statistics was established and the relation with the Soviet Union was broken. Mr Šemeta explains, 'Many difficulties were faced; the methodology was according to Soviet standards and the Lithuanian staff had limited responsibility — the process of adapting to western standards had to start from scratch.' Cornerstones in this process were laid in 1995, when the common declaration between Eurostat and Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania was established, and in 1999 when the amended law on statistics for harmonisation with EU statistics was passed by the Lithuanian parliament.

Chapter 12 on statistics in the *acquis communautaire* was closed in 2000, when it was agreed upon that Lithuania complied with EU standards. Proudly, Mr Šemeta declares that, in 2006, compliance of the statistical domains with EU requirements will reach 99.97 %.

More challenges to overcome

When asked about the future challenges for the office, Mr Šemeta smiles, 'Challenges add flavour to our life... We have different kinds of challenges, on an EU level and on a national level.' The challenges at an EU level are, among others, within the European statistical system (ESS), where Mr Šemeta is a member of a partnership group. This group initiated a task force and requested it to draw up a paper outlining the issues to be solved and the objectives to be realised in the renewed basic legal framework on Community statistics; it should cover a definition of independence of Eurostat and NSIs, confidentiality aspects as well as improvement of



Statistical Office of Lithuania

the operational effectiveness of the ESS. There are many challenges at a national level as well; within the next two to three years, regional statistics will be developed and there will be an increase in the number of indicators within service statistics. Social statistics, which for the time being are lagging behind, will also be developed. On the structural side, there are also important projects going on: the development of a statistical quality management system should be put into place by the end of 2007. Another project to create an integrated statistical IT system started last year. The development of electronic questionnaires within business statistics is

Statistics Lithuania

Statistics Lithuania has around 560 employees, 360 in the central office in Vilnius and 200 in the regional offices; 87 % of staff are women with a lower proportion in the central office (81 %) and as high as 97 % in the regional offices; 78 % of staff have a degree of higher education, with again a difference between the central (86 %) and regional offices (63 %). Almost 30 % of staff are below the age of 40, with a higher share in the central office (36 %) than in the regional offices (15 %). Average length of service in statistics is 18 years.

a third important project. Within this field there is in parallel an IT project going on, financed by EU Structural Funds, to make it possible to capture data directly from enterprise accounting systems.

More and more data free of charge

On the question of data dissemination, Mr Šemeta says that the policy is to go more and more towards having all data free of charge. For the time being, all important publications, as well as 12 topics in the dissemination database, are free of charge, but there are plans to make all data free by the end of 2006. Mr Šemeta contemplates, 'Is this good or not? Sales have gone down through this, but on the other hand, statistics should be public.' There has been an enormous increase in the number of visits to the website of Statistics Lithuania; this year there have already been on average 4 200 visits per day as compared with 2000 visits last year, which makes in total 1.5 million in one year — half of the population of Lithuania. Mr Šemeta continues, 'We have 48 points of dissemination spread throughout the country, with the intention of getting closer to the citizens. Many do not have access to the Internet, especially not in the rural areas.'

When discussing the strengths and weaknesses of the office, Mr Šemeta says that they are good in the production of statistics, but that an area to improve is the analysis of statistics. They need to train staff in order to improve their analytical skills. When talking about staff, Mr Šemeta mentions something which is typical not only for Statistics Lithuania, but for the whole civil service, which is the need to keep young staff who have a tendency to stay for only two to three years, and then go on to the private sector, which is better paid. 'We are never able to compete with the private sector. The only thing to do is to try to make the young staff give as much as possible of their knowledge while they are here.'

An independent institution

In order to see how the office is seen by the users, two surveys were launched in 2005; one on image perception and one to find out the opinion of statistics held by employees in public administration. The outcome of these surveys was very positive. 'Statistics are becoming more and more popular in the political debate. The politicians use our figures and rely on them', says Mr Šemeta. 'We have never had any political pressure, or any interference during my time. We are a very independent institution.'

We are now part of the decision-making process

Sigma also met with Daiva Norkevičienė, Head of European Affairs and International Cooperation for 11 years. 'After graduating in languages at university, and working within the environmental and meteorological sectors, I started in Statistics Lithuania and I participated in the very first steps of enlargement in 1995 when the common declaration between Eurostat and the Baltic States was signed,' Ms Norkevičienė says. 'I participated in some quite historical issues, like, for example, the reply to the first questionnaire in 1996 from the Lithuanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where it was asked to make a self-assessment of the Statistical Office. We did not know much about classifications and standards at that time.' Ms Norkevičienė participated in the delegation for the EU statistical *acquis* implementation plan, which was, according to her, very well coordinated by Eurostat. Two screenings took place; one multi-country screening in 1998, and one bilateral one in 1999. As Mr Šemeta mentioned, Chapter 12 on statistics was closed quickly, since this was one of the least problematic sectors, much assisted by the help of the Phare programme. Ms Norkevičienė continues, 'We were observers in working parties in Eurostat, through which we learnt a lot.' Not only did Eurostat contribute to this learning process, but individual Member States did too, such as Sweden, Denmark and Finland, etc. There were different kinds of assistance: financial, knowledge based and physical. Norway, for example, offered printing equipment. Finland helped to set up a library.

Today Statistics Lithuania is very much involved at the international level, for example within the Statistical Programme Committee and the European statistical system. Good cooperation relations are continuously maintained with other Member States, like Ireland, Denmark, Germany, Spain, etc. A memorandum of understanding has been signed with Statistics Netherlands. 'The biggest change since enlargement is



Algirdas Gediminas Šemeta

Algirdas Gediminas Šemeta

Algirdas Gediminas Šemeta (aged 43) graduated from Vilnius University in the Faculty of Economy and Finance in 1985.

He worked from 1985 to 1990 at the Institute of Economy and Planning as an economist and researcher. When Lithuania became independent in 1990, he was appointed Head of Subdivision at the Economic Strategy Department at the Ministry of Economy. In mid-1991, he moved over to the Prime Minister's office as a deputy Head of Division for Privatisation. In 1992, he became Head of the Securities and Exchange Commission. The initial development of the capital market was under his responsibility. In 1997, he turned to politics and was Minister for Finance until mid-1999. After a short time in the private sector, Mr Šemeta was asked by the Prime Minister to join the civil service again. He became Government Secretary, coordinating all the civil service in Lithuania. In September 2001, he was appointed Director-General of Statistics Lithuania. An interesting fact on the private side is that Mr Šemeta was a champion gymnast in Lithuania in the late 1970s to early 1980s.

that we are no longer observers, we are now part of the decision-making process,' says Ms Norkevičienė. 'After having received assistance for a long time, it is now our turn to give assistance to other countries needing this, for example Croatia, Albania and the CIS countries.'

Author: Louise Corselli-Nordblad
Media Support Team Eurostat



Daiva Norkevičienė

Lithuania

Lithuania is situated in the north of Europe, by the Baltic Sea. It borders Latvia to the north, Belarus to the east and south, and Poland and Kaliningrad (part of the Russian Federation) to the south-west. It is the biggest country among the three Baltic States; it is twice the size of the Netherlands. It has 3.4 million inhabitants and around 1 million Lithuanians live abroad.

The Lithuanian State emerged in 1240. In the 14th century, Lithuania was a Grand Duchy which expanded from the Baltic to the Black Sea. In the 18th century, Lithuania was invaded by Russian and Swedish troops and, in 1795, Lithuania was annexed by Russia. This lasted until the end of the First World War. On 16 February 1918, the State of Lithuania was restored. This day is now a national holiday in Lithuania. After the outbreak of the Second World War, Lithuania was occupied by Soviet troops, an occupation which lasted until 11 March 1990. Lithuania was the first Baltic State to restore independence.

A young statistician setting up new statistical fields



Dr Gediminas Samuolis

Sigma also got a chance to talk to Dr Gediminas Samuolis in order to find out what a young statistician thinks about the Statistical Office. Gediminas Samuolis started in 1996. At that time he was still studying for his master's degree at the Economics Faculty of Vilnius University. The reason why Gediminas Samuolis started at Statistics Lithuania was the subject of his master's thesis: FDI — foreign direct investment. Since Statistics Lithuania was just at that time setting up their FDI statistics, what was more natural than to offer Gediminas Samuolis a job? He worked with FDI until 2000.

After the FDI statistics were up and running, it was time for Gediminas Samuolis to find a new challenge, to set up a new field within the continuously developing information society.

Has the job met your expectations?

'It has, since I get a chance to develop new fields and to exercise my knowledge and put it into practice. With FDI, I started from scratch, and within the information society there is a continuous development. Each year more indicators are developed, my work consists mostly in coordinating these indicators and the theoretical work behind them. This gives me a good chance to develop myself and to meet people from other coun-

tries and share their experience. I am a member of the Working Group Information Society at Eurostat.'

How do you see [your] future in the Statistical Office?

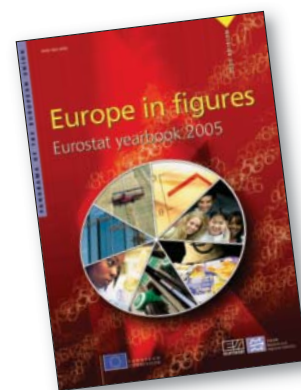
'The expansion of information society statistics not only in Lithuania, but in the whole world is good for my personal career. There are plans to expand information society statistics within the office and to create a separate unit. That is a challenge for me. Otherwise, another challenge is to start a new project from scratch, who knows which field that would be...'

Author: Louise Corselli-Nordblad
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