

EUROSTAT'S INTERNAL DISSEMINATION ERROR MANAGEMENT POLICY

On 16th December 2014, Eurostat adopted a new policy on the management of errors in disseminated data. This policy describes how and in which circumstances errors in the data are corrected and guarantees that users are informed about such non-scheduled revisions in an appropriate way. The policy covers significance levels for errors' correction, commitment to correct significant errors as soon as possible, communication aspects and the approach for correction of past errors. The policy was revised in July 2020.

Eurostat's internal policy on error management aims to give guidance on the definition of terms, types of errors and their treatment, communication between the services concerned, information to users and reporting to management. It provides a common framework for the management of errors applicable to all statistical domains. Moreover, it aims to contribute to the continuous improvement of the quality of Eurostat's processes and products.

The policy includes:

- The criteria used to decide the significance of the error and its treatment;
- The guidelines on how to inform users about non-scheduled revisions (corrections) and their underlying causes.

The implementation of the policy is supported by a Eurostat internal procedure, internal communication mechanisms and reporting template supporting the implementation of the policy. The correction of errors forms part of non-scheduled data revisions which are, by definition, not announced in advance because they are a result of unforeseeable events. The term "non-scheduled" does not refer to the cause of the revision but to the timing. Non-scheduled revisions are not pre-announced or reflected in dissemination plans.

For the sake of the policy's clarity, the following definitions are used:

Statistical data are numerical data representing the size of the phenomenon studied. Statistical data are often accompanied by or disseminated with statistical information, like metadata, statistical symbols, comments, tables, charts, figures, definitions, methodological explanations and other texts explaining the content and meaning of the statistical data. Such erroneous statistical information should also be corrected as appropriate. This policy however focuses on the treatment of errors in disseminated statistical data.

- An error is defined as the dissemination to users of incorrect statistical data due to a handling error or input of wrong data or missing data. Errors can be spotted in recently released statistical data (recent data) as well as in previously disseminated statistical data (past data). The publication of statistical data which should not have occurred in case of breach of statistical confidentiality or dissemination of data under embargo is also considered as an error.
- Revisions are broadly defined as any change in a value of statistical data released to the public. Data are generally revised in order to incorporate new improved information. Therefore, revisions are inherent to statistical production, for example when reporting promptly a phenomenon knowing that some relevant information is still outstanding and will be available at a later stage.
- Relation between an error and a revision: An error in disseminated statistical data (dissemination of wrong data) which needs to be corrected in accordance with this error management policy will most likely trigger a non-scheduled data revision as, in most cases, error corrections cannot be announced.
- Errors of a systemic nature: Errors can be an isolated phenomenon or be of a systemic nature. Errors of a systemic nature occur systematically when certain circumstances are met during the production process. In this case, a reflection should be undertaken to identify whether changes or improvements to the process itself are required.

The treatment of an error is determined by its level of significance. A significant error in disseminated statistical data is one of a nature potentially damaging to Eurostat's reputation by affecting the trust of users of European statistics. These errors are treated with high priority. In order to distinguish between significant and less significant errors, the following criteria apply. However, it should be noted that both significant and less significant errors are to be corrected, the difference lying in the urgency for correction.

Significant errors are identified as follows:

- Errors in disseminated highly market sensitive statistical data;
- Errors in headline indicators or headline figures in news releases;
- Errors in other parts of news releases following an agreement between the services concerned;
- Errors in any other disseminated statistical data impacting the reputation of Eurostat or triggering substantiated major complaints from users.
- Dissemination of confidential statistical data;
- Break of embargo by Eurostat.

Less significant errors cover all other errors in data and are defined as follows:

- Errors in statistical data not directly impacting on the reputation of Eurostat or triggering major complaints from users. It also includes errors in past data.

Significant errors detected immediately after their release are corrected without delay. For errors in news releases, the error is corrected immediately via an emergency procedure. Other significant errors are corrected at the latest at the next regular dissemination (11 a.m. or 11 p.m.), provided that the amended data is available in case the error(s) originate(s) from a Member State.

In case of dissemination of confidential or dissemination of data under embargo, the data is withdrawn without delay.

Although the correction of less significant errors can be assigned a lower level of priority, the error should nevertheless be corrected within the shortest possible time. Such errors should be corrected within 30 working days at the latest.

In the case of an error being notified by an external user, even if it is not possible to correct the error immediately, the user is kept informed. In the case of news releases that need correction in headline indicators or figures, all the original recipients (journalists, agencies and the spokesperson responsible for Eurostat) are contacted directly. A revised version of the news release including an explanation of the error is put on the website and marked as "revised".