

Statistics in development cooperation - regional statistical initiatives

Statistics Explained

This article is part of a [set of background articles](#) providing an '*outline of knowledge*' of international statistical cooperation between the [European Union \(EU\)](#) and developing countries, for non-statisticians needing to deal with statistics in development programmes and projects. The outline serves as an entry point and introduction to the much more detailed Eurostat publication 'Guide to statistics in European Commission development cooperation', downloadable in [PDF format](#) in English, French and Spanish (further down referred to as '*the Guide*').

Many developing countries have weak statistical systems and mechanisms for measuring results. Good, reliable statistics are essential for measuring progress in reaching development goals and provide essential information about the effectiveness of policies and programmes. They help governments improve their policies and to be transparent and accountable about the delivery of development results. Reliable statistics are a key element towards better measurement, monitoring and management of the results of [development assistance](#).

Regional integration requires comparable statistics to inform common regional policies. The regional statistical capacity approach provides economies of scale and good results in terms of harmonisation, comparability and exchange of methods and data. [PARIS21](#) has developed an approach to develop and implement a regional strategy for the development of statistics (RSDS). It should ensure that the statistics from the national statistical systems (NSSs) are comparable, by applying international standards and good practices. The RSDS aims at facilitating the development of a regional statistical system, as well as data with a strictly regional dimension. The RSDS is complementary to the [National Strategies for the Development of Statistics \(NSDS\)](#) processes, and vice versa. The RSDS action plan must be agreed between regional authorities and the countries involved.

Statistics and regional cooperation - the European statistical system experience

Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union, provides statistics at European level that enable comparisons between countries and regions. Eurostat's key role is to supply statistics to other [European Commission](#) Directorates-General (DGs) and other [European institutions](#) with data so they can define, implement and analyse EU policies. Eurostat offers a whole range of important and interesting data that governments, businesses, the education sector, journalists and the public can use for their work and daily life.

Eurostat processes and publishes comparable statistical information at European level. The office tries to arrive at a common statistical 'language' that embraces concepts, methods, structures and technical standards. Eurostat does not collect data. This is done in [Member States](#) by their statistical authorities. They verify and analyse national data and send them to Eurostat. Eurostat consolidates the data and ensures they are comparable, using harmonized methodology.

The European statistical system 'ESS' functions as a network in which Eurostat's role is to lead the way in the harmonization of statistics in close cooperation with the national statistical authorities of the Member States. ESS work concentrates mainly on EU policy areas - but, with the extension of EU policies, harmonization has been extended to nearly all statistical fields.

More than 50 years were needed to build the European statistical system as we know it. This construction is a world premiere and developing areas can benefit from the experience of Eurostat both in success stories and failures.

The interests and limits for regional statistical activities in developing regions

Over the past 20 years, there has been an increasing emergence of regional integration processes in the developing zones, which deploy statistical activities. Similarly, other international actors develop statistical activities in their geographic area of competence.

There is a wide range of reasons for developing statistical activities at regional level: a common (transnational) interest, trade development, economies of scale, the comparative advantage of the regional level, advocacy at the regional level.

Regional organisations are heterogeneous and bound by their mandate, which defines their scope of competence. The need for statistics and statistical activities by regional organisations is driven by their strategy, their needs for policy formulation, analysis and implementation, monitoring and evaluation of their programmes. There is no single typology of statistical services at regional level: the range of statistical services varies from a very small entity within a directorate to a large separate entity.

Guide examples and practical information

Very often, regional organisations consolidate the data collected and analysed by the Member States, for comparability purposes. Thus, the scope of regional statistics aims rather at ensuring that the Member States work in a coordinated manner towards commonly agreed goals.

- B.2.4.2 *Regional organisations*
- Box 2.12: *Selected regional organisations with statistical activities*
- Box 2.13: *A regional body with an exclusively statistical purpose: Afristat*
- Box 2.14: *Example of a regional organisations with a statistics component: The West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA)*

Factors which influence regional support programmes

The regional dimension raises some special issues to take into account throughout the regional project cycle: the mandate of the institution, the capacity of the institution to animate a network of national and international stakeholders, the possible existence of a strategy for statistics at regional or at continental level, the expected level of integration and the related statistics needed.

The [World Bank](#)'s Independent Evaluation Group (IEG) proposes five key determinants for the success of a regional support programme. These determinants could be extended to statistical regional projects:

- Strong country commitment to regional cooperation requires attention to the political economy of relations among countries to gain their acceptance of the obligations involved in acting cooperatively;
- The scope of objectives has to match national and regional capacities for regional programs to deal effectively with the complex coordination challenges in the implementation of their activities;
- Clear delineation and coordination of the roles of national and regional institutions has proved crucial to the implementation of program activities and the sustainability of outcomes (principle of subsidiarity...);
- Accountable governance arrangements take time to establish but are essential to gaining country ownership;
- Planning for sustainability of program outcomes after external support ends has not been done consistently across regional programs.

Statistical projects at regional level

Main objectives of regional statistical programmes and projects are:

- Providing comparable data of good quality on member states of the regional organisation;
- Capacity building in statistical partner organisations;
- Strengthening of regional and sub-regional organisations;
- Evaluation of the impact of regional policies;
- Regional statistics to be used for evidence based decision making, e.g. on regional trade and/or economic development;
- Advise policy makers on interpreting statistics relevant for regional policies.

The **key activities** typically include one or more of the following:

- Strengthening coordination and management of regional statistics, including the regional legal framework;
- Building and strengthening regional statistical infrastructure, including harmonisation of definitions and classifications and development of databases;
- Investment in appropriate infrastructure, especially information and communication technology;
- Support for regional data collection activities and for the compilation of harmonized regional statistics;
- Supporting data dissemination;
- Human resource development (training).

The [Evaluation of the Commission support for statistics in third countries](#) (2007) indicates that the European Commission reserves a 25% share of resources, in large projects and non-statistical sector programmes, for institutional development for collecting and [processing](#) of the necessary information to monitor and evaluate the programme.

Guide examples and practical information

- C.8.6 *Regional and sub-regional (multi-country) projects*
- Box 8.5: *Example: Developing a Regional Strategy for the Development of Statistics for Central America*
- Box 8.6: *Example: Regional study on progress towards the MDGs in the Caribbean*
- Box 8.7: *Example: Improved comparability of Gross Domestic Product estimates in AFRISTAT countries*
- Box 8.8: *Example: Practical issues in a region-wide statistical data collection – the UEMOA harmonised price index*
- Box 8.9: *Examples: Regional harmonisation of methodologies and tools – PARSTAT 1-2-3 surveys and COMESA statistical software support and training*
- Box 8.10: *Example: Development of the Harmonized Consumer Price Index for the COMESA region*

Core principles to be considered for a regional statistical project

- User relevance
- Efficiency of a regional versus a national approach
- [Advocacy](#) and commitment of regional and national decision-makers
- Integration in and consistency with general development strategies at regional and national level
- [Coordination](#) strategy
- Subsidiarity (only activities that cannot be carried out effectively at national level should be carried out at regional level)
- [Capacity building](#) (including training and IT infrastructure)
- Sustainability of results

The PARIS21 Regional strategy for the development of statistics approach

PARIS21 has developed an approach to develop and implement an RSDS. The objective of an RSDS is to prepare an action plan that will meet the information needs of regional integration policies. It should ensure that the statistics from the NSSs are comparable, by applying international standards and good practices. The RSDS aims at facilitating the development of a regional statistical system, as well as data with a strictly regional dimension.

The RSDS is complementary to the national NSDS processes, and vice versa; while NSDSs should include activities to produce data needed at regional level, the RSDS recognise the constraints and limitations at national level and national needs in statistical capacity development.

The RSDS action plan must be agreed between regional authorities and the countries involved.

Success factors for the RSDS approach are:

- political commitment at highest regional and national levels;
- constructive dialogue between data producers and users;
- availability of required resources;
- coordination with technical and financial partners.

The PARIS21 secretariat acts as a facilitator in the RSDS process, supporting regional bodies in their strategy design, implementation and monitoring. It encourages dialogue at regional level and provides advice on statistical legislation and training. It also shares experiences from other regions. The PARIS21 approach is presented in brief in the booklet '[The RSDS Approach in a Nutshell](#)' .

Other articles

- [International statistical cooperation](#) (online publication)
- [Statistics in development cooperation](#) (online publication to which this article belongs)

Dedicated section

- [International statistical cooperation](#)

Publications

- [Guide to Statistics in European Commission Development Co-operation](#)

External links

- **AfDB, AUC, UNECA** : [Strategy for the Harmonization of Statistics in Africa \(SHaSA\)](#)
- **AfDB, UNECA, World Bank, PARIS21** : [Reference Regional Strategic Framework for Statistical Capacity Building in Africa \(RRSF\)](#)
- **African Centre for Statistics** : [The challenges of monitoring and reporting on the Millennium Development Goals in Africa by 2015 and beyond](#)
- **AFRISTAT** : [Besoin d'information statistique et fiabilisation des dispositifs de production de données, notamment de conjoncture dans les pays de l'UEMOA \(The need for statistical information and reliability of data production systems, especially for short term economic data, in UEMOA countries\)](#)
- **ESCAP** : [MDG monitoring at regional level](#)

- **European Commission** Communication COM(2008) 604: [Regional integration for development in ACP countries](#)
- **European Court of Auditors** : [Effectiveness of EDF support for Regional Economic Integration in East Africa and West Africa](#)
- **PARIS21** : [The RSDS Approach In A Nutshell](#)
- **UN** Coordinating Committee for Statistical Activities' Task Team on Coordination at the Sub-regional Level: [Coordination of statistical capacity building programs at the sub-regional level \(2008\)](#)
- **UNDP** : [Regional Report on the Achievement of the MDGs in the Caribbean community](#)
- **World Bank** 's Independent Evaluation Group: [The Development Potential of Regional Programs – An Evaluation of World Bank Support of Multicountry Operations](#)