

Statistics in focus

INDUSTRY, TRADE AND SERVICES

THEME 4 – 14/2000

Contents

What are short-term business statistics?.....	1
Focus on the implementation of the short-term statistics Regulation (STS-R)	4
Plans and developments	5
Focus on STS dissemination ...	6

Short-term business statistics and their dissemination

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For many years *Statistic in Focus* have been produced each month with the latest developments in short-term business statistics (STS), in particular for the index of production and producer price indices. This special edition looks behind the data to examine briefly why and how these indices are produced. It then looks in more detail at the implementation of the short-term statistics Regulation (STS-R) and the dissemination of STS.

What are short-term business statistics?

Eurostat publishes a wide range of statistics on a short-term basis, by which we mean statistics compiled more frequently than once a year. Alongside the headline catching inflation and unemployment rates, Eurostat produces short-term business statistics whose principal aim is to assist in the analysis of the business cycle - indispensable for decision-makers in business or in government, investors and central bankers, as well as consumers.

Indicator	NACE coverage	Freq.	Form	Requested delays
Production	Sections C and D; groups 40.1 and 40.2	monthly	w.d.a.	1 month & 15 days
Turnover, domestic and non-domestic	Sections C and D	monthly	gross	2 months
New orders, domestic and non-domestic	Divisions 17, 18, 21, 24, 27-35	monthly	gross	1 month & 20 days
Persons employed	Sections C, D and E	quarterly	gross	3 months
Hours worked	Sections C, D and E	quarterly	gross	3 months
Wages and salaries	Sections C, D and E	quarterly	gross	3 months
Output prices, domestic and non-domestic	Sections C, D and E except for 6 groups	monthly	gross	1 month & 15 days

Note: the delays indicated may be extended for smaller Member States

C: mining and quarrying
D: manufacturing
E: electricity, gas and water
17: textiles
18: wearing apparel; dressing and dyeing of fur

40.1: electricity
40.2: manufacture & distribution of gas
21: pulp, paper and paper products
24: chemicals and chemical products
27-35: basic metals; machinery; electrical, optical, transport & other equipment



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Table 1: EU industrial short-term indicators - STS-R requirements
See box 1 (page 2) for an explanation of the forms

For STS this normally means compiling monthly or quarterly data to show a rapid assessment of the economic situation at an aggregated level and a more detailed analysis providing information on short-term events in particular activities. Indices are compiled for output, orders, prices and labour input; a summary of the EU indicators is shown in tables 1, 2 and 3.

Whereas annual statistics, such as structural business statistics, have detail, comprehensiveness and accuracy as priorities, STS priority and advantage is their speed, with the main STS indices disseminated within 2-3 months after the period to which they refer.

Why do we have STS?

The importance of STS has grown in recent years with the development of the Single European Market and the progressive implementation of Monetary Union. These developments, as well as structural changes in the importance of the service sector, increased the pressure on the development of a new system of short-term business statistics which saw the adoption in May 1998 of the STS-R, replacing the previous legal framework dating from the 1970s.

What do STS show?

The indicators that were chosen for inclusion in the STS-R serve for a particular type of analysis.

Indicator	NACE/CC coverage	Freq.	Form	Requested delays
Production: building; civil engineering	Section F	quarterly	w.d.a.	2 months
New orders: building; civil engineering	Groups 45.1 & 45.2	quarterly	gross	3 months
Persons employed	Section F	quarterly	gross	3 months
Hours worked	Section F	quarterly	gross	3 months
Wages and salaries	Section F	quarterly	gross	3 months
Construction costs: material; labour costs	New residential buildings	quarterly	gross	3 months
Permits: number of dwellings; size	New residential buildings	quarterly	gross	3 months

Note: the delays indicated may be extended for smaller Member States

F: construction
45.1: site preparation
45.2 building of complete constructions or parts thereof; civil engineering

Table 2: EU short-term indicators in construction STS-R requirements
See box 1 for an explanation of the forms

Indicator	NACE coverage	Freq.	Form	Requested delays
Turnover	Sections G, H and I; Divisions 72 and 74	monthly	gross; w.d.a.	2 months
Persons employed	Sections G, H and I; Divisions 72 and 74	quarterly	gross	3 months
Deflator of sales	Division 52	monthly	gross; w.d.a.	2 months

Note: the delays indicated may be extended for smaller Member States

G: wholesale & retail trade; repair of motor vehicles & cycles, personal & household goods
H: hotels and restaurants
I: transport, storage and communication
52: retail trade
72: computer & related activities
74: other business activities

Table 3: EU short-term indicators in services STS-R requirements
See box 1 for an explanation of the forms

What are "forms" in the context of STS?

Gross: the most basic index. For example, if turnover increases by 5% over a quarter in absolute figures, the gross index also increases by 5%.

w.d.a. - working day adjusted: this adjustment, often used for the production index, takes account of the varying number of working days in each reference period - it effectively smoothes out calendar effects. A special case is the "Easter effect" as this holiday period may fall in either March or April (Easter Sunday falls March 22nd to April 25th).

s.a. - seasonal adjustment: this adjustment accounts for the effect of climatic and institutional events that repeat more or less regularly each year (for example: summer holidays or Christmas sales).

Trend: the trend is a variation over a long period of years, generally associated with the structural causes of the phenomenon being studied.

The production indices aim to show the evolution of value added and often do this by way of approximations based on output measures. The turnover index, particularly important in retail trade and in other services, aims to show the evolution of the market for goods and services. New orders indices aim to show future demand for products and services as an indication of future production.

The employment and wages/salaries indices aim to show developments in the level and costs of employment while the hours worked index relates to the volume of work done.

Output price indices aim to measure the development of transaction prices. In the construction industry the equivalent component costs indices (material costs and labour costs) show the price developments of production factors used in that industry. Finally the building permit indices aim to show the future development of construction activity.

Harmonisation and data treatment - Eurostat's role in European STS

Eurostat's role in short-term business statistics, like its role in most statistical domains, is one of harmonisation and data treatment. The legal basis mentioned above is only one small piece in the process of harmonisation: it provides some basic rules which are legally binding but, on their own, provide only a very small step towards comparable statistics. The STS-R is supplemented by a methodological manual, foreseen in the Regulation

itself, which provides further guidance on the compilation of short-term indicators. Whilst hard to imagine at the present time, the aim is one day to have short-term statistics for all members of the euro-zone and possibly the EU that are as harmonised and comparable as those within an individual Member State today. Eurostat encourages the adoption of practices that will lead to greater comparability through the drafting and refinement of standards relating for example to the definitions of indicators and methods of seasonal adjustment. In some cases, where regarded as necessary and sufficient consensus has been achieved, these standards may become legally binding. Many methodological specialists contribute actively in the preparation of these standards, representing the

point of view of businesses (the main suppliers of raw data), statisticians and users.

An auxiliary activity undertaken by Eurostat is the documentation of national practices, whereby Eurostat disseminates reports on data production methods for each of the indicators in all of the Member States. This project, known as STS Sources, is currently being updated and expanded from the indicators in industrial and construction activities (documented during the second half of the 1990s) to include also the indicators in services.

The second essential part of Eurostat's work is data treatment and the compilation of short-term statistics beyond the national ones supplied by each Member State - aggregation. After receiving data from Member States, approximately 1.5 months after the end of the reference period for monthly data and after 3 months for quarterly data, the Eurostat staff follow a production chain that leads to the compilation of totals; EU-15 for the EU as a whole and EUR-11 for the euro-zone.

Raw data may be received either as absolute figures or already in the form of indices. In the case that data is received as absolute figures the pre-treatment involves conversion from national currencies (if relevant) to euro and the creation of an index on a common base year which is currently 1995 = 100. If aggregated levels of the activity classification, such as main industrial groupings (see box), have not been provided these are calculated using weights

What are MIGs?

MIGs stands for Main Industrial Groupings. This term is being replaced by the term "aggregate classifications". As these two names imply these classifications contain very few headings and are useful for business cycle analysis at an aggregated level. Many different definitions of these MIGs exist but a consensus is forming that at least 5 headings should be separately identified:

- energy;
- intermediate goods;
- capital goods;
- consumer durables;
- non durable consumer goods.

Box 2: Aggregate classifications

for each branch or activity. The EU and euro-zone aggregates are then produced using weights for each Member State taken from the base year.

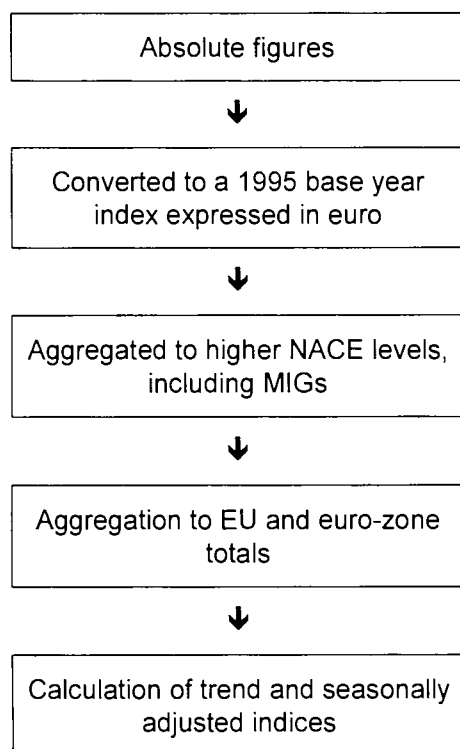


Figure 1: simplified chain of treatment

Many Member States provide seasonally adjusted (s.a.) or trend series. For those that do not, and for the EU-15 and EUR-11 aggregates Eurostat adjusts the gross or w.d.a. forms to these supplementary forms as appropriate. Figure 1 shows a simplified scheme of this production chain.

In practice, this apparently simple procedure, is complicated by

missing data. The most common reasons for this are late delivery or simply that a Member States does not compile the data. There may also be ruptures in time series where data is not available for a transitory period. In some of these cases Eurostat can use estimation techniques to provide users with the series required. For example, in order to produce the EU and euro-zone indices very quickly, Eurostat estimates these aggregate indices as soon as data have been transmitted by a sufficient number of Member States that a threshold of 60% of the activity has been surpassed. These estimates are refined and revised as a larger proportion of data becomes available over time.

Focus on the implementation of the short-term statistics Regulation (STS-R)

The STS-R entered into force in June 1998. It includes a timetable for a progressive implementation by all Member States to be completed during 2002. The main achievements of a successful implementation of the STS-R will be a more rapid availability of these indices for more Member States than before with the coverage of some of the indicators expanded to the tertiary sector.

A major event since the adoption of the STS-R has been the creation of the euro-zone of eleven of the

fifteen EU Member States. The common monetary policy required by this has strongly increased the need for short-term economic indicators in Europe. Consequently, the European Central Bank (ECB) has shown an increasingly keen interest in the European aggregates of the STS variables and has requested rapid improvements in quality and timeliness of existing statistics and implementation for the missing indicators/activities.

The increased political interest in short-term economic statistics is also evident in the request in July 1999 of the ECOFIN¹ committee for the full implementation of the STS-R by the end of 2001 for industry, construction and retail trade. For the other services the ECOFIN decision requested increased efforts in cyclically sensitive services.

At the time of adoption data provision by each Member State was partial in that not all of the indicators were provided in the forms and delays required and with the sectoral coverage or breakdown specified. The STS-R foresees a transition period by the end of which all Member States should have fully applied all of the compulsory provisions.

Since the adoption there has been considerable improvement in data availability and furthermore, Member States have started to develop plans for filling the remaining gaps, which in some cases are quite substantial.

¹ Ecofin Council; Economic and Financial Questions

Table 4 shows more detailed information for the two indicators in the service activities where availability varies greatly depending on the sector covered. As the ECOFIN Decision identified, this new area for European STS is clearly one that will require a lot of development and investment before indices can be calculated for the EU as a whole.

Apart from data availability, the other characteristic of interest to users is the dissemination delay.

Between December 1998 and the middle of 2000 the transmission delays for the major variables of industrial production and domestic producer prices have improved greatly. Several countries now supply the data on time or with only a short delay beyond that required by the STS-R. In some cases, there have been dramatic improvements, for example the delay for the European aggregates has been reduced from between 60 and 70 days to between 55 days.

Plans and developments

In the period 2000-2002, the STS-R implementation faces a number of important tasks. Clearly the most important is the full national implementation of all provisions of the Regulation; Eurostat will need to follow the planning and execution of implementation actions carefully. From a methodological standpoint, the most important work for Eurostat is to push forward with the preparation of implementing decisions, for example on definitions of indicators and to revise the STS methodological manual. The existing manual pre-dates the Council Regulation and needs to be expanded to cover all subjects of the Council Regulation, in particular by refining early work done on the retail trade and construction sectors.

On a more operational level two areas of work are foreseen for Eurostat during 2000:

- the revision of the weights system used to produce EU and euro-zone aggregates;
- the revision of the classification of Main Industrial Groupings based on the conclusions of a specialist task force and the subsequent implementation of the new definition in databases and publications.

It is planned to present more detailed information on both of these actions in this series of Statistics in Focus later in the year.

Concerning dissemination, Eurostat intends to introduce a new press release on new orders indicators.

NACE Rev. 1 Divisions	DK	D	F	I	L	NL	A	FIN	S	UK
Motor trades	E/T	E/T	E/T	E	T	E/T	E/T	E/T	T	T
Wholesale trade	E/T	E/T	E/T	E	T	E/T	E/T	E/T	T	T
Hotels & restaurants	E/T	E/T	E/T	E		E	E	E/T	T	T
Land transport	E/T		E/T	E		E	E	T		
Water transport	E/T		E/T	E		E	E	T		
Air transport	E/T		E/T	E		E	E	T		
Supporting transport activities	E/T		E/T	E		E	E	T		T
Post and telecommunications	E/T			E		E	E	T		T
Computer activities	T		E/T	E		E/T		E/T	T	T
Other business activities	T		E/T	E		E		E/T	T	T

E = employment; T = turnover
B, EL, E, IRL, P: no services indicators

Table 4: Member States providing services data at April 2000

Indicator	First data		EU total
	Days	Country	Days
Industrial production	35	DK, D, UK	55
Industrial turnover	35	DK, D, NL	90
Industrial new orders	35	DK, D, NL	90
Industrial employment	45	UK	90
Industrial domestic output prices	15	UK, FIN	35
Production in the construction sector	35	D	90
Employment in construction	25	DK, FIN	90
Retail turnover	30	NL	65
Retail employment	25	FIN	:

Table 5: Average delays for selected indicators (1)

(1) Quarterly data available for the third month of each quarter for production and employment in the construction sector.

Focus on STS dissemination

To state the obvious, a necessary step towards the use of statistics is to disseminate them. With short-term statistics we have already noted that their trump card lies in their speed to market and so a rapid and efficient dissemination mechanism is necessary.

Monthly Panorama of European Business - the MPEB

The main dissemination tool for STS data is the Monthly Panorama of European Business, supplemented by a monthly Statistic in Focus and press releases. The MPEB started

in January 1994 as the *Short-term supplement* to the annual Panorama of EC industry. This 60-page bimonthly publication concentrated on manufacturing industry. In 1997 the publication was renamed the *Monthly Panorama of EU Industry - the MPEI*. It was given a fresh cover and layout, gained an accompanying data diskette of business statistics, and was released on a monthly basis.

In November 1998 the publication passed 100 pages, the coverage including the service sectors for the first time and in January 1999 the publication's name changed to the *Monthly Panorama of European Business - the MPEB*. The diskette

was replaced with a CD-ROM and the length of time-series distributed increased significantly.

January 2000 saw the latest reworking with:

- a closer alignment to the provisions of the STS-R;
- wider coverage of economic activities;
- longer time series;
- growth rate presentation changed in line with practice in many Member States;
- data extracted after the 20th of the month to provide fresh EU and euro-zone estimates;
- a revision of the comparison of the EU with Japan and the USA.

Format	Content	Publication/ release date
<i>Paper</i>		
Monthly Panorama of European Business - MPEB		
Main STS dissemination product that also contains some structural business statistics 120 page publication	Analysis, tables, graphs	15th of each month
Statistics in Focus		
General series with a monthly issue dedicated to STS 8 page brochure	Brief analysis, tables, graphs	15th of each month
Press release		
General series with 3 monthly press releases dedicated to STS 4 page leaflet	Brief analysis, tables and graphs	5th, 10th and 25th of each month
<i>Off-line</i>		
MPEB CD-ROM		
Complement to the paper MPEB publication Pdf of the MPEB paper publication and MS Excel and txt files of underlying data since 1988	Analysis, tables, graphs and data	15th of each month
<i>On-line (internet)</i>		
New Cronos		
General Eurostat reference database containing most Eurostat data Dft files - can export to csv, txt and other formats Data		Weekly update
Web site, press releases		
Eurostat's web site provides information on all of Eurostat's dissemination activities and includes 3 monthly press releases dedicated to STS and an area dedicated to euro-zone indicators Html and Pdf versions of press releases	Brief analysis, tables and graphs	5th, 10th and 25th of each month

Table 6: STS dissemination methods

One of the common features from the very first *supplement* that has survived through to today's *MPEB* has been the inclusion in each edition of a special analysis of industrial or service activities, looking in greater depth at their structural and short-term developments.

The choice of sectors has rotated to cover most manufacturing industries every year. Since the change from the MPEI to the MPEB, service sectors have started to be included in this rotation as well. For 2000 the activities covered or planned are shown in Table 7.

New Cronos domains

The MPEB has developed a market over its six years but it does not, indeed can not, satisfy all needs. An analytical paper publication will never meet the needs of those who wish to take full advantage of short-term business statistics strength - the freshness of its data. The answer lies in New Cronos,

Eurostat's reference database. STS data on New Cronos is updated every week and tailor made extractions can be made by Eurostat's network of Data shops - details on the back page. These extracts can be made in various formats such as csv and txt files or the proprietary dft format of New Cronos' viewing software CUB.X.

European Business trends EBT on New Cronos

The home of STS data on New Cronos is the European Business Trends (EBT) domain of theme 4, the business statistics theme. EBT is organised along sectoral lines with separate collections for industry, construction and services. These collections contain all published STS data, including some special series such as new car registrations and generally offer detailed activity data as well as MIGs.

The series are available in various forms; the index of production for

example is calculated as a trend cycle, working day adjusted, seasonally adjusted and gross series.

For some users however EBT offers too much choice and Eurostat has developed a number of specialist domains on New Cronos combining many different types of short-term data to meet particular targeted users. These multi-source datasets can be found in theme 1 of New Cronos, the general statistics theme. The following contain limited datasets of STS data.

Domain: Euro
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7	Energy Non-energy mining and quarrying
8	Construction and real estate Distributive trades
9	Tourism Transport services
10	Financial services Business services
11	Information and audio-visual services Non-market services

Table 7: MPEB sectoral commentaries 2000

Further information:

➤ Reference publications

Title Monthly Panorama of European Business - Annual subscription
 Catalogue No KS-AM-00-000-EN-C Price EUR 162

➤ Databases

New Cronos Theme 4
 Domain EBT (European Business Trends)

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