

Statistics in focus

INDUSTRY, TRADE AND SERVICES

THEME 4 – 18/2000

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Short-term business statistics

Data collection practices

Gunter Schäfer

What is STS Sources?

STS Sources is Eurostat's methodological database containing information on how short-term business statistics are compiled in the EU Member States.

- Firstly, this document will give an overview of the product and why it exists.
- Secondly, it will discuss the contents and features of STS Sources as a database.
- Thirdly, it will describe possible extractions that can be made from the database in order to disseminate them to anybody interested in this specific area of business statistics.

Main aim of the product

STS Sources was developed in order to store methodological information from different countries in a structured and consistent manner with a view to then disseminating this information to users and other experts in the field. This facilitates the presentation of information in a fully comparable manner between countries and over time.

The database functions permit any subset of the stored information to be extracted in a variety of output formats. Once created, these output products exist independently from the database and can be further edited or, due to their media, widely disseminated.



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History

STS Sources has grown out of a project to document the data collection methods for industrial and construction short-term indicators that was carried out during the mid-1990s. Each year methodological information was collected for a subset of indicators and then published, starting with the core indicators of industrial production and producer (output) prices. This exercise was repeated over a four-year period until practically all of the indicators had been documented.

In 1998 a Council Regulation on short-term statistics (STS-R)¹ was adopted and replaced two Council Directives from 1972 and 1978. One of the main features of the STS-R was to extend short-term business statistics beyond the industrial and construction activities to also cover distribution and services. Allied to the intensification of contacts with applicant countries this provided the impetus for a re-launch of this project. It was decided to simultaneously update the information concerning the indicators for industry and construction and to expand coverage to include new indicators for retail trade and other services. Technological developments since the creation of the first database in the mid-1990s, notably the increased use of the Internet for disseminating information, led to a complete review of the techniques used for storing and disseminating this information - STS Sources was born².

Link between the product and other methodological developments within Eurostat

The development of the STS Sources database and dissemination tools has been carried out as part of a loosely co-ordinated network of methodology databases on EU business statistics. The other parts of this system that are operational today are the SBS Sources database which contains comparable information on national data collection methodology for structural business statistics and CODED, a database of concepts and definitions which is currently being extended beyond business statistics. The co-ordinated development of these databases means that some of the dissemination products of STS Sources (and SBS Sources) can be dynamically linked with the definitions available from CODED, providing a seamless integration of standard definitions and terminology with the information on national data collection techniques.

What information is stored in STS Sources?

Database features

The technical platform of STS Sources is a Microsoft Access 97 database. The methodological information in STS Sources is organised into two main categories:

1. an overview of legislation, classifications, units and registers used for short-term statistics which tend to be common across many or all indicators; this is referred to in STS Sources as the "statistical system" of the Member State;
2. information more or less specific to individual short-term indicators (sometimes information is given on a multi-indicator survey or administrative source rather than a single indicator).

¹ More information about the STS-R and its implementation is available in *Statistics in Focus* no. 14/2000 (CA-NP-00-014-EN-C) "Short-term business statistics and their dissemination".

² Existing information on national methodologies from the old database (called *Mona Lisa*) was transferred into STS Sources. It was from this basis that Member States were invited, in April 2000, to update the information for industry and construction and to extend it to distribution

and services. The information given on the current contents of the database indicates the extent to which updates have been received at the time of writing.

Top heading	with sub-headings	broken down further into
Statistical system	Institution	
	Legal basis	
	National classifications	Activity classifications Regional classification Other classifications
	Units	
	Business statistics register	General information Population coverage Record contents Updating Dissemination Planned changes to the register
	Summary of indicators	
Indicator	General information	Administrative information Summary of questionnaires
	Population coverage	
	Information collected on each unit	List and definition of variables Time span covered by data Planned changes in information collected
	Primary data collection method	
	Production of results	
	Quality	
	Dissemination	National dissemination Transmission to Eurostat and further use of the statistics

Table 1: Hierarchical tree structure of methodological sub-headings within the STS Sources database

Information is recorded for each country for one statistical system and as many different short-term indicators as relevant for that country. A time stamp (reference year) is associated with each indicator so that information can simultaneously exist in the database for multiple years for the same indicator and hence updates can be recorded as and when the national statistical authorities inform Eurostat of changes in their methods. Each of these unique combinations of indicators and years has approximately 70 methodological sub-headings assigned to them, according to a uniform hierarchical tree structure. A summary of the main headings are shown in table 1 for the unique statistical system and the multiple indicators; note that these headings are broken down into further detail in the database.

The information contained in each of the methodological sub-headings is treated by the database as a unique record or building block. Each one of these can be uniquely defined by its context:

- country;
- statistical system or name of indicator;
- year;
- hierarchical item (methodological sub-heading);
- language (as the database can store information in more than one language).

As the database has been constructed/designed in this way, information can be compared between countries and over time and can be extended to new countries and indicators, as well as being simply updated.

Variable	Indicator	B	DK	D	EL	E	F	IRL	I	L	NL	A	P	FIN	S	UK
	Statistical system	2000	2000	2000	2000	1996	2000	2000	2000	2000	2000	1999	2000	2000	1996	1999
Industry																
110	Production index	2000	2000	2000	2000	2000	2000	2000	2000	2000	2000	1999	2000	2000	2000	1999
120-122	Turnover indices	1995	2000	2000	D	D	2000	1995	2000	2000	1995	1999	2000	2000	2000	1999
130-132	Orders indices	1995	2000	2000	D	D	D	D	2000	2000	1995	1999	D	2000	2000	1999
210-230	Labour input indicators	1996	2000	2000	1998	1999	1996	2000	2000	2000	2000	1999	2000	2000	1996	1999
310-312	Output price indices	1993	2000	2000	2000	2000	2000	2000	2000	2000	2000	1999	2000	2000	1994	1999
Construction																
110-116	Production indices	2000	2000	2000	D	2000	2000	D	2000	2000		1999	D	2000	D	1999
130-136	New orders received		D	2000	D	2000	D		D	2000	2000	1999	D	2000	D	1999
210-230	Labour input indicators		2000	2000	1998	1999			D	2000	2000	1999	D	2000	D	1999
310-322	Output prices or costs	1996	2000	2000	2000	2000	1994	1994	2000	2000	1994	1999	D	2000	2000	1999
411/412	Building permits		2000	2000	D	1999		1994	2000			D	D	2000	2000	
Retail trade																
120/123	Turnover indices		2000	2000	2000	2000			1999		2000	1999	2000	2000	D	1999
210/211	Employment indices		2000	2000	1998	2000			1999	D	2000	1999	2000	2000	D	1999
Other services																
120	Turnover indices		2000	2000	D	D			D	D	2000	1999	2000	2000		1999
210/211	Employment indices		2000	2000	1998	D			2000	D	2000	1999	2000	2000	D	1999

Table 2: Coverage of indicators by economic activity

Source: Eurostat (STS Sources database)

Note: the table displays for each (group of) indicator(s) the latest available year of methodology; D = derogation granted for the compilation of the indicator and hence no methodology available; blank cell = no information currently provided (as of 18/9/2000 - information expected soon); for labour input indicators some or all of the following indicators are covered: employment indices, hours worked, wages and salaries.

Country and short-term indicator coverage

Information on the basic tools used for short-term business statistics (the "statistical system" part of STS Sources) is available for most EU Member States for 1999 or 2000. For the remaining Member States older information is available but is somewhat incomplete as it is based on information collected before the STS Sources project was started and hence has less detail in certain areas.

Table 2 lists the short-term indicators for which methodological information is available by Member State. The reference years for which this information exists are given in the table, grouped by activity. As can be seen nearly all of the reports have been updated recently. As with the information on the statistical system the updates for the years 1998 to 2000 tend to be more complete than the earlier ones. Eurostat will regularly ask the Member States to update this information, probably on an annual basis during the implementation phase of the STS-R.

Language coverage

The STS Sources database was designed to store and extract methodological information in any number of languages. However, all content is currently available only in English.

How is information disseminated and where is it available?

An important design goal of the STS Sources database was the possibility to generate multiple output formats, depending upon the needs of the end user. As such it is possible using the database interface to extract tailor-made information for a user-driven selection of countries and years. Once generated these extractions exist independently from the database itself and can be made available as separate products.

Output types that can be generated from STS Sources

There are two different output formats available:

- MS Word output;
- HTML output.

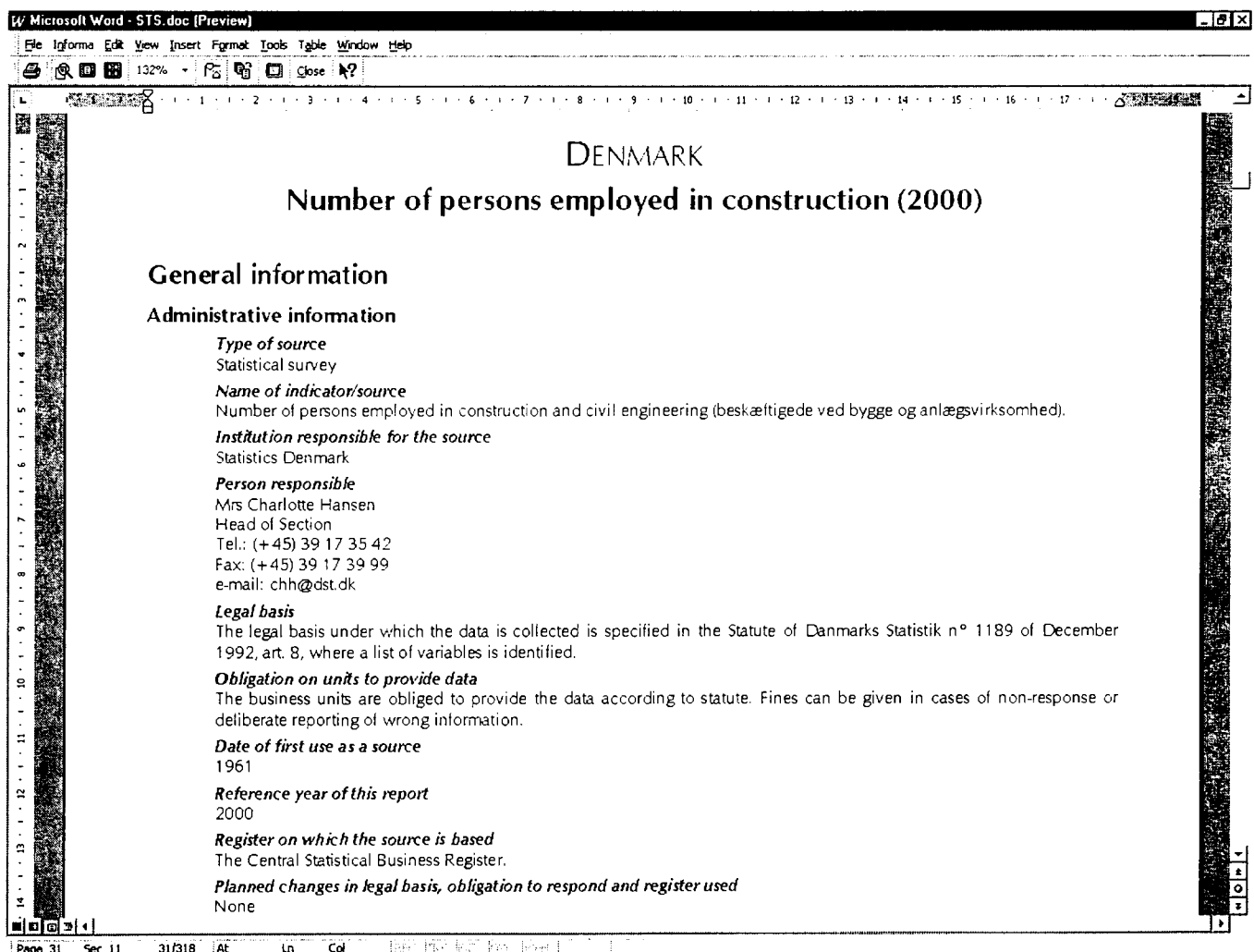
In addition, the MS Word output can be converted easily and conveniently to other text formats, for example PDF.

Word documents

The STS Sources database is capable of producing a document in Microsoft Word 97 format ready for printing and duplication. As well as the actual contents of the database, this file also contains a front page and a credits page. The file is fully

formatted with basic features that could be expected from a methodological reference work: headers and footers identifying the countries and indicators documented, page numbering, an auto-generated table of contents and text formatting.

Prior to generating an extraction, a selection can be made of the database's contents to tailor the resulting MS Word document to specific needs. It is possible to generate output for any selection of countries, indicators and years. In addition, the extraction can cover a selection or all of the hierarchical items (methodological sub-headings) that were used in structuring the information. An example screenshot is shown below:



PDF documents

Once an MS Word output has been created, it can be converted easily into the "Portable Document Format" (PDF) using Adobe's Acrobat software. The resulting platform-independent PDF document can then be distributed to be used with Adobe's Acrobat Reader (available free of charge) that runs on almost any computer³. The benefit of this solution is that the end user does not require a copy of the database software or the word processing software in order to read the document, whilst the document can also be read on a variety of computer platforms. Another advantage of the PDF format is that the file contents and format cannot inadvertently be changed after its generation. Because of this, the author retains greater control over the contents and layout of the document.

Eurostat will distribute PDF documents in electronic format as well as printed reports subject to demand. Interested parties should contact the official responsible for European short-term business statistics Gunter Schäfer or refer to the Commission's Business Methods web site (freely accessible at the time of writing).

HTML interface/product

This output choice results in the creation of a complete HTML product that integrates the methodological information on national data collection practices with fixed background information such as the STS-R, other relevant EU statistical Regulations, the NACE Rev. 1 classification of economic activities and the NUTS classification, as well as a glossary of terms⁴. All this information is accessible through a user interface featuring some standard navigational features as well as a tailor-made, collapsible, tree to browse through the various levels of the methodological sub-headings. One of the main advantages of the HTML product is that it allows users to view information for either one country/source combination at a time or two of them in a side-by-side view. Hence comparisons can be made of the compilation practices used for two different indicators for the same country or between two different countries. Furthermore, it is possible to insert hyperlinks on individual terms which call up on-screen explanations from the aforementioned glossary.

The HTML output of the database can be customised in a similar fashion to the MS Word output, by selecting any combination of countries and indicators prior to output generation. For each of these combinations it is possible to select the particular year desired (normally the latest year for which the methodological information is available) as well as all or only some of the methodological sub-headings.

Since technically the HTML output is a set of (several hundred) HTML and ancillary files (images mainly) it only requires a recent Internet (WWW) browser to use it. Without any adaptations, the set of files can be shared across an Intranet or the Internet. Furthermore, it can be disseminated via a CD-ROM as a stand-alone application.

Eurostat has produced such a CD-ROM, with the title "Short-term Statistics - National Methodologies". Specialist users working intensively with the information may receive a copy of this CD-ROM directly from Eurostat (again contact Gunter Schäfer) or consult the Business Methods web site at the address given at the end of the text. The next page shows a screenshot of a two-country view from the CD-ROM product.

The Business Methods web site referred to in this Statistics in Focus can be found at the following address:

http://forum.europa.eu.int/Public/irc/dsis/bmethods/info/data/new/nat_meths.html

Taylor-made selections of methodological information may be requested from Gunter Schäfer, tel: +352 4301-33566; fax: +352 4301-34359; e-mail: gunter.schaefer@cec.eu.int

³ In fact, the reader software is likely to be already installed on most modern computers.

⁴ The latest version of this glossary is made available by Eurostat's "Concepts and Definitions Database" (CODED) which contains a module to generate the glossary in the format required for the STS Sources output.

Box 1: Availability of STS methodological information

Short-term Statistics / National Methodologies - Microsoft Internet Explorer

File Edit View Go Favorites Help

Address <I:\STS Sources\HTML\en\msources.htm> Links

Home Help Tree Info

Country: DK Source: Construction employment Country: A Source: Industrial production index

Introduction

- STATISTICAL SYSTEM
- NAT. DATA SOURCE(S)
 - General information
 - Population coverage
 - Information collected
 - Collection method
 - Production of results
 - Quality
 - Dissemination

Primary data collection method

Data collection media

Data is collected by postal questionnaires.

Timetable of data collection

Questionnaires are posted to the reporting units 5 days before the Wednesday reference date with a due date of reply 2 weeks later. Data collection is normally closed 10 weeks after the reference Wednesday.

Sample or census

Stratified sample survey. This includes enterprises having their main activity in Section F of NACE Rev. 1 and other construction KAUs belonging to enterprises with their main activity outside of Section F.

Criteria for stratification

Characteristics used for stratification are the NACE Rev. 1 activity and employment.

Threshold values and percentages

There are approximately 22,650 enterprises in the reference population with 5 or more persons employed. The sample includes approximately 3,200 enterprises, which covers around 65% of the total number of persons employed. The sample rates are as follows:

Persons employed	Population	Sample size	Sample rate
0-9	35 100	0	0%
10-14	2 850	2 250	79%
15-19	2 230	1 900	85%
20 and more	6 660	6 660	100%

Response rate

The response rate is 96% 90 days after the end of reference. When the final index is compiled it is around 99.9%.

Actions to speed up or increase the rate of response

10,300 single-establishment enterprises (about 500 multi-establishment-enterprises) and about 1,600 establishments of multi-establishment-enterprises carrying out a principal activity within the Sections C to F of NACE Rev. 1.

Criteria for stratification

90% of the national production at NACE Rev. 1 Class and employment size classes (10-14, 15-19, 20+).

Threshold values and percentages

There are approximately 6,600 enterprises in the sample with more than 20 persons employed and about 4,200 enterprises with between 10 and 19 persons employed. Approximately 13,000 establishments are involved for the calculation of the production index. The sampling rates for enterprises are as follows:

Number of persons employed Sample rate in terms of employed persons

Local intranet zone

Further information:

Databases

New Cronos Theme 4

Domain EBT (European Business Trends)

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