Mind the gap - What do users expect and what do we offer in regional and urban statistics

Teodora Brandmüller (Teodora.BRANDMUELLER@ec.europa.eu)[[1]](#footnote-1), Oliver Müller (Oliver.MUELLER@ec.europa.eu)1

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# Introduction

Eurostat's mission is to provide high-quality statistics for Europe. Subnational data can increase the understanding of the diversity that exists within Member States and across the European Union. Eurostat offers a wide range of regional, city and typology based statistics to show the complex picture what is happening at a more detailed geographical level within Europe. One of the principles of the European Statistics Code of Practice is Relevance: European statistics meet the need of users. [1] This paper evaluates to which extent the Eurostat offer in the domain of subnational statistics meets the user needs and how it could be improved.

# Methods

As a part of the ESS.VIP.DIGICOM "User profiling of European statistics users" project [2] five personas have been identified as a representative of Eurostat's larger user base. Personas are fictitious but realistic representations of archetypes of users. From these five personas two have been selected and adapted to assess regional and urban statistics:

* Analytical advanced user
* Visually oriented intermediate user

The assessment focuses on the following questions:

* What do users need?
* What does Eurostat offer?
* To what extent do we fulfil expectations?
* How could we improve further?

The first question has been answered partially following the findings of the user profiling. To complement those findings and in order to answer the other questions both quantitative and qualitative research methods have been used. We have analysed in-depth the website monitoring reports of Eurostat. In the course of 2017/2018 we conducted a series of consultations (written consultations with different groups, workshop with stakeholders) and also conducted two series of structured interviews with key stakeholders. The analysis of the documentations related to these consultations and interviews have also contributed to the assessment.

Although, in the consultations/interviews we have learned about unmet data needs that would require "ground-breaking work", for example providing statistical indicators on the quality of urban governance at city level, we focused on areas of: dissemination, communication and deriving new outputs/products from existing data.

# Results

The summary of results is presented in the tables below.

Table 1. Analytical Advanced User

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| --- | --- |
| Persona | Hugo  Works as a policy maker for the European Commission's Directorate General for Regional and Urban Policy. He needs to find both statistical and geospatial datasets, download them to do his own calculations and create his own graphs and maps. |
| Main tasks of persona | * Looking for relevant datasets * Downloading tables to Excel * Adjusting the layout and format of the tables * Downloading geospatial data |
| Tools used by persona | * Database (Statistical data) * Geospatial data * Statistics Explained * Statistical Reports (but no PDFs) |
| Eurostat offer | Eurostat's free dissemination **database** (Eurobase) contains:   * more than 350 regional dataset covering all main statistical themes; * 100 tables using the degree of urbanisation covering mostly the theme of Population and social conditions * 50 tables using regional typologies * 20 tables on cities covering mostly the theme of Population and social conditions   The geospatial **database of Eurostat** (GISCO database[[2]](#footnote-2)) contains core geospatial data covering the whole of Europe, such as administrative boundaries, and thematic geospatial information, such as population grid data.  Eurostat maintains and annually updates analytical **Statistics Explained** articles using mainly regional data covering all statistical themes. These are published also as print publication in form of the Eurostat Regional Yearbook.[3] A few articles are also produced annually using other sub-national data (city data, data by degree of urbanisation, etc.) An extensive glossary explaining terms is also available in Statistics Explained.  Eurostat provides a complete overview of the sub-national data offer in a reference table available on the Regions and Cities dedicated section of the Eurostat website. |
| To what extent do we fulfil expectations? | The Eurostat offer meets the need of the persona "Hugo" to a large extent.  Eurostat’s regional and city data offer is much appreciated. These datasets are widely used in briefings, presentations and policy reports. Regional and city statistics are considered as an important instrument for targeted policy-making and a useful tool for understanding and quantifying the impact of political decisions in specific territories.  Geospatial data provided by Eurostat is also essential in many policy areas for providing spatial context, for spatial analysis and for creating statistical and thematic maps.  The dissemination formats, the databases, the Eurostat regional yearbook and Statistics Explained were also evaluated positively. |
| How could we improve further? | Eurostat could aggregate data for more territorial typologies related to the territories with specific geographic, economic, social and demographic features, namely the typologies on island regions, mountain regions, border regions and sparsely populated regions or outermost regions.  Local policymakers, as well as elected representatives of a specific area/region would appreciate having easy access to all the data related to their area/region. |

Table 2. Visually Oriented Intermediate User

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Persona | Marie-France  She visits Eurostat's website whenever she needs to put things in a European perspective for her studies. She prefers to look at graphs and maps because they are easier to interpret and give an overview much more quickly. She does not mind getting conclusions from Eurostat’s publications and reports, but she draws her own when writing essays. Although she has a specific goal in mind, she often deviates from that goal and starts exploring other topics too. |
| Main tasks of persona | * Looking for reports and publications (including maps) * Searching for visualizations and adjusting them * Making screenshots of tables, maps and visualisations |
| Tools used by persona | * Visualisation tools * Database (but less) * Statistics Explained * Statistical Atlas * Regions and Cities Illustrated |
| Eurostat offer | For the brief description of the Database and Statistics Explained see Table 1.  **Regions and Cities Illustrated** is an interactive data visualisation tool which contains data for a wide range of indicators covering regions, cities and several typologies. Next to the map there are four standard visualisations (a distribution plot, a scatterplot, a bar chart and a data table); these provide an opportunity to make deeper analyses of the data as well as comparisons and rankings. Furthermore, an animated timeline can be used to explore how the various indicators have evolved over time.  The **Statistical Atlas** is an interactive map viewer that allows users to study statistical data in combination with layers of geospatial information (for example, statistical regions, cities, roads or rivers). The Statistical Atlas can be used to view and download all the maps that are included in the Eurostat regional yearbook. |
| To what extent do we fulfil expectations? | Eurostat offer meets the need of the persona "Marie-France" to a large extent.  Both Regions and Cities Illustrated and Statistical Atlas have been evaluated positively both in quantitative and qualitative terms. |
| How could we improve further? | The product offer of the domain is vast, heterogeneous and complex; actually so complex that non-advanced users have trouble to find what they are looking for. Eurostat could create an "overview" page of subnational data to provide easy access to intermediate users. Going a step further – providing an overview of all subnational statistical data within the European Commission would be also most appreciated.  News and some interesting insights might be unnoticed by non-advanced users who visit the website monthly. A regular newsletter could help to raise awareness and to engage intermediate users. |

# Conclusions

The evaluation concluded that while the needs of personas are met to a large extent there is possibility to improve further. Eurostat could extend its offer and provide more datasets by territorial typologies to satisfy specific policy needs, like interest in border regions, outermost regions, mountain regions, etc. Several of these typologies are currently being produced and included in the Regions and Cities Illustrated tool. Eurostat have also recently released its new overview page on "Regions and cities" answering to the needs of intermediate users. The future website monitoring will show the "success" of these developments. Other improvement ideas, like a "geographical entry point" providing access to all data on a specific territory, a Commission wide joint data portal for subnational statistics, and a newsletter on regional and city data are currently being explored further.

# References

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1. Eurostat, Unit E-4: Regional statistics and geographical information [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/gisco/overview [↑](#footnote-ref-2)