'Engaging with users to modernise the dissemination of European statistics'

**Keywords:** user research, user needs, usability testing, user profiling, interaction with users, personas, user satisfaction

# Introduction

Modernising the Eurostat website and dissemination products is driven by the objective to better respond to users’ needs and to facilitate access to official statistics. Following current trends, the aim is to be more visual and attractive and also to provide more structured and precise texts replying to the most common user questions. Thus, engaging with users serves as the fundament and impetus for any changes in this modernisation process.

# Methods

In 2017, several user research activities were launched at Eurostat as part of the DIGICOM project – an ESS project aiming to modernise the dissemination and communication of European statistics. The aim of these user research activities was to learn more about our users and their needs, and get recommendations on what we can do to modernise the dissemination of European statistics. Two qualitative research methods were used: field studies and usability tests.

## Field studies: Identifying personas of European statistics

In the field studies, sessions with 40 different users (light, intermediate, advanced) from across Europe were organized over a period of 6 months. Users were asked about their profile and their use of statistics, and observed as they interacted with a number of dissemination products on the Eurostat website. The outcomes were descriptions of five main user profiles identified, a list of high-level recommendations on how to improve the dissemination of the products tested, and personas of the users of European statistics.

Personas are specific, visual and textual representation of a group of users of a product or service based on behaviors, goals and motivations of real users that allow empathy with and focus on real users in order to guide design.

Knowing our users' key goals, main tasks, motivations, challenges and frustrations is key in helping us further improve our website and dissemination products.

**2.2. Usability studies in Eurostat**

Eurostat has conducted usability studies of 8 different dissemination products (during the development phase). These were carried out with smaller groups of users as part of the DIGICOM project. Personas have been used in order to prepare the test guide and recruit the right profiles for the tests so that they represented the main group we aimed to target with the tested product.

The usability tests resulted in more specific recommendations to improve the usability of the tested products. Implementing these recommendations is in reality not just a "copy and paste" process, but has partly proven to be challenging due to different or even contradicting user opinions. It also became apparent that the earlier users are invited to give their feedback on a product, the better this could be integrated into the final product.

This engagement with our users can thus be seen as a circular process: Eurostat proposes new or improved dissemination products to users who then provide their feedback; on this basis recommendations are drawn which subsequently result in additional improvements of the products. Learning from users now will help Eurostat in the future to disseminate better custom-tailored products.

The presentation will include concrete examples of user feedback and its translation into improved dissemination services.

# Results

**Five personas of European statistics**

 The 5 identified personas of users of European statistics are the following:

(1) Technical advanced user

(2) Analytical advanced user

(3) Data oriented intermediate user

(4) Visually oriented intermediate user

(5) Personally interested light user

# Conclusions

This user research endeavour has shown that users can be mapped on a continuum with very advanced users on one end, very light users on the other, and intermediate users in between. The users’ position on this continuum can change because their goals might change, for example, when they change jobs or when they use Eurostat also for personal reasons after work. This implies that products targeted at advanced users should also be accessible for intermediate and light users, and products for light users should offer functionalities that accommodate the needs more advanced users.

Another important aspect identified during this exercise was the fact that potential or non-users are not a persona per se. Once they become users of Eurostat statistics, their goals, tasks and characteristics fit one of the existing five profiles.

**4.1. Use of personas in practice: The design process**

Personas are valuable in the whole process of developing products for statistical dissemination. This design process can be divided into several steps. In each of these steps, personas serve as inspiration, provide guidance and can be turned to for making decision.

In the initial creation and conceptual phase, we shall not only ask ourselves which type of users (represented by a persona) this product is primarily created for, but also how this persona will most likely use the product, what kind of features are essential to include so that they reach their goals and what is their level of expertise.

Subsequently, in the development phase we can turn to personas for several purposes: to identify the important features and rank them according to the persona's needs; to take decisions on the look and feel; to evaluate all product aspects from the perspective of the persona. An important tool in this phase are usability tests. Personas are used to prepare the test guide and recruit the right profiles of our target user group who will then test the product to uncover usability issues and validate our ideas.

Finally, personas serve as a tool in internal review / validation processes as we can use them to explain to internal stakeholders the reasoning behind our (design) decisions as well as to define the scope of our promotion activities. For the latter, the profile of a persona is valuable to identify which key messages should be sent via which channel and in which way to attract attention of the target audience.

The empathy we gain with our users by referring back to personas throughout this whole process is important in order to stay focused on their needs, which in turn allows us to offer products which help them achieve their goals.