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Item 5 of the Provisional Agenda

**EUROSTAT EXPERIENCE IN MEASURING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT
AND GOALS FOR THE WG**

Submitted by Eurostat

This meeting is organised jointly with Eurostat and OECD
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EUROPEAN COMMISSION
EUROSTAT

Directorate D: economic and regional statistics
Unit D-1: Key indicators for European policies



Eurostat experience in measuring sustainable development and goals for the WG

Historical background

In 1997, as a contribution to the UN testing phase, Eurostat produced a pilot study based on the UN list, containing 46 European indicators. In 1998, Eurostat also hosted a meeting with the European countries testing the UN list of indicators, to review progress and present results with the aim of advancing the methodological understanding of the way in which SDIs were being developed and used across the Member States. As a result of the international testing phase, the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs revised the framework and structure of the SDI set, resulting in a reduced but more policy-oriented set of indicators. In 2001, Eurostat published a second SDI publication drawing upon the UN core list and containing some 63 indicators.

In September 2001, the Statistical Programme Committee ⁽¹⁾ established a task force to develop a common response from the European statistical system to the need for indicators on sustainable development. The task force, comprising statisticians, researchers, members of national governments, and representatives of other European Commission services, met between 2002 and 2005. The conceptual framework and the set of indicators developed by the task force was endorsed by the Commission in February 2005.

The current priority for Eurostat is to provide a tool which can help to implement change by measuring progress towards the objectives of the EU's sustainable development strategy. Although the current conceptual framework was derived to a large extent from the EU strategy, Eurostat recognises that any framework which is based solely on current policies has little chance of long-term survival, and for this reason the broader considerations of sustainable development were not ignored. The result is a conceptually sound and robust instrument which will continue to be refined over the coming years, and which has found practical applications in EU decision-making.

Political background

In 2001, the European Commission translated the vision of sustainable development into an operational strategy which was endorsed by the Heads of States or Government at Gothenburg in June 2001, and which identifies six unsustainable trends that need to be tackled: limiting climate change and increasing the use of clean energy; addressing threats to public health; managing natural resources more responsibly; improving the transport system and land-use management; combating poverty and social exclusion; and dealing with the economic and social implications of an ageing society.

In 2002 at Barcelona, the European Council added an external dimension to the strategy, following three main objectives: harnessing globalisation — trade for sustainable development; fighting poverty and promoting social development; and sustainable management of natural and environmental resources. In addition, the European Council made commitments in support of the Monterrey consensus on financing for development aimed at achieving the millennium development goals adopted by the UN in 2000.

Within the framework of the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development, the Johannesburg declaration and the plan of implementation reaffirmed and built upon the 1992 Rio commitments. The EU is committed to translating these commitments into concrete actions. The main issues added here were sustainable production and consumption, corporate responsibility and participation.

In December 2005, the European Commission published a communication paving the way for a review of the sustainable development strategy. It builds on the declaration on guiding principles for sustainable development which was adopted by the European Council earlier in June. The renewed strategy should be adopted by the European Council of June 2007.

⁽¹⁾ The Statistical Programme Committee (SPC), which is chaired by Eurostat, brings together the heads of Member States' national statistical offices. The SPC discusses the most important joint actions and programmes to be carried out to meet EU information requirements. It agrees a five-year programme, which is implemented by the national authorities and monitored by Eurostat.

The EU framework for SDI

The framework has been conceived to provide a clear and easily communicable structure for the SDIs. It follows a hierarchical approach where indicators are divided into three levels, each level matching the needs of different types of users. Tight policy linkages assure strong user relevance and effective utilisation of indicators in decision-making. The framework is therefore based on priority policy issues, while being flexible enough to adjust to possible changes in these priorities and objectives, bearing in mind that new issues could emerge as a result of the review of the strategy. The framework comprises the six priority areas of the 2001 strategy, together with global partnership (from the 2002 communication on global partnership), and the themes on production and consumption patterns and good governance derived from the WSSD plan of implementation. The theme on economic development highlights the economic dimension of sustainable development in the framework and bridges it to the Lisbon process. The 10 themes are:

1. Economic development
2. Poverty and social exclusion
3. Ageing society
4. Public health
5. Climate change and energy
6. Production and consumption patterns
7. Management of natural resources
8. Transport
9. Good governance
10. Global partnership.

The themes are further divided into sub-themes and 'areas to be addressed'. The sub-themes usually monitor progress towards the headline objectives while the 'areas to be addressed' support a more detailed and disaggregated analysis of background factors in each theme. In some cases the sub-themes also address so-called 'slow burning' concerns that may need a very long time to reverse.

The set of indicators comprises 155 indicators, of which 34 are not yet feasible and 11 others are replaced by proxies. It makes maximum use of existing indicator initiatives, such as those of the UNCSD and the OECD, and various EU initiatives including the structural indicators. The identification of appropriate indicators is an iterative process. As the Commission is committed to regularly review the strategy, this will result in revision of the indicator set, to adapt to new needs, which may become apparent following the review.

The sustainable development strategy and the relevant EU policy documents encompass several priority areas for which no information or only partial information is currently available. To overcome this technical constraint and assure the production and compilation of the necessary data for policy-making in a longer time-frame, the indicators were divided into two categories, 'best available' and 'best needed'. The 'best available' indicators refer to indicators that can be compiled on the basis of existing data. Nevertheless, some of these indicators may not be the ideal indicators for sustainable development policy issues, but serve as proxies for the ideal ones, so-called 'best needed' indicators. Some of the indicators may also be classified as 'best needed' due to data quality problems.

Depending on the indicator, different kinds of development efforts relating to concepts, methodologies and data collection procedures will be required. The Commission, in cooperation with the European statistical system and the research community, will investigate the feasibility of the 'best needed' indicators and will report on progress in ensuring the availability of those indicators which are feasible. This development work forms a considerable task that will contribute substantially to further improve the homogeneity of the set of indicators.

Eurostat goals for the WG

Eurostat expects to see a fair assessment of the various approaches, with clear acknowledgement of their respective strengths and limitations. At the end of the process it is hoped that consensus will be reached on which approach is suitable for which purpose, and that useful advice can be given to potential users on the steps they need to take in setting up such systems.

Eurostat is also very much committed to the development of knowledge and understanding for sustainable development issues across Member States and countries associated to the European Union.