

Reaction to the ESSNet Mid-term review

For the two-year ESSNet project on SDC Eurostat has made a mid-term review. This document is the reaction of the project team.

General comments.

The ESSnet is now mid-way. Almost all deliverables have been delivered according to schedule. There is only a slight delay in the tasks risk assessment and synthetic data. But that will be recovered in 2009.

It is the aim of the project team to prepare the remaining deliverables according to schedule and fulfil all the tasks of the ESSNet as agreed upon in the project proposal and project contract.

Handbook

All the comments by the testers are available on the internal ESSnet website. The password is available to Eurostat. On the one hand side it is very correct not to spread passwords, but a short communication with the project team could have solved this. We would surely have agreed to grant access to the whole review team.

We have made many extensions to the handbook so far, also based on the reviews. However given the size of the handbook, using the track-changes option is not possible. We have extended the legal section. Many changes have been made to the microdata section and we have presented the material in a more logical order. Also case studies have been added and are available on the website. The tabular section had been improved as well. And in the frequency tables section a major extension dealing with group-disclosure has been included.

The suggested executive summary was never foreseen. However as we will indicate which sections will be more an introduction and which sections will give a more in-depth background we hope to serve all interested users.

Follow up of the CENEX inventory

A successful course in Ljubljana has been organised. We still think that these courses are the best way to spread the knowledge. Apart from that there have been many contacts with 'less experienced' countries. Mostly by phone and email. Some money for physically visiting them had been allocated, but extensive email and the telephone contacts proved to be more efficient.

External co-funding for the Ljubljana course was sought. The UNESCO Chair in Data Privacy (<http://unescoprivacychair.urv.cat>) subsidized with €4900 the trips of delegates from Slovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania and the Czech Republic.

The CENEX inventory has been more extensively reported on. The fact that it mainly contains numbers etc is just a question of efficiency. But it has taught us many lessons. Addressing the needs of countries with similar needs on SDC has been an incentive to organise the courses focussing on groups of new Member States.

Making tools better usable

We have listened to the remarks. Extending the input formats is one thing. As an experiment μ -ARGUS could read already SPSS, but we have extended it to τ -ARGUS as well now. Also due to new versions of SPSS we had to adapt μ -ARGUS for that as well to keep μ -ARGUS up-to-date.

Extending ARGUS for SAS is foreseen as well in 2009.

In our final report we will comment on the problems NSIs and Eurostat have stated to have with the SDC tools.

Note that internal test reports of the project are available on the web site. Needless to say that it is vital that users (like Member States and Eurostat) communicate their problems to the project team.

IT infrastructure and sustainability

A first report on open source and sustainability has been produced. The dependency on XPress or CPLEX however will not be solved by moving to open source. Given the complexity of the mathematical optimisation models to be solved, top-quality solvers are needed. But the experts are still not convinced that the quality of open source solvers is high enough to solve for the real-life problems. There will be no short time solution here.

But we must keep track of the developments. Converting τ -ARGUS for open source/freeware solvers is a task much too complex for this ESSNet. Maybe something for a new FP7-project? The final report will involve a cost estimate for such a task.

Guidelines for output checking

The sub-group is working hard here. The questionnaire has been analysed. We expect a report by the end of the project

A complete solution for automatic output checking is not to be expected by the end of the ESSNet. It also has never been promised. The small sub-contract here was only meant to further advertise the ideas of Jobst Heitzig by asking him to produce a report and a prototype. It is also far from sure whether the researchers in an RDC will accept this method. Note, that in 2009 in Germany a 3-years national SDC research project is starting which will (amongst other objectives) consider Heitzig's approach to automated output checking more closely, and study its usability.

Communication etc

The websites of the different projects have been integrated. A start with the FAQ has been made and we are extending it.

Software

Big surveys: task 5a1 is for 2009.

Blocking methods The report is there and a first implementation is already available in μ -ARGUS.

The risk-models part has been delayed a bit as communicated already.

Record linkage: Indeed a prototype was available already. However as we want μ -ARGUS to be a control-centre for all micro-data SDC, it should be available within μ -ARGUS. That only was promised here.

Software for tabular data

The report on linked tables is available. It has been presented at the PSD'2008.

We have already implemented now the negative values solution. The linked tables implementation is now in progress.