

Comparison of European news releases on businesses

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Paper prepared for the third EESW workshop in Nürnberg, 9-11 September 2013
8 September 2013

Harmonised European statistics offer the opportunity to compare European and national presentation of the data. In this paper the presentation and comparability will be analysed on the basis of news releases. The starting point of the analysis will be three recent Eurostat news releases on business statistics (industrial production, international trade in goods and innovation). Starting from the European news releases the linked national news releases are searched and analysed.

The analysis will pay attention to the following aspects:

- Are the data comparable?
- Is extra national detail added in the national release?
- Is the European comparison presented in the national release?
- What period is covered by the news release?
- Differences in timing of the news releases.
- Is the relevant metadata available (definition of concepts, sources, methods)?
- Is the release aiming at politicians, the general public or businesses?
- Is the interpretation different?

In case no linked press release is found, an attempt was made to find another publication on the subject for the same reference period.

Selection of news releases

The basis of the analysis is a set of three Eurostat news releases in the domain of business statistics: on industrial production, international trade in goods and on innovation (the links to all the publications used are in the annexed table). The idea was to have some variation in subject matter. The news releases on industrial production and international trade concern short term statistics with monthly data and press releases. In this case the press releases giving the first estimates on the year 2012 were selected.

The selection was not entirely unproblematic. The selected news release on industrial production was the last with base year 2005. Eurostat removed all the data with base year 2005 from the dissemination database. Countries did different things. The Netherlands, for instance, publishes the data in parallel, but has frozen the 2005 series

¹ The contents of this paper do not necessarily reflect the opinion or position of the European Commission.

(including the provisional data on the last months). For international trade in good the press release with the first provisional data on the year 2012 was selected. These provisional data were still incomplete with several countries missing.

The second step was to search for news releases (or other publications) from EU Member States on the same subject. The selection of Member States is limited by our language competence and available time. The current analysis includes Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, Romania, Spain and the UK. The links to the releases used in this analysis are in the annex. The selection is biased towards larger countries and to west European countries.

The results will be discussed per news release.

Industrial production

Table 1 gives an overview of the national releases on industrial production related to the selected Eurostat news release of 13 February 2013.

Table 1. National releases on industrial production linked to the Eurostat news release of 13 February 2013

Country	Type of publication	Organisation	Delay to Eurostat	Comparability of data
Austria	News release	Statistics Austria	after	na
Belgium	News release	Statistics Belgium	after	na
France	Not found	na	na	na
Germany	News release	Statistics Germany	before	No
Ireland	News release	Statistics Ireland	before	Yes
Netherlands	Web message	Statistics Netherlands	before	No
Romania	News release	Statistics Romania	before	Yes
Spain	News release	Statistics Spain	before	Yes
UK	Electronic publication	Statistics UK	before	No

There is full coherence in the fact that data for Austria and Belgium are missing in the Eurostat press release (because no data can be compared, the comparability is classified as not applicable). Austria publishes its data of 22 February and Belgium on 25 February; this is with an additional delay of 7 and 8 working days.

Otherwise comparability of data is often missing. On the basis of the information in the publications it is difficult to distinguish between different concepts, different scope, data revision and simple errors. Analysis with the help of Eurostat domain experts² identified the following reasons for discrepancies:

- Different concepts of industry. According to the Eurostat news release: *Total industry excluding construction*. This should be read as NACE 2008 categories B Mining and quarrying, C Manufacturing and D Electricity, gas,

² Thanks to Ms Sarmite Visocka (Eurostat)

steam and air conditioning supply; it not only excludes F Construction, but also E Water supply; sewerage; waste management and remediation activities;

- Different variable. The German statistical institute publishes turnover, and does not mention production.
- Different presentation of the variable: with working day correction, per working day, seasonally corrected, trend value and different base years. The Eurostat release uses seasonally adjusted with base year 2005. UK has base year 2009. Belgium gives the original series and the trend. The Netherlands presents production per working day.

Notable exceptions are the Irish and Romanian presentations of the production data; the overlapping data coincide with the Eurostat publication.

Table 2. Aspects of the releases on industrial production

Country	Metadata available?	Interpretation?	European comparison?	Relevant for businesses?
Eurostat	Yes	No	Yes	No
Austria	Yes	No	No	No
Belgium	In link	No	No	In link
France	na	na	na	na
Germany	In link	No	No	No
Ireland	Yes	No	No	Yes
Netherlands	No	No	No	No
Romania	Yes	No	In link	Yes
Spain	No	No	No	Yes
UK	Yes	No	No	Yes

Metadata

Metadata are often available, either directly or indirectly via a link. But the metadata are not always sufficient. In several cases the scope of the concept of industry remains somewhat unclear (in the Eurostat press release for instance); information on sources and methods is often missing.

Interpretation

The releases do not go beyond the description of the data also presented in the table, sometimes with some additional detail. There are no links to other sources or pieces of information.

European comparison

The national press releases do not offer a comparison to the developments in other countries. The exception is Romania, where a link is added to the forthcoming Eurostat press release.

Relevant to business

No explicit reference to the usefulness of the data to business is made. We assume that the information is more relevant to businesses if more detail is offered. Several countries present more details in the breakdown in industries. Spain offer more detail both by industry and by region.

International trade in goods

Table 3 gives an overview of the national releases on international trade in goods related to the selected Eurostat news release of 13 February 2013.

Table 3. National releases on international trade in goods linked to the Eurostat news release of 15 February 2013

Country	Type of publication	Organisation	Delay to Eurostat	Comparability of data
Austria	News release	Statistics Austria	before	No
Belgium	News release	National Bank Belgium	same	No
France	News release	Ministry external trade	before	No
Germany	News release	Statistics Germany	before	No
Ireland	Article	Statistics Ireland	after	No
Netherlands	Web message	Statistics Netherlands	before	No
Romania	News release	Statistics Romania	before	No
Spain	Not found	na	na	na
UK	Electronic publication	Statistics UK	before	No

The national releases generally are a few days earlier than the European release (which feels as a natural state of affairs).

Also in this example there are many ways to present the data: monthly, part of year total (e.g. January to November); non-adjusted, working days corrected, seasonal adjusted, trend. Moreover, non-euro countries publish the data in their own currency. This makes that data are really comparable. The national statistical institutes of Austria, the Netherlands and Ireland publish data that visibly differ from the data published by Eurostat. The Belgian and the Irish publication explicitly state that the publication is according to the national concept (based on change in ownership) and not on the European concept (based on passing the border), whereas the Austrian press release explicitly refers to the border concept. The Eurostat press release gives the general warning *national concepts may differ from the harmonised methodology*.

Table 4. Aspects of the releases on international trade in goods

Country	Metadata available?	Interpretation?	European comparison?	Relevant for businesses?
Eurostat	Yes	No	Yes	No
Austria	Yes	No	No	In link
Belgium	Yes	No	No	No
France	No	No	No	Yes
Germany	In link	No	No	No
Ireland	Yes	No	No	Yes
Netherlands	No	No	No	No
Romania	Yes	No	In link	No
Spain	na	na	na	na
UK	Yes	No	No	No

Metadata

As with industrial production, metadata are often available. But the metadata are not always sufficient; it is not always explicit according to which concept trade is measured. The Irish presentation of the data opens with 7 pages of meta-information. This is remarkable, as the metadata is often rather in notes and annexes (The UK publication ends with 8 pages of background notes).

Interpretation

As with industrial production, the releases do not go beyond the description of the data also presented in the table; sometimes the publication contains some additional detail. There are no links to other sources or pieces of information.

European comparison

Obviously European trade partners are always an element in the national presentation of data. The national press releases do not offer a comparison to the developments in other countries. The only exception is Romania with a link to the Eurostat press release.

Relevant to business

Some countries present more details in the breakdown by products.

Innovation

Table 5 gives an overview of the national releases on innovation related to the selected Eurostat news release of 11 January 2013.

Table 5. National releases on innovation linked to the Eurostat news release of 11 January 2013.

Country	Type of publication	Organisation	Delay to Eurostat	Comparability of data
Austria	News release	Statistics Austria	before	Yes
Belgium	Article	Scientific and technical information service	before	No
France	Article	Statistics France	before	No
Germany	Article	Centre for European Economic Research	before	No
Ireland	Article	Statistics Ireland	before	Yes
Netherlands	Book	Statistics Netherlands	before	No
Romania	News release	Statistics Romania	before	Partly
Spain	News release	Statistics Spain	before	No
UK³	Article	Department for business innovation and skills	before	No

All national publications were months to even more than a year before the Eurostat publication. Only in a minority of case a national publication in the format of a press release was detected. In three out of nine cases the information was not published by the national statistical institute.

Also in this domain we needed Eurostat domain experts⁴ to interpret the differences. The main reasons are:

- Differences in scope according to economic activity. Some countries also include construction and Spain even includes agriculture. The more broad the inclusions, the lower the innovation rates.
- Difference in scope according to size. Germany includes enterprises with 5 to 10 employees, whereas the other countries all seem to apply a threshold at 10.
- The Netherlands uses the concept of persons employed, whereas the other countries seem to employ the concept of employees in paid employment.
- Eurostat uses a broad definition of innovation, including not only technological innovation (process and product), but also non-technological innovation (organisational, marketing). Belgium presents only separate results for technological and non-technological innovation; Germany only presents technological innovation.

In all the data we checked we found only one case where the difference between the Eurostat publication and the national publication of the data could not be explained by differences in concepts or scope. It concerns the Romanian figure on the percentage of innovative enterprises involved in collaboration.

³ The time reference is quite confusing: the results are presented not according to reference period, but according to survey period.

⁴ Thanks to Ms Geneviève Villette (Eurostat)

Table 6. Aspects of the releases on innovation

Country	Metadata available?	Interpretation?	European comparison?	Relevant for businesses?
Eurostat	Yes	No	Yes	No
Austria	Yes	No	No	No
Belgium	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
France	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Germany	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Ireland	Yes	No	Yes (previous)	Yes
Netherlands	Yes	No	No	No
Romania	Yes	No	No	Yes
Spain	Yes	No	No	Yes
UK	Yes	No	No	Yes

Metadata

The metadata are more complete than in the other domains, probably because in many cases the publication is not limited to the format of a press release. Still, metadata are not always sufficient; the scope is not always well defined.

Interpretation

Innovation is the only selected domain that contains some interpretation beyond the description of the collected data.

European comparison

Both Belgium and Ireland profited from the possibility to relate national results to results of other European countries.

Relevant to business

A majority of countries present more details in the breakdown by economic activity; Romania and Spain also present regional breakdowns.

Conclusions

No story

One conclusion from the overview is that news releases do not present an interpretation or story. In most cases they just describe a table in text format, with a high number of figures. Such a presentation is not in line with usual communication guidelines. The approach is in line, however, with the objectivity principle of the European Statistics Code of Practice (Principle 6: impartiality and objectivity). One of the indicators reads: *Statistical releases and statements made in press conferences are objective and non-partisan*. The principle is generally accepted in the statistical community. On the other hand, statistics should also be presented in a clear and understandable form (principle 15: accessibility and clarity). This does not only require the necessary metadata, but also a story with links the data, also to other pieces of information and policies. Such links take us beyond the strict statistical reality, but it is a way to demonstrate the relevance of the data. By careful wording the

distinction between the statistical reality and the story can remain visible in the external communication.

By accident we found two press releases that interpret current economic developments on the basis of several sources. Statistics Netherlands publishes a quarterly press release on the state of the economy integrating data on GDP, international trade, investments, consumption and employment. The German ministry of economic affairs (BMWi) publishes each month a press release on the German economy on the basis of a similar set of statistics (also containing monthly data on industrial production non comparable with the Eurostat news release); on top of that they do refer to developments in the European and world environment. These press releases are examples of going beyond the statistical stove pipe towards the production of information.

Disseminating organisation, dissemination mode and delays

The data on industrial production were published by the national statistical institutes. On international trade and innovation also other organisations were responsible. For Belgium the data on the three subjects were published by three different organisations; this makes it more difficult to present more integrated results.

We took Eurostat news releases as a starting point and expected to find linked national news releases. Our interest is not so much in the news release as dissemination mode, but in the comparability of the European and the national dissemination of data. Obviously presentation of data and metadata in a news release has to cope with limited space; it is only natural to find more data, metadata and analysis in larger publications.

Most countries issued a news release on industrial production and international trade in goods; on innovation only three out of nine countries issued a news release.

In general the national releases are before the Eurostat release. The exceptions are the news releases on industrial production for Austria and Belgium. The data appears as missing in the Eurostat news release, and appear in the national press release only a few days later.

Metadata and comparability

Principle 14 of the European Statistics Code of Practice on coherence and comparability states: *European Statistics are consistent internally, over time and comparable between regions and countries; it is possible to combine and make joint use of related data from different sources*⁵. In the majority of cases the data presented

⁵ The difference between coherence and comparability is explained in the ESS Handbook on Quality Reports 2009: *The coherence of two or more statistical outputs refers to the degree to which the statistical processes by which they were generated used the same concepts - classifications, definitions, and target populations – and harmonised methods. Coherent statistical outputs have the potential to be validly combined and used jointly. Examples of joint use are where the statistical outputs refer to the same population, reference period and region but comprise different sets of data items (say, employment data and production data) or where they comprise the same data items (say, employment data) but for different reference periods, regions, or other domains. Comparability is a special case of coherence and refers to the latter example where the statistical outputs refer to the same data items and the aim of combining them is to make comparisons over time, or across regions, or across other domains.*

in the release is not comparable with the Eurostat press release. Available metadata and our professional experience were not sufficient to fully analyse the reasons for the differences; we had to ask our colleagues for advice. The differences are mainly due to different concepts and different scope. It is impossible to compare countries on the basis of the national news releases, even in statistical domains that have been well regulated for a long time.

The lack of comparability due to differences in sources and methods is even more difficult to assess, especially on the basis of the limited information in news releases.

European comparison and relevance to businesses

European statistics offer the opportunity to show the comparison over countries. The national releases do not use this opportunity. The Romanian news releases are an exception; they refer to the (forthcoming) Eurostat news release in a link. Comparisons over countries are made in the Belgian and the Irish article on innovation.

In the communication towards enterprises on data collection it is often stressed that the same enterprises that are confronted with response burden, are also users of official statistics, for instance for benchmarking and market analysis. In the releases we analysed no explicit reference was made to usefulness of the statistics to enterprises. We know that Statistics Netherlands has dedicated websites for different user groups, including businesses as a separate user group of official statistics <http://www.cbsvooruwbedrijf.nl/> (in Dutch only).

We have assumed that data can be interesting for enterprises only when they have sufficient detail. Some releases contain (a link to) sufficient detail to be interesting to enterprises.

References

European Statistical System Committee (2011), The European Statistics Code of Practice, adopted by the European Statistical System Committee on 28th September 2011

ESS Handbook on Quality Reports (2009)

The annex contains the links to all releases used in this analysis.

Annex: Links to releases used in the paper *Comparison of European news releases on businesses*

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Eurostat

Production/22/2013 13 February 2013:

http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_PUBLIC/4-13022013-AP/EN/4-13022013-AP-EN.PDF

International trade/25/2013 15 February 2013:

http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_PUBLIC/6-15022013-AP/EN/6-15022013-AP-EN.PDF

Innovation/5/2013 11 January 2013: http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_PUBLIC/9-11012013-AP/EN/9-11012013-AP-EN.PDF

Austria

Production/Pressemitteilung 10.463-039/13 22 February 2013/Statistics Austria:

http://www.statistik.at/web_de/dynamic/presse/070082

International trade/Pressemitteilung 10.478-054/13 8 February 2013/Statistics Austria:

http://www.statistik.at/web_de/presse/069931

Innovation Pressemitteilung 10.292-145/12 5 July 2012/Statistics Austria:

http://www.statistik.at/web_de/dynamic/presse/065478

Belgium

Production/persbericht 25 February 2013/Statistics Belgium:

http://statbel.fgov.be/nl/binaries/Productie%20NL_tcm325-214330.pdf

International trade/perscommuniqué 15 February 2013/Nationale Bank van België:

<http://www.nbb.be/doc/DQ/N/DQ3/HISTO/ENP1211.PDF>

Innovation/Key Indicators – Innovation/ Scientific and Technical Information Service:

http://www.stis.belspo.be/docs/CIS2010/Key%20Indicators_2010.pdf

France

Production: no short term publication found

International trade/news release 7 February 2013/Ministry of External Trade:

<http://www.douane.gouv.fr/data/file/8102.pdf>

Innovation/article October 2012/INSEE:

<http://www.insee.fr/fr/ffc/ipweb/ip1420/ip1420.pdf>

Germany

Production/Mitteilung 49/13 8 February 2013/Destatis:

https://www.destatis.de/DE/PresseService/Presse/Pressemitteilungen/2013/02/PD13_049421.html

International trade/Mitteilung 50/13 8 February 2013/Destatis:

https://www.destatis.de/DE/PresseService/Presse/Pressemitteilungen/2013/02/PD13_05051pdf.pdf?_blob=publicationFile

Innovation/Studien zum deutschen Innovationssystem Nr. 6-2012 February 2012/Zentrum für Europäische Wirtschaftsforschung (ZEW):

<http://www.zew.de/de/publikationen/innovationserhebungen/euroinno.php3#seitenanfang>

<http://www.zew.de/de/publikationen/innovationserhebungen/innovationserhebungen.php3>

State of the economy/Pressemitteilung Die wirtschaftliche Lage 11 February 2013 /Bundesministerium für Wirtschaft und Technologie/

<http://www.bmwi.de/DE/Presse/pressemitteilungen,did=551022.html>

Ireland

Production/Press release 5 February 2013/CSO:

http://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/releasespublications/documents/industry/2012/prodturn_nov2012.pdf

International trade/article Trade Statistics December 2012 March 2013/CSO:

http://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/releasespublications/documents/externaltrade/2012/trade_dec2012.pdf

Innovation/article Community Innovation Survey 2008 2010 April 2012/CSO:

<http://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/releasespublications/documents/multisectoral/2010/cmminn0810.pdf>

The Netherlands

Production/Conjunctuurbericht 8 February 2013/Statistics Netherlands:

<http://www.cbs.nl/nl-NL/menu/themas/dossiers/conjunctuur/publicaties/conjunctuurbericht/inhoud/maand/archief/2013/2013-02-08-m03.htm?Languageswitch=on>

International trade/Conjunctuurbericht 14 February 2013/Statistics Netherlands:

<http://www.cbs.nl/nl-NL/menu/themas/dossiers/conjunctuur/publicaties/conjunctuurbericht/inhoud/maand/archief/2013/2013-02-14-m02.htm>

Innovation/book *ICT, kennis en economie 2012* Statistics Netherlands 2012:

<http://www.cbs.nl/NR/rdonlyres/130F8419-05C1-43AE-B5ED-4C373F34EC82/0/2012i78pub.pdf>

State of the Economy/news release PB13-011 Statistics Netherlands/14 February 2013:

<http://www.cbs.nl/NR/rdonlyres/13E11D5C-B464-40DA-AADC-E80F08668A8A/0/pb13n011.pdf>

Romania

Production/Press release 8 February 2013/INSSE:

<http://www.insse.ro/cms/rw/pages/comunicate/ipi.ro.do>

International trade/Press release 11 February 2013/INSSE:

<http://www.insse.ro/cms/rw/pages/comunicate/comertulExterior.ro.do>

Innovation/Communication 27 July 2012/INSSE:

http://www.insse.ro/cms/files/statistici/comunicate/com_trim/Inov_ind/inov%20date%20def%202008_2010r.pdf

Spain

Production/Press release 7 February 2013/INE: <http://www.ine.es/prensa/np0213.htm>

International trade: not found

Innovation/Notas de Prensa 14 December 2011/INE: <http://www.ine.es/prensa/np689.pdf>

UK

Production/Statistical Bulletin 7 February 2013/ONS:

<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/iop/index-of-production/december-2012/stb-iop-dec-2012.html>

International trade/Statistical Bulletin 7 February 2013/ONS:

<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/uktrade/uk-trade/december-2012/stb-uk-trade--december-2012.html>

Innovation/UK Innovation Survey 2011 – First findings May 2012/BIS:

<http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/science/docs/f/12-p107-first-findings-uk-innovation-survey-2011.pdf>