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(iii) Managing communication

**FACILITATING ACCESS TO INTERNATIONAL STATISTICS**

Submitted by the Federal Statistical Office, Germany<sup>1</sup>

**I. INTRODUCTION**

1. Destatis recently devised a new web platform for international statistics, which attempted to maximise user benefit by offering extensive support to anyone searching for international statistics whilst limiting the resource input required by our staff. This approach was driven by numerous factors, in particular: (a) the need to focus more on online dissemination and reduce our printed output and (b) the urgent need to reduce staff input in light of an internal reorganisation. The new web platform offers information on a wide range of organisations that provide official international statistics and also presents key indicators from various data sources. The data presented is held in a newly devised central database in standardised form and is used to feed a variety of products (website, publications, treatment of requests). It is envisaged that the new central database will also enable us to automatise the production of further products in the near future.

**II. IMPROVING ACCESSIBILITY OF INTERNATIONAL DATA**

**A. Limited resources**

2. In 2007 our section for European statistics was merged with another Destatis section responsible for disseminating international statistics (beyond the EU). The international section was located at our Bonn office and consisted of 14 permanent members of staff. As these members of staff were needed for new tasks, it was decided that the international and European dissemination sections should merge. The European section – located in the smaller Berlin branch of our office – was assigned 4 extra members of staff and was given responsibility for the dissemination of all international data. This meant that 10 members of staff at the Bonn office were available for new assignments.

3. Our unit in Berlin then had to decide which aspects of the international statistics product portfolio were to be continued, adapted or abandoned, given that the staff level had been significantly reduced.

**B. Key principles of a new dissemination strategy**

4. The portfolio up until 2006 consisted of four main pillars:

- a. International Yearbook: Destatis published an annual international edition of the Statistical Yearbook alongside the national Statistical Yearbook. The international yearbook consisted of more than 400 pages and featured a wide range of data from international and national sources. The production of this yearbook required a lot of staff input, particularly due to the fact that many data series were completed using data published by the respective national statistical institutes.

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- b. Information service: Numerous members of the team were responsible for treating queries relating to international statistics. This included a significant amount of fee-based data subscriptions.
  - c. Country profiles: Statistical country profiles were published on an irregular basis. These contained a wide range of data and were based primarily on national sources.
  - d. Online data tables: A small selection of approximately 10 indicators was presented in static online tables for all countries worldwide.
5. Given the general trend to more online dissemination and the limited resources, the decision was taken to reform the product portfolio.



**The Destatis Statistical Yearbook 2006**  
National and international data in separate publications

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6. International data dissemination was to focus on the following principles:
- a. Online first: The online platform for international data was seen as the main dissemination channel. A larger amount of key data was to be presented online.
  - b. International sources: Many statistics are not available for all countries worldwide. The temptation is to “fill the blanks” using data from national sources. But this approach is very staff-intensive and also leads to problems with respect to comparability. Therefore it was decided that international official statistics were to form the basis of the new dissemination strategy.
  - c. Continuation of products where possible: In order to provide a certain degree of continuity, it was also decided that products such as the international yearbook and the country profiles were not to be discontinued completely but replaced by products that are less labour intensive.
  - d. Automation of processes: Where possible processes required to produce the international data product portfolio are to be automated.
7. In total, this meant that the international data dissemination was to focus on a new online platform providing users with basic data and helpful information for further data research.
8. In addition, a reduced version of the international yearbook based primarily on international data sources was to be integrated into the main Statistical Yearbook as an annex. It was also decided that the country profiles were to be continued but again using international sources and focusing on a clear set of countries (G20 states).
9. Where possible, the creation of online tables, yearbook tables and country profiles was to be automated.

**C. Analysing the status quo of international data dissemination**

10. International data is published by a wide variety of organisations and in many different formats. Many users are unaware of the main players in this field and find it very difficult to find the data they need. This is particularly true for all users that lack sufficient English language skills as well for users with limited computer literacy.

11. This analysis of the status quo lead us to the idea of creating an online platform that was easy to use and understand, was provided in German and English language and besides offering basic international data focused on explaining to users how they themselves could find the data they required.

12. A clear three-fold navigation was adopted providing international data by theme, by country and by institution. The category “data by institution” was to offer information on the various data providers and help users to find further statistics themselves.

#### D. Technical problems and solutions

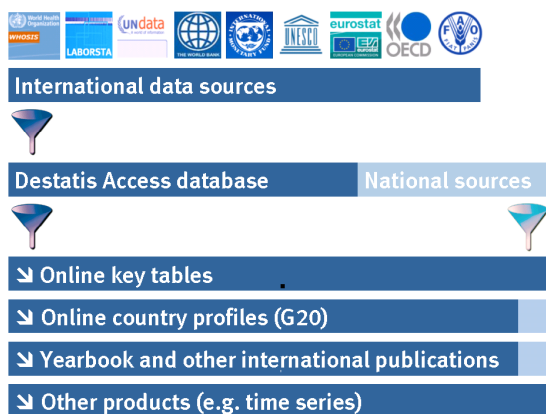
13. In order to increase the automation of the processes needed to implement our product portfolio, data from a variety of sources needed to be held in a standardised format. Our unit created an Access database that is capable of importing statistical data from a very wide range of sources (such as World Bank, WHO, OECD or IMF). Each indicator imported into this database is assigned numerous attributes, such as description in English and German, title in English and German, measurement unit, number of decimal places etc.

14. These indicators can then be exported in various formats to feed the numerous international data products our unit publishes. In the first implementation stage, the main data export channel was the export of key indicators for the online data tables featured on the new international web platform (basic indicators by theme and by country). Further export channels are envisaged, including the creation of yearbook tables, country profiles and more.

15. Given the amount of data we wanted to publish on our website and the need for permanent updating, it was clear that the process of creating the key tables needed to be as automated as possible.

#### Standardising indicators

Data is imported from numerous sources and exported to create various products



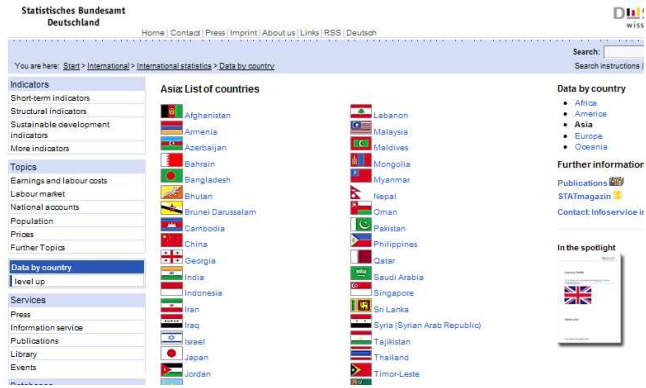
#### E. New online platform for international data

16. The new online platform is intended to cater for users from various backgrounds – from first-time or casual users to more experienced users that are in search of detailed statistics.

From the outset, the aim was to keep the website as simple as possible. As with any online platform, the limitations given by the website architecture of the respective national statistics office needed to be respected. In the case of the international data web platform, this meant that navigation between the various levels is unfortunately not as user-friendly as originally intended.

17. The website is divided into three main sections: data by theme, data by country and data by institution. In addition the online platform offers international publications, contact details of the service team for international statistics plus definitions of the key indicators featured on the site.

**The new online platform**  
 Access to key indicators by topic and country  
 plus information on the data sources



18. Data by country: Almost 50 key indicators from various international organisations are presented for each country with UN sovereignty status. Links also lead to the respective statistical offices.

19. Data by theme: The key indicators are also provided broken down by theme. In addition, this section also offers tables taken from the international part of the Destatis yearbook plus a range of thematic statistics links. The theme structure is based on the themes used by Eurostat.

20. Data by institution: This section offers information on the most important organisations that publish official international statistics plus information on the databases they offer and a link to each database.

**III. FURTHER IMPROVEMENTS**

21. Website: The international website has only been online for a few months. A number of improvements are planned for the near future. In particular, we are looking into ways of providing data as time series and also considering how to address the issue of data visualisation.

22. Yearbook: Plans are underway to automate the creation of data tables for the international section of the Destatis Yearbook.

23. Country profiles: We hope to publish a country profile for all G20 states by the end of 2010. We are also attempting to automate the creation of the profiles in order to reduce the workload and reduce the sources of error.

24. Other products: In the mid-term our aim is to integrate a number of international data time series into the Destatis database system Genesis.

**IV. POINTS FOR DISCUSSION**

25. When the concept for the website was originally devised, the UNdata portal was not yet online. Also the World Bank recently switched to free online dissemination and offers a wide range of data from numerous sources in its online database. Does this mean that an online website for international statistics as set up by Destatis is now no longer needed? How important is the aspect of language (i.e. providing the information in native language)?

26. How do other national statistical offices deal with this issue? Are international statistics actively disseminated in other countries?

27. Does the international website really cater to all user groups? How could the topic perhaps be communicated more efficiently or in a more user-friendly manner?

28. How could national statistical offices co-operate more closely in this field