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Changing needs for skills in producing and communicating statistics

Topic 5 – Who uses statistics, what do they need and how should we engage with them?

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Introduction

Landscape for producing statistics will substantially change over the years. Digital / data revolution, new data sources including big data, the pressure to further reduce burden for respondents as well as need for fast and timely provision of statistics increases the emphasis on adapting the skills for statisticians. The changing needs of users also call for new ways of communicating statistics.

Methods / Problem statement

Use of modern statistics needs improvements and developments both on producer and user side. Statistical production will be more and more based on combining all types of data sources. Instead of or in addition to teams and groups, working methods will change as statisticians will increasingly work in more loose networks, from home and use modern information technology.

Also on the users' side, an enormous amount of changes are anticipated. Beyond that modern users want more than one data source, they notice the growing trend in instant information. Consequently this increases also their expectations in terms of speed of access to statistics. However, users may not differentiate between official statistics and other sources, which often lack "proof of quality". Users are becoming more autonomous; they appreciate easy and quickly accessible tools which allow them to work with the source data to quickly generate custom made dynamic graphs and tables to show the main developments. Such use of statistics will not only generate new information but also knowledge.

Results / Proposed solution

European Master in Official Statistics (EMOS) and European Statistical Training Programme (ESTP) are initiatives that over the coming years support equipping the current and future statisticians with skills needed for new methods, techniques and best practices needed for developing, producing and communicating European statistics. These training initiatives are supported by a skills gap analysis on national and ESS level and specific actions for training current staff and recruiting new statisticians.

In order to anticipate the new user mode, Eurostat has launched the DIGICOM project (2016-2019). The project includes actions to better identify users' needs, to communicate on the added value of European statistics, to create and share visualisation tools among the European Statistical System (ESS) and to improve statistical literacy. A first inventory of statistical literacy actions in the ESS has been conducted; it includes a wide range of activities and products. Some products based on data aim to inform while other products aim to explain statistical methodology or official statistics. The project will further develop and share literacy products targeting schools and universities, including a new product called "Statistics for Beginners".

Conclusions

The three concrete projects currently address the skills needed in producing and communicating statistics in rapidly evolving environment. Right mix of combining the existing skills in the current workforce and those needed to respond to future challenged will be key in developing new skill-building strategies.