

Enterprise surveys as a tool for identification of skill needs

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Overview on Eurostat enterprise surveys that might be used for skills analysis (Summary of the presentation by Katja Nestler, Cedefop)

1. INTRODUCTION

Apart from exploring the comparability of national surveys/data collections, the European dimension of the new Skillsnet initiative requires the assessment of existing (regular) European enterprise surveys that might have the potential as a tool for identification of skill needs and might be used in a long-term perspective for skill needs analysis. “First address” in this respect is Eurostat that is the EU authority for the production and dissemination of Community statistics.

Eurostat surveys are an integral part of the European Statistical System (ESS) that comprises Eurostat, National Statistical Offices and other national statistical authorities that collect official statistics in EU Member States, Iceland, Norway and Liechtenstein. This implies several advantages when considering the possible use of Eurostat enterprise surveys for identification of skill needs:

- Eurostat surveys are an inherent part of the national and EU statistical work programmes that provide for the necessary financial and human resources to produce and disseminate statistics. Eurostat surveys make use of the whole statistical infrastructure in countries.
- As a rule, Eurostat surveys are based on regulations that impose the terms and conditions under which official statistics are produced.
- Eurostat surveys guarantee high quality data and statistics as they are produced according to common agreed quality standards.
- Eurostat surveys are based on harmonised methodologies, and common concepts, definitions and classifications to be applied in all countries.

The “price” that has to be paid for these advantages is the “heaviness” of the system that implies a certain resistance against changes, and hence its “inertia”. New emerging demands cannot be answered in a short period of time.

As there is currently no Eurostat survey whose subject is “skills”, the following Eurostat surveys were explored as possible vehicles for identification of skill needs or for skills analysis: the “Job vacancy Statistics”, the “Community Innovation Survey (CIS)” and the “Continuing Vocational Training Survey (CVTS)”.

2. JOB VACANCY STATISTICS

National data on job vacancies and occupied posts have been collected since 2003 under a gentlemen’s agreement. The quarterly data collection under regulations (EP/Council regulation; implementing Commission regulation) will start in 2010 (breakdowns by NACE at section level –

A to Q). The annual data collection will continue under gentlemen's agreement (breakdown also by region - NUTS 2, and occupation – 1-digit-level)

Conclusions: The regulations under development do not allow for any change prior their implementation in 2010. After, it would be a long-term process for revisions, but given the reservations by Member States regarding the burden of the annual data collection, it seems almost impossible to extend the data collection with respect to content and/or level of detail in the foreseeable future.

3. COMMUNITY INNOVATION SURVEY (CIS)

The CIS provides statistics on the different aspects of innovation activities in enterprises and the impact on economic outcomes. Breakdowns are given by country, type of innovator, size class and NACE. The survey covers enterprise with 10 and more employees in the sectors specified in the regulation (NACE at division or groups of divisions' levels – 2-or 3-digit levels), though not the whole economy is covered and some divisions are covered on a voluntary basis only.

Conclusions: Since the first survey in 1993, the survey went through several rounds of harmonisation and improvement, and is considered now as a "focussed" survey with acceptable response rates. Therefore, Eurostat does not envisage changes of the survey for the purpose of any extension. (Personal discussion with Eurostat)

4. CONTINUING VOCATIONAL TRAINING SURVEY (CVTS)

The CVTS provides detailed statistics on continuing vocational training (CVT), but also basic data on initial vocational training (IVT) in enterprises. From the first round in 1994 (CVTS1; reference year 1993) to the third round in 2006 (CVTS3; reference year 2005), the survey went through several phases of development to extend the coverage and to improve the data quality. As of the implementation of CVTS3, a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council and an implementing Regulation of the Commission provide a solid basis for the regular (every 5 years) and stable implementation of the survey over the coming years. The survey covers enterprises with 10 and more employees in the NACE sections C to K and O.

One part of the survey is dedicated to training policies and management in enterprises. In this context, at least two questions are directly linked to "skills". Enterprises are asked how frequently they have implemented "*formal procedures with the objective of evaluating future skill needs of the enterprise*", and how frequently they have conducted "*structured interviews...with the objective of establishing the specific training needs of its employees*". As one reaction of the enterprise to "missing skills" is training, the data on the volume of CVT with respect to "*fields of training*" provides indirect information of possible skill needs of the enterprise. The overall analysis of these data (using also microdata), taking into account data on "non-training enterprises" and aspects "*having an effect upon the scope of CVT activities*", might give a first idea of "skill needs" in enterprises (in the different sectors, size classes) and the relevant actions taken by enterprises.

Conclusions: The CVTS has in principle the potential of a tool for identification of skill needs (in enterprises) and/or skills analysis. Apart from the direct and indirect information available already at this stage, the further development in the context of identification of (future) skill needs would be conceivable. Regarding the practical realisation, one has to consider the enormous burden of the survey on respondents that causes response rate problems with all inherent negative consequences. It is therefore Eurostat's intention to further streamline the survey and to concentrate on basic and essential information needs (personal discussion with Eurostat). In this context, a revision of the implementing regulation might be envisaged or even needed. Within this mid-term process, there might be a little chance to deepen in a strongly focussed way the (direct/indirect) concept of collecting data on "skill needs", provided that there is a declared (political) intention by all parties involved (mainly Member States, Commission).