EFTA - European Free Trade Association

5. Strategic and managerial issues of official statistics (EFTA)

5.1 Institutional frameworks and principles, and role of official statistics (EFTA)

Institutional framework of EFTA Statistical cooperation

• The European Free Trade Association (EFTA) is an intergovernmental organisation for the promotion of free trade and economic integration to benefit its four Member States: Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland. Since the beginning of the 90s, EFTA has progressively developed a statistical cooperation policy with Eurostat.
• For Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway, statistical cooperation with Eurostat is provided for in the Agreement on the European Economic Area (EEA) which gathers the 3 EFTA countries and the 27 EU Member States into a single market.
• Statistical Cooperation between Switzerland and Eurostat is governed by a bilateral agreement.

Objective of EFTA Statistical Cooperation

The EFTA Statistical Office (ESO) was created as a liaison office between Eurostat and the EFTA national statistical institutes. ESO's main objective is to promote the full inclusion of the EFTA States in the European Statistical System (ESS), and thus provide harmonised and comparable statistics supporting the general cooperation process between EFTA and the EU within and outside the EEA Agreement. The cooperation also entails technical cooperation programmes with third countries and training of European statisticians. ESO is located on the premises of Eurostat, the Statistical Office of the European Union, in Luxembourg.

5.2 Statistical programmes, and coordination within statistical systems (EFTA)

Annual European Economic Area (EEA) statistical programme

A specific EEA annual statistical programme is developed every year by the EFTA Statistical Office in consultation with the EFTA National Statistical Institutes. The EEA annual statistical programme is based on a subset of, and in parallel with the annual statistical programme elaborated by the European Commission.

Switzerland/EU annual statistical programme

A specific annual statistical programme is drawn up every year in the framework of the agreement in the field of statistics between Switzerland and the EU.

5.4 Management and development of human resources (EFTA)

European Statistical Training Programme

EFTA attaches great importance to quality and comparability of European statistics and therefore supports Eurostat in the design and implementation of an ambitious European Statistical Training Programme (ESTP). In 2012, the EFTA Secretariat will fund the organisation of three ESTP courses respectively on Geographic Information Systems (Norway), User-friendly dissemination of statistics (Norway), and Data analysis and data modelling (Switzerland). These courses are provided by EFTA National Statistical Institutes and open for participation of statisticians from EFTA and EU Member States. In return, EFTA statisticians will be invited to participate in all ESTP courses supported and financed by the European Commission (Eurostat). Other applicants may be admitted to the courses depending on the availability of places.

5.7 Technical cooperation and capacity building programmes (EFTA)

Technical cooperation

EFTA technical cooperation programmes and activities are governed by a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the EFTA Secretariat and Eurostat. The MoU's overall objective is to avoid gaps or overlapping in technical assistance toward countries where the European Union is also active, through direct involvement of the four EFTA States in statistical programmes run by the European Commission. EFTA's involvement in technical cooperation programmes under the MoU gives priority to countries that have concluded declarations on cooperation or free trade agreements with EFTA. In 2012, support will be mainly granted to economies in transition in Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA), Western Balkans and Mediterranean regions (Medstat). EFTA cooperation will give priority to global assessments of national statistical systems in light of the revised European Statistics Code of Practice as well as seminars and study visits on socio-economic statistics, applied statistical methods and management of technical assistance in statistics.