

## Box 4

**FIRST ESTIMATES OF RETAIL TRADE TURNOVER IN THE EURO AREA**

Eurostat released an estimate of the retail trade turnover in the euro area for January 2004 on 5 March 2004, labelling the results as first estimates. This significant improvement in timeliness from around 65 days to around 35 days after the reference period is the result of a gentleman's agreement between Eurostat and the national statistical institutes (NSIs). It also reflects the implementation of new statistical methods for producing euro area statistics. This box describes the methods and features of these first estimates for the euro area.<sup>1</sup>

**New procedures for estimating retail trade aggregates in the euro area**

In November 2001 the Statistical Programme Committee<sup>2</sup> decided that Member States should – within two years – be in a position to provide the retail sales index within 30 days of the end of the reference period by using new sampling techniques. Until now, no euro area country has been able to publish this kind of retail trade data in such a timely fashion. The basic idea behind the proposal was that by using existing national samples, smaller sub-samples for each euro area country could be identified, which, combined, would provide a reliable estimate for the euro area. The NSIs would first deal with the required data from the sub-sample. The second step would be to publish the results based on all of the national data (which could potentially lead to a revision of the euro area figures).

The first estimate for the euro area includes the total retail trade turnover in constant prices, broken down into retail sales of food, beverages and tobacco and retail sales of non-food products. Full details of the aggregates are published together with the release of the first estimate for the next reference period, i.e. around 60-65 days after the end of the reference period.

All euro area countries have implemented measures to improve the timeliness of their results. For example, Belgium, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg and Finland use reduced sample sizes for their first estimates. Spain and Portugal have been able to bring forward their releases, while nonetheless maintaining the full sample size. Two other countries use different methods to improve the timeliness of their results. Germany uses data from the six largest Länder and France provides estimates based on monthly data collected from supermarkets and results from the Banque de France's monthly retail trade business survey.

Not all euro area countries are currently included in these first estimates for the euro area (see table). However, the country coverage of the euro area aggregate is over 80% and further improvements are expected. For example, the Netherlands will be able to contribute to the first estimates for the euro area from the reporting period February 2004 onwards.

1 For more details, see also the relevant Eurostat news release and the article entitled "Retail trade: volume of sales", Statistics in Focus, Theme 4 - 8/2004, Eurostat 2004, both available at [www.europa.eu.int/comm/eurostat](http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/eurostat).

2 The Statistical Programme Committee co-ordinates the work carried out by Eurostat and the NSIs for the collection and compilation of non-financial euro area statistics.

## Timeliness of first estimates of retail trade turnover in the euro area

(Number of days after the reference period)

Reference period	euro area	BE	DE	GR	ES	FR	IE	IT	LU	NL	AT	PT	FI
June 2001	64	54	43	79	46	60	60	60	117	38	60	59	58
January 2004	35	n.a.	32 <sup>1)</sup>	n.a.	42 <sup>1)</sup>	32 <sup>1)</sup>	46 <sup>1)</sup>	53 <sup>1)</sup>	n.a.	55	60	31 <sup>1)</sup>	42 <sup>1)</sup>

Source: Eurostat.

1) Included in the first estimate.

### Data quality and future developments

It is too early to make a firm assessment of the quality of these first estimates. The compilation of first estimates on the basis of partial, incomplete data could lead to more substantial revisions. This may reflect a higher rate of non-response to the surveys, the selection of large retail units in a reduced sample or time constraints for quality checks owing to faster data processing. However, tests carried out in 2003 by Eurostat did not produce any evidence indicating that this improved timeliness had led to more substantial revisions to euro area aggregates. Some caution is nonetheless warranted, as euro area retail trade aggregates have always been relatively volatile and revisions have often been substantial.

The production of a first estimate of retail trade turnover was used as a pilot project with the aim of providing more timely results at euro area level, while restricting the additional burden for the NSIs. Thus, the successful implementation of the new method is important for the future development of other euro area statistics.