

European statistical system: common classification of territorial units for statistics

NUTS

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PURPOSE : to establish a common classification of Territorial Units for Statistics (NUTS). **CONTENT** : regional statistics are a cornerstone of the European Statistical System, they are used for a wide range of purposes and a wide range of users. The regional data of the EU Member States are inter alia used for allocating structural funds in a rational and consistent way. Hence, regional statistics are the objective statistical base for important political decisions. All regional statistics have been based on a geographical division of the territory studied. Eurostat, in collaboration with the Commission departments, set up the Nomenclature of Statistical Territorial Units (NUTS) at the beginning of the 1970s as a single, coherent system for dividing up the European Union's territory in order to produce statistics for the Community. This NUTS classification has gained increasing importance in recent years as the basis for harmonised, and thus comparable, regional data. NUTS is used as a reference for the collection, development, harmonisation and dissemination of Community regional statistics. Recent changes in the NUTS classification gave rise to some tensions between the Commission and the National Statistical Office concerned. Soon several new Member States will join the European Union; for them, a consistent regional breakdown of their territory for statistical purposes also needs to be defined in a suitable way. All these political developments and foreseeable task lead the Commission to the conclusion that it would be appropriate to create a legal base for the Nuts classification. In accordance with the principles of subsidiarity and of proportionality, the objective of creating a harmonised regional classification used for all European regional statistics can only be achieved at Community level. This legal text has been drawn up with several objectives in mind: - to fix the current state of the NUTS breakdown of regions in the Member States, as it has developed since 20 years; - to define objective criteria for the definition of regions, so that candidate countries have a guideline for creating a regional classification for their country; - to assure comparability and impartiality when regional statistics are compiled and used for various policy purposes; - to define clear rules for future amendments of the NUTS breakdown, so as to forestall conflicts of the kind that have occurred in the past. Amendments are inevitable when the administrative structure of a country changes. But also for the non-administrative units occasionally an adaptation to changing needs is mandatory. In the past these amendments were discussed between the Commission and the country concerned without a clear framework of rules. The proposed Regulation shall remedy this unsatisfactory situation; - by ensuring that the NUTS classification is not amended too frequently, so that the users of regional statistics have the requisite stability of data for analysis.