

**UNITED NATIONS STATISTICAL COMMISSION and  
ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE  
CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS**

**UNECE Work Session on the Communication of Statistics**  
(30 June – 2 July 2010, Paris, France)

- (i) Getting the numbers across in ways that external audiences understand

**MAKING STATISTICS EASILY ACCESSIBLE TO JOURNALISTS**

Submitted by Instituto Nacional de Estadística (INE), Spain<sup>1</sup>

**I. INTRODUCTION**

*“We never, ever in the history of mankind have had access to so much information so quickly and so easily” – Vinton G. Cerf, the person most often called the father of the Internet*

1. One of the most common problems faced by Statistics Offices is how to present their statistics on their websites, especially considering the diversity of users to whom they must transmit their information.
2. In the case of Spain, experts have given the INE website awards, due to its structure and contents. However, access to the information is complicated for users who are not specialised in statistics, who often do not find what they are seeking, and end up turning to the customer services of the organisation in order to dispel any specific doubts.
3. Conscious of this weakness in its external communications, in 2004, the INE considered developing a specific page within its website, with contents that would be more accessible and understandable for non-specialised users. In addition, given that the media is the main transmission vehicle of statistical information to the general public, the INE opted for designing this specific site "tailored" for journalists.
4. After a period of consultation with several media professionals, and bearing in mind the most common information requests made by journalists, the contents to include in this specific site were decided.

[http://www.ine.es/en/prensa/seccion\\_prensa\\_en.htm](http://www.ine.es/en/prensa/seccion_prensa_en.htm)

**II. INE's PRESS AREA**

**A. Human Contact**

5. One of the important elements of the contents was to include the contact telephone numbers of the staff that comprises the Press Office. This might seem to be a minor issue, but it is very important if the goal is to improve the external communications of an organisation.
6. Due to the growth of Internet use, human contact has been replaced by the use of new technologies, and in particular, by email. This has had an immediate effect on websites. Nowadays, it is difficult to find contact telephone numbers on websites, given that most queries are submitted by email. The same occurs with Press Offices.

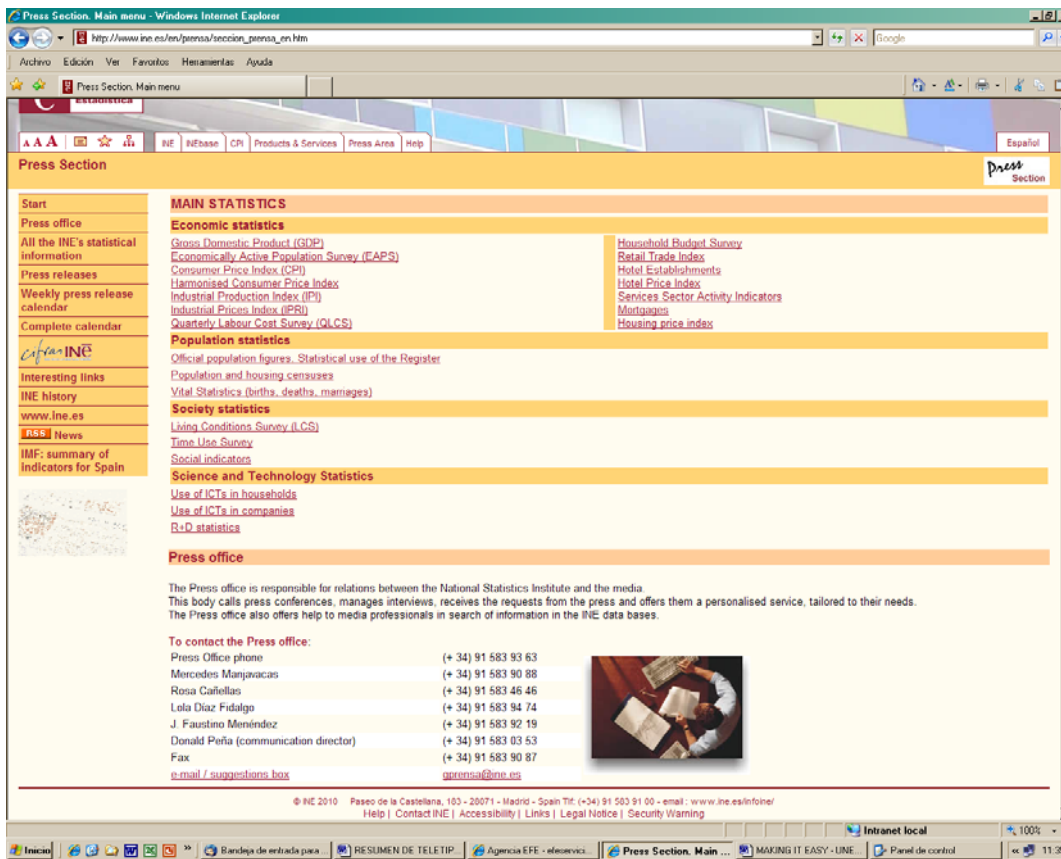
---

<sup>1</sup> Prepared by Donald Peña ([donaldpe@ine.es](mailto:donaldpe@ine.es)).

7. In fact, many journalists commented that it was increasingly complicated to access the press offices of organisations by telephone now that everything is done by email. This communications channel has many advantages, but disadvantages as well. One of these is the lack of rapid response – it is necessary for someone to open an email and reply to it - and the time it takes to ask further questions. With this, using the telephone is instantaneous, as well as allowing a two-way conversation. In short, contact with a person not only aids more fluid communication, but also improves the image of the organisation.

8. If the person's voice at the other end of the line solves your problems, you will place greater value in that person, and consequently in the work he or she does and in the organisation where he or she works.

9. For all these reasons, there was a need to give a "human face" to this specific section, and not just with contact telephone numbers, but also with the names of the persons manning the telephone lines.



## B. The Objective

*“Journalism - a profession whose business it is to explain to others what it personally does not understand” – Lord Northcliffe*

10. Nevertheless, our primary objective was to create a specific section within the INE website with easily digestible content, as well as enabling quick and straightforward retrieval of information. In other words, exactly what a journalist needs in order to be able to convey a message to his or her audience.

11. What better than to seek the guidance of professionals in order to design a made-to-measure product? Their assistance proved crucial to specifying secondary objectives such as what kinds of data or series should or should not be included, which information is essential and which to steer clear of, what to do with methodologies etc.

12. Furthermore, we should take advantage of this initiative in order to “educate” media professionals regarding retrieval of information from our website. If we managed to have them visit our specific section, we should not let them leave without the data they were seeking, and where possible, we should also be in a position to show them how to delve into our databases.

13. Thus a reduced list of operations most frequently required by the media, along with the information needed by them most urgently and in the most straightforward manner was established. The data provided was highly simplified, in view of the fact that we were not creating a microsite in tandem with the INE website, but rather concentrating the most frequent requests into a reduced space. All of which is geared towards the media. It was decided to name this site “Press Area”.

### **C. The Content**

14. On the first page or cover of this “Press Area” it was decided to include a summary of the statistics most requested by journalists. It was decided to keep the number small, never more than 30. Over time, some of the statistics included have given way to others and to new products, all the time taking into account the needs and priorities of journalists. In addition, they have come to encompass not only economic statistics, but also other groups such as population, society or technology, whose significance to the media has gradually increased.

15. When selecting any of these statistics, we endeavour to provide access to basic information, which is easily digestible, readable and readily accessible. Thus, the first to appear is the latest data, followed by a link to the historical series, which is usually the information most requested by the media. As a matter of fact, when a figure is published, one of the first questions by journalists is... how long has it been since a similar figure? ?

16. This historical series can undoubtedly be retrieved from the database; and not only for the basic figure, but also for a great deal of detailed information. It is therefore necessary to know one's way around the database and this is precisely the weakness of non-specialist users. In addition, we present links to detailed results, enabling access to our database, other relevant aspects, which vary from one set of statistics to the next, and the methodologies.

17. With regard to the latter, we are aware that journalists are not usually very familiar with statistical methodologies. That is why we decided to create a brief summary of them and present them in a straightforward manner. The brief summary does not include formulas or calculations and summarise the essential information from the dozens of pages of methodological documentation into a few concise paragraphs. The objective was for users not accustomed to making use of methodologies to become familiarised with basic statistical data. For example, in the case of the Consumer Price Index (CPI) for Spain, the methodology is more than 100 pages in length. In the Press Area we present a summary of this, and in a mere 8 lines of text we present our users with very important aspects for understanding this indicator, such as, the fact that it is compiled with 220,000 prices collected each month.

18. Added to this is other relevant data, which depends on the specific features of each set of statistics. Thus, we provide information on gathering information, including some definitions and/or metadata on how data is deflated, on adjusting for the calendar effect, and on weightings, etc. All of which, it should be stressed, is provided briefly and concisely. For a journalist finding time to read a lengthy methodological document is difficult. It is much easier to read a few paragraphs. Therefore our goal has been to pack those paragraphs full of the vital information we wish to convey.

**Press section / Consumer Price Index (CPI)**

Start	Latest data	Monthly rate (%)	Over the year rate (%)	Annual rate (%)
Press office	CPI (March 2010)	0.7	-0.5	1.4

[Press release](#) [Monthly series](#) [Detailed results](#) [Methodology](#) [Characteristics of the CPI base 2006](#)

**Description**

The objective of the Consumer Price Index (CPI) is to provide a statistical measurement of the evolution of the set of prices of goods and services that the resident population in family dwellings in Spain consumes.

This index is elaborated with 220,000 prices from 491 articles, of which more than 30,000 establishments informed distributed in 1770 municipalities in the whole country. The data collection is carried out via personal visit to the establishments on the corresponding dates. Moreover, data is collected by telephone, fax and email. In some articles tariffed articles information is obtained from the corresponding official publications.

**CPI History**

The first price indices that were calculated in Spain go back to 1936 and these served as a base to establish the first Quality of Life Indices System that was maintained in force until December 1960. Subsequently two new systems entered into force with base years 1958 and 1968.

With the entry into force of the system base 1976 the indicators received the denomination of Consumer Price Indices. This system introduced significant novelties such as the classification of consumption into eight major groups and the creation of indices for each one of the Autonomous Communities. Since then another two CPI systems have existed with base years 1983 and 1992.

In January 2002 the CPI Base 2001 system entered into force. Among the main CPI Base 2001 novelties its publication in twelve groups stands out, motivated by the adaptation of the COICOP, as well as the update of the weightings of these twelve groups based on the information provided by the Continuous Household Budget Survey.

The CPI base 2001 includes sales prices, the annual revision of weightings and the linking of the indices is noteworthy.

The first indices in base 2006 were published in January 2007. The sample of municipalities increases in 25% (up to a total of 177), the number of prices collected increases 12% (up to about 220,000) and the number of articles in the shopping basket increases from 484 to 491.

The shopping basket of the Base 2006 CPI includes new articles such as dietetic and children products, homeopathy, physiotherapy, plastic surgery and myopia. Similarly, others disappear whose consumption is no longer significant, such as upholstery fabric, repairs of certain household appliances or fabric for clothing.

**CPI Base 2006 Groups**

The 12 CPI Base 2006 Groups are subdivided into 37 subgroups, 79 classes and 126 subclasses; 57 headings and 28 Special Groups.

## D. Links required

19. The Press Area also contains a series of links to other information also required by the media. In this way, we provide links to the INE database, to a backlist of press releases, to the weekly and annual calendar of short-term and structural press releases, and to the "INE figures" information bulletin. Also links to the RSS news service, to the summary of IMF indicators for Spain and to the websites of the main producers of statistics from around the world.

20. In addition to this, we provide access to a document prepared by the Press Office on the history of the INE in Spain.

## E. The future

21. Since the Press Area became operational in 2004, it has come to be one of the reference pages within the INE website. Nowadays it is one of the most visited. And not only by journalists, but by other types of non-specialist audience. In 2009 it received more than seven million hits.

22. I believe the Press Area's success resides in the fact that we have managed to get the message across to non-specialist users, using easy-to-understand language and a straightforward structure, geared to meet the most basic of needs.

23. The more detailed information is of course shown in our database. But with the Press Area we have managed to enable many users to easily locate the basic data they are searching for when they come to our website.

24. Our aim for the future is to continue to improve the content of the Press Area in order to make it even more accessible. We are convinced of the importance of bringing the information to the user. But we also regard it as of value to provide information on how that data is compiled. If we succeed in combining both factors, we will be improving our image and strengthening outside trust in our work.