

**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)

**REPORT OF THE WORK SESSION ON  
THE COMMUNICATION OF STATISTICS**

**I. INTRODUCTION**

**A. Participation**

1. The UNECE Work Session on the Communication of Statistics was held from 30 June to 2 July 2010 in Paris, France. It was attended by participants from: Albania, Australia, Belgium, Canada, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Georgia, Germany, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Kazakhstan, Republic of Korea, Luxembourg, Mexico, Netherlands, Norway, Russian Federation, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom and United States of America. The European Commission was represented by the Statistical Office of the European Communities (Eurostat). The European Central Bank and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) were also represented. Experts from Customer Carewords, The Guardian Datablog and Datastore (United Kingdom) and the University of Florence (Italy) participated at the invitation of the UNECE secretariat.

**B. Organization of the meeting**

2. Mr. Anthony Gooch, Director of the OECD Public Affairs and Communications Directorate, opened the meeting by welcoming participants and highlighting the need for early planning in communicating all statistical activities. He noted that the meeting provided an excellent opportunity to exchange views and experiences on communication practices, issues and challenges in different statistical organizations.

3. Mr. Marco Mira D'Ercole, Head of OECD Household Statistics and Progress Measurement, opened the second day of the meeting on behalf of Ms. Martine Durand, OECD Chief Statistician and Director of the Statistics Directorate. He stressed the importance of public trust in official statistics and the need for developing relevant measures of the progress of society.

4. The agenda of the work session consisted of the following substantive topics:

- (i) Getting the numbers across in ways that external audiences understand;
- (ii) Managing credibility in good times and in bad;
- (iii) Managing communication;
- (iv) Improving outreach using Web 2.0, social media and multimedia;
- (v) Internal communication and training.

5. Mr. Leon Östergaard (Denmark) chaired the meeting. The following participants acted as session organizers: Mr. Toby Green and Mr. Rory Clarke (OECD) for topic (i), Mr. Michael Levi and Mr. Kenneth C. Meyer (United States) for topic (ii), Ms. Frances Comerford (Ireland) and Mr. Heath Jeffries (United Kingdom) for topic (iii), Ms. Colleen Blessing and Ms. Colleen Flannery (United States) for topic (iv), and Mr. Leon Östergaard (Denmark) and Ms. Gabrielle Beaudoin (Canada) for topic (v).

6. Mr. Gerry McGovern (Customer Carewords) gave a keynote lecture on the need to move from organization-centric to customer-centric websites. He said that the development and improvement of a website should not be based on opinions about how it looks, but on usability testing. It is important to make it easy for people to use websites and to ensure that they are able to complete their task. The number of visits to a website is not a good indicator of its success. What should be measured is the users' success in finding

what they are looking for and accomplishing their tasks. We also need to pay attention to users' satisfaction as well as dissatisfaction with the website. Becoming service-oriented is a big challenge. A good way to overcome barriers within the organization is to show detailed evidence that the website is working for the customers.

## **II. SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION OF SUBSTANTIVE TOPICS**

### **A. Getting the numbers across in ways that external audiences understand**

7. Spain shared their experience with the development of a Press Area on their website that allows quick and straightforward retrieval of statistical information, including time series data. Brief methodological explanations are provided using simple language. This Press Area has been operational since 2004 and is one of the most visited pages on their website. The Press Area redesign has increased their impact on the media. A video is planned to be launched for the World Statistics Day to reach out to a younger audience.

8. Germany showed how they are improving the presentation of data on their website to make the information easier to understand and use. The difficulty for statisticians to write short and simple texts was highlighted. To avoid using so many resources to edit the texts written by statisticians, press officers within the organization could write the texts themselves and then ask statisticians to check them. It is also a challenge to find the right balance between avoiding the terms that are too technical and explaining those that cannot be avoided.

9. Statistics Denmark has developed a number of tools to present and promote statistics in more entertaining ways. The goal was to change the image of the organization and reduce the fear of statistics among the general public. A large screen displaying daily news, the latest data and quizzes was set up in the lobby of the building. The job advertisement section of the website was also redesigned. A poster depicting different aspects of Danish society, a set of postcards, a deck of Trivial Pursuit cards, quizzes and a collection of jokes and quotations about statistics can all be used by statisticians to be better ambassadors of statistics. There is a risk that people will not remember the correct answers to quizzes, but the main objective of this "infotainment" approach is to promote statistics, not to educate people.

10. The U.S. National Center for Health Statistics presented a new platform called "Stats of the States" that provides direct access to the most recently published key vital and health indicators by state. The indicators included in this platform are selected on the basis of experience about what the users are most interested in. This web platform was launched at the beginning of 2010 and has successfully met the need of users of vital and health statistics interested in analysing U.S. state and geographical data.

11. OECD presented their proposed metadata standard for datasets and their iLibrary platform, which is specifically aimed at the research community and puts the proposed standard into practice. This platform allows researchers to find and cite datasets easily. Standard bibliographic and citation metadata are used, which makes it easy to use them in research publications. This new publishing platform should weave OECD datasets into the global information resource network used by researchers and students around the world. The publishing metadata will be sent to platforms such as Google Scholar, Scopus and Web of Science so that datasets will start to appear in scholarly search results.

12. The following points and questions were raised during the discussion:

- How should the success of a website be measured? It was argued that the number of visitors was not a good measure, as it did not give any indication of the degree of satisfaction or dissatisfaction of those visitors.
- The importance of the quality of statistics in building public trust was highlighted. The brand is the image of the organization and it needs to be trusted.
- The "infotainment" approach presented by Statistics Denmark was considered interesting, but some argued that statistical organizations are not in the entertainment business and should be careful not to go too far along the entertainment road.
- The target audience of each statistical organization needs to be segmented. It is a big challenge to reach out to each specific user group in each country.

- Should we educate the users or the statisticians, or both? It seems far easier to reach the statisticians within the organization than the users in the outside world. Providing statisticians with detailed feedback on the use of their data is a good way to convince them of the need to improve their communication skills.

## **B. Managing credibility in good times and in bad**

13. Australia presented a conceptual framework for trust and the role of lockups in building trust in official statistics. The presentation argued that political interference and bad press can easily destroy trust. One of the key elements in building trust in official statistics is having protocols in place for access to pre-release statistics to avoid any perception that there is an unfair advantage given to certain groups of stakeholders with early-access or that the statistics are subject to political spin or interference. One recommended release practice in building that trust in statistics is to have lockups in place. During the short discussion, it was apparent that only a few organizations present had lockup policies.

14. For the past five years, Statistics Norway has participated in Synovate's reputation survey that asks respondents to give their impression of 82 government departments and agencies. Their presentation discussed the importance of trust and reputation in statistics and showed that the results depend on how you measure trust. The ranking was also compared with the Eurobarometer survey on official statistics. The organization also plans to measure its reputation in the future, and will consider whether it will be useful to participate in several surveys to secure both national and international comparisons. Questions from the Electronic Working Group on Measuring Trust in Official Statistics (it is chaired by Dr. Ivan P. Fellegi and reports to the OECD Committee on Statistics) will be tested. Among the challenges are different ways of calculating the need for more transparency, and how to use the results.

15. Statistics Sweden presented the principles of handling data corrections: openness, quick handling, flexibility (depending on the type of product and seriousness of the error), taking a user's perspective into account and indicating corrections on the website. There are several difficult decisions that need to be made in this regard: providing immediate access to the information; erasing incorrect data immediately vs. creating insecurity among users; information overload vs. accusations of hiding information. During the discussion, it was stressed that it was important to educate the public – the media, in particular – about statistics to avoid misinterpretation of data.

16. Eurostat's presentation focused on the role of data in the Greek economic crisis and the damage done to Eurostat's credibility. The presenter outlined the background of some reservations that Eurostat had about official Greek statistics beginning in 2002. The report on Greek government deficit and debt statistics in January 2010 raised many questions and was widely covered by the media (Greek and German). A Goldman Sachs swap deal led to even more questions from the media. Eurostat continues to receive questions about the issue to this day. It has been noted by politicians that Eurostat had not been given enough power 5 years ago, which led to increasing the power of Eurostat.

17. The following points or questions were raised during the discussion:

- Trust can be lost fast but an organization is less likely to lose it quickly if it has built this trust over a long period of time. The public can be more forgiving in this case.
- The autonomy of an organization is one of the most practical ways to boost credibility.
- People may distrust a statistical organization but this is often caused by the audience's unawareness of the wide usage of the government data by many independent organizations and media outlets.
- Organizations need to think about the context in which they communicate statistics. There are many data available nowadays and it is often not clear where people need to go to find that data. It is important to encourage policymakers to share and exchange information and make it easier to find.
- People want transparency and access to the numbers. The role of statistical organizations should be to meet this need.
- Error and corrections policy and procedures can really help improve the quality of data.
- It can be very difficult to measure trust. Trust can be complex and depends on the emotions of the audience. Organizations need to be careful in interpreting data and take human factors into account.

It is also important to look at how people act with regard to an organization instead of what they say about the organization.

### **C. Managing communication**

18. At the 2009 work session, the University of Florence presented a conceptual model to assess the quality of the communication of statistics. This model was applied to a set of statistical publications collected at the meeting. A group of statisticians was asked to examine these publications and assess the presence or absence of a range of criteria using an assessment table. The results of the analysis would have been different if it had been carried out by communication experts. Some suggested that the rating scale should be refined. The final goal of the project is to improve the impact of the communication of statistics. The presentation described the first attempt to apply and assess the model.

19. Kazakhstan presented their new dissemination strategy aimed at improving interaction with users. This strategy includes developing a new instrument to inform the public about statistics, putting more emphasis on electronic dissemination of statistics, extending publishing activities by developing a visual identity and introducing publication standards, and providing training to users of statistics. Further work is planned to achieve a high level of trust in official statistics.

20. Germany has developed a new web platform for international statistics. The goal was to maximize user benefit by offering extensive support to anyone searching for international statistics while limiting the resource input. This new web portal includes about 50 indicators for all countries around the world, and data are presented by theme with news updates, as well as by institution. The web portal is available in both German and English. Plans for the future include adding time series, visualizations, and country profiles at the push of button. It would be useful to find out more about the users of this portal and to have links to this portal on Wikipedia and other websites.

21. As part of their new communication policy, Slovenia is holding thematic press conferences in addition to their regular monthly press conferences. Topics covered so far include population ageing, environmental statistics, sustainable development, young people and gender statistics. A brochure is usually prepared for such press conferences where the topic is presented jointly by statisticians who talk about the data and academic or/and governmental experts who give their views on the issue. This experience has been successful, attracting considerable interest from journalists. Academics, statisticians and government officials willingly participate as interpreters of data in such press conferences. It is also leading to broader media coverage and an increase in trust in official statistics. Video recording of these conferences would be useful to reach a broader audience, but the risk would be that journalists would no longer come to the conferences.

22. The U.S. Census Bureau discussed the mechanics of the 2010 Census communication campaign. Different media were used to reach out to the many different population communities and the focus was put on the hard-to-count population. This was made possible with a budget twice as high as that of the 2000 Census campaign. Dealing with public mistrust of government was a major challenge. The 2010 campaign was successful in increasing public awareness of the census and encouraging more people to fill in the census form. Many videos were put on YouTube.

23. The following points and questions were raised during the discussion:

- Is it the role of national statistical organizations to disseminate international data?
- How important is it to publish in English in addition to the local language(s)?
- The involvement of politicians in census campaigns can have a positive or negative impact on the response rate and credibility of the organization. It is important for organizations to be perceived as independent. In the United Kingdom, an attempt has been made to involve local politicians in the 2011 Census campaign.

#### **D. Improving outreach using Web 2.0, social media and multimedia**

24. A representative of The Guardian newspaper (United Kingdom) discussed the main aspects of “data journalism.” The presentation focused on data visualization and use of different platforms to make data more accessible to general audiences (Google Docs, Data Blog, Flickr). The Guardian also encourages people to take the datasets and produce their own visualizations and to share them online. There has been a big demand for raw data when people wanted to know more about the context of a story. The future of “data journalism” is highly correlated with the huge amount of data made recently available by different governments. In the case of The Guardian, social media was described as a useful tool to disseminate information. The presentation mentioned the “mutualization of news” when the statistical organizations or news reporters are not the experts anymore. Workflows also can be long and cumbersome. People often cannot find relevant publications quickly or information becomes outdated by the time of release.

25. The U.S. Census Bureau discussed how integrating the 2010 Census Communications Campaign across media, channels of communication, and Census Bureau operating units led to the success of the campaign. Social media tools helped generate and maintain consistent messages for live and digital information sharing. Senior executives promoted the use of social media. The agency consistently uses the name of the U.S. Census Bureau in all channels of social media. That increased credibility, ease of discovery and leverage from other census work. The video production team created a variety of multimedia messages and the IT team ensured the required video streaming capabilities to deliver them. The Census Director promoted the activities on his blog. Interacting with users on as many platforms as possible is important in reaching people where they want to be reached.

26. Eurostat presented “Statistics Explained,” an online tool that was launched in 2009 that illustrates new ways of publishing statistics. The tool’s objective is to reach a wider audience of “non-specialists” who are not usually inclined to visit statistical websites. “Statistics Explained” consists of an online encyclopedia of European statistics, glossary and portal to the detailed data and metadata. “Statistics Explained” is maintained on the Wiki platform with an open structure and the ability to edit articles. The web tool has 150 contributors from Eurostat. Many people look at the website via Google Translator.

27. A panel discussion provided an opportunity to learn and talk about new experiments in social media from different countries and organizations.

28. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics discussed the use of web chats to communicate with potentially large audiences. Experts received more questions about methodology than about data. People who participated in the Web chats had positive things to say but a declining number of people participated (1 500 for the first chat, 200 for the second chat, and less than 200 for the third chat). The human resource demand for the Web chat was greater than expected. Policy required the review of written responses by subject matter experts and involvement of editors for monitoring and approving messages.

29. The Netherlands presented their new iPhone application, e-Book, Twitter and YouTube Channel. They outlined basic usage of social media to increase the visibility of an organization. These initiatives started small and with a low budget and later received the support of the management.

30. Estonia discussed the high popularity of social media in the country and how statistical organizations can use this trend to promote their messages and reach a wider audience. Social media also help the organizations to look less formal. It was too early to consider the use of social media as a success story because of its recent emergence.

31. Switzerland focused on how it uses online charts and a timeline to present several types of documents in chronological order dating back 150 years for easier consumption of data. The organization also uses online quizzes to increase interactivity of the data. Special efforts are in place to attract people to the new online features of the website.

32. The Guardian representative discussed the role of including crowdsourcing – the process of involving the audience in producing articles – in identifying and improving news stories. Data analysis is not the prerogative of statisticians and journalists. More and more people/users are involved in the data analysis.

33. The following points and questions were raised during the discussion:
- Integrating social media into communication requires additional resources which can be a limitation for some of organizations.
  - Journalists are starting to realize that they need to know statistics to investigate and question data, leading to more statistical literacy within the media in the future.
  - It is difficult to calculate the return on investments in social media. It is important to find ways to measure those results.
  - The importance of brand/image in social media cannot be overestimated. An organization should keep that in mind while using those tools.
  - Archiving online content is a specialist's job and it is worth having someone on staff who deals with this issue.
  - The demand for stories about/with data is growing. It is important to produce and make those stories easily accessible.
  - Podcasts can be an important tool in disseminating statistical information.
  - The use of Facebook differs across organizations. Some allow their employees to use this tool and others block access to Facebook at work places.
  - It is necessary to keep in mind data security while experimenting with different online tools. Data archiving of social media content is also important. Organizations have different policies or no policies at all for retaining online content.
  - Social media technologies will change. Statisticians need to be ready to embrace new tools and platforms.

#### **E. Internal communication and training**

34. The presentation by Canada on “Maximising employee engagement in an era of change” focussed on strategies to foster employee engagement by adapting communication methods to ensure they remain relevant to the new generation of statisticians. It stressed that the management of change needs to be supported by a sound internal communication strategy, and concluded that a combination of traditional communication mechanisms and new tools is necessary to support change.

35. Eurostat outlined experiences of communicating a new strategy for the production of statistics (the “Vision”) to staff. Two important challenges were identified: how to make the contents of the Vision understandable to all staff and to how to motivate staff to implement it. A wide range of communication tools are used and changes are now being implemented across the European Statistical System. Staff opinion surveys measure the success of the communication methods used, and a number of “lessons learned” have been identified.

36. Sweden gave a presentation on improving internal communication in their organization following feedback from staff that changes were needed. It is critical that all managers improve their communication skills. A study of the situation has led to the development of a new strategy for internal communication. A communication plan, system and other documents and actions are being prepared to support this strategy, including a set of “rules” on how to have efficient meetings.

37. The United States Energy Information Administration gave a presentation on why statisticians need an editorial style guide. They have recently launched a new style guide to help the many statisticians who prepare text for external users do so in a more consistent way. The style guide is published using a wiki to give more flexibility for future enhancements and updates, though the number of editors is limited. A series of staff workshops have helped to ensure its successful implementation, and confirmed the role of the communication group as the authority on writing style issues.

38. Eurostat presented the internal communication implications of the implementation of the “Statistics Explained” wiki-based tool. This approach considerably reduces the time needed to publish statistics compared to traditional paper publications. Although some statisticians were initially sceptical, early discussions with key users and senior management support has helped to improve acceptance. The

advantages of the “Statistics Explained” approach are becoming clear, and it is now starting to replace some paper publications.

39. The following points were raised during the discussion:
- The use of employee satisfaction surveys to help assess the impact of new communication methods;
  - How to ensure that staff receive consistent messages in a cascade briefing system and how to ensure that staff feedback is heard, and is seen to be acted on;
  - Good internal communication is not only needed at times of major change, it is necessary all the time, and is essential to maintaining overall staff satisfaction;
  - The extent to which corporate culture can be modified in the short to medium term and how to overcome resistance to change;
  - Communication channels for staff at remote locations, such as electronic discussion groups;
  - How to deal with the problem of gossip and rumours spreading misleading information;
  - Whether existing staff can adapt to become communication specialists, or is it better to hire external communication experts?
  - Conflicts between individual management styles and corporate communication strategies;
  - Senior management support is important for the successful implementation of a style guide;
  - Whether one style guide can cover all output media;
  - Whether user or producer style guides should be used when communicating with users such as the media;
  - How to provide suitable mechanisms for user feedback for web publications;
  - Author resistance to changing from paper to web publications;
  - The professional image of statistical organizations is affected by the consistency of style on the web site and the presence of broken links.
  - The use of social media.

### **III. PROGRESS ON THE “MAKING DATA MEANINGFUL” GUIDES**

40. The third volume in the “Making Data Meaningful” series was presented. This is a major update of the 2004 publication “Communicating with the Media”. Delegates were requested to provide feedback before this publication is finalised in the autumn. It is expected to be published in early 2011.

It should be noted that the first two guides were very successful with different kinds of audience. The UNECE Statistical Division receives numerous requests for the publications on a regular basis. Also, several statistical offices expressed their willingness to translate the guides into Spanish and Japanese languages (the guides have also been translated into Russian).

41. Following the completion of an in-depth review on statistical dissemination and communication, the Conference of European Statisticians has requested the production of guidelines and good practices on improving statistical literacy. This will be the topic of the fourth volume in the “Making Data Meaningful” series. The UNECE Secretariat called for volunteers to form the editorial team for this new publication.

### **IV. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE TOPICS AND PRODUCTS**

42. The following suggestions for future topics and products were made during the small-group and plenary discussions:

#### **Topics:**

- Addressing segmented audiences;
- Use of social media (best practices);
- Presentations from media organizations (Reuters or Bloomberg, for example) and private companies with their view on dissemination of statistics and best practices;
- External and internal communication strategy;

- More about success stories/best practices;
- Invite people from more countries and invite statisticians;
- How to use and measure success in social media and in general (designing and conducting customer surveys, for example);
- Overview of different tools for storytelling;
- Suitable mechanism for user feedback for Web publications;
- Crisis management and dealing with disasters;
- More examples of corporate branding;
- Information on creating and using mobile applications.

**Products:**

- Create a statistical literacy guide;
- Create a platform for exchanging documentation (Facebook, wiki or blog);

**Other Suggestions:**

- Make organization reports shorter so people can actually read them. Also, try to give more time to participants to read those reports.
- Make small-group discussions valuable by different topics at the same time. Shift those discussions toward the end of the conference so the suggestions do not repeat one another.

**V. FURTHER INFORMATION**

43. All background documents and presentations for the meeting are available on the website of the UNECE Statistical Division.<sup>1</sup>

44. The participants expressed their great appreciation to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) for hosting this meeting and providing excellent facilities for their work.

**VI. ADOPTION OF THE REPORT**

45. The participants adopted the present report before the Work Session adjourned.

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<sup>1</sup> ([www.unece.org/stats/documents/2010.06.communication.htm](http://www.unece.org/stats/documents/2010.06.communication.htm)).