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

UNECE Work Session on dissemination of statistical commentary and stories
(Geneva, 4-5 December 2003)

INFORMATION NOTE

The meeting will be held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, Switzerland from 4 to 5 December 2003 beginning at 9.30 a.m. on Thursday, 4 December 2003

I. PURPOSE OF THE MEETING

1. The main objective of the meeting is to facilitate the exchange of experience and identify the best practices in disseminating statistical commentary, analysis and stories – using words to explain the numbers. A shift towards complementing statistical data with commentary and analysis is required to increase the visibility and role of statistics and to remain competitive in today's information saturated world.
2. The meeting is intended for experts from national and international statistical offices dealing with the above-mentioned issues in their everyday work, e.g. heads of dissemination departments, editorial staff presenting analysis and commentary, or any other staff responsible for dissemination of statistical data.

II. AGENDA OF THE MEETING

3. The work programme of the meeting will consist of the following substantive topics:
 - (i) How to make a story out of statistics. Recruiting and training of storytellers, and the creation of a favourable culture.
 - (ii) How to decide which stories to tell and to ensure they are of high quality.
 - (iii) Dissemination of statistical commentary and stories. How to get them through to the user (general public and the media)
 - (iv) How to integrate statistics from different sources and subject-matter areas to produce analysis that would be of interest to a wide audience.
4. Detailed explanatory notes on the content of topics (i) – (iv) are provided in Section V of this Information Note.

III. PARTICIPATION AND ACCREDITATION

5. Representatives of all Member States of the United Nations and of interested intergovernmental organizations are welcome to participate in the meeting. Participants representing non-governmental organizations in a consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council may also attend. All participants must be accredited by the competent authorities of their country or international organization. All participants attending the meeting are requested to have a valid passport and, if required, a visa. Applications for visas should be made as soon as possible to the Embassy of Switzerland in the country

in which the participants reside, with a reference to the UNECE Work Session on dissemination of statistical commentary.

6. The statistical offices and international organizations are asked **to inform the UNECE secretariat before 15 June 2003** whether their organization intends to participate at the meeting and/or submit a contribution on the topics mentioned above. Please indicate the topic to which the paper will refer as well as *participant(s) name(s) and their contact data*.

7. Participants are requested to fill in the attached Conference registration form and send it to the secretariat by fax (+41 22 9170040) by 1 November 2003 so that it may be processed well in advance of the meeting.

8. In order to enter the Palais des Nations, all participants need to obtain a security pass (ID card). For this purpose, please present yourself with your passport at the Villa les Feuillantines (shown on the attached map) by 8:30 a.m. at the latest on Thursday, 4 December 2003. Participants are requested to keep this ID card with them at all times for the duration of the meeting.

9. Two gates can be used for entering the UN premises: the pedestrian passage at Place des Nations (buses 5, 8 and 18, stop Nations) and the Pregny Gate (Avenue de la Paix, 14, buses 8 and 18, stop Appia).

IV. DOCUMENTATION, METHODS OF WORK AND OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

10. The working language of the meeting is English. The following deadlines and requirements apply:

- The papers, not exceeding 10 pages, **should be sent to the UNECE secretariat by 15 October 2003 at the latest.**
- Papers should be submitted in electronic format (e-mail or diskette) and sent to Ms. Tiina Luige (tiina.luige@unece.org).
- Documents should be submitted in MS Word.

11. The topics will be considered based on two kinds of papers: **invited papers** and **supporting papers**. The Steering Group preparing the meeting has asked selected countries to prepare invited papers and to lead the discussion on individual agenda items. The Session Organizers are provided below. The invited papers will provide the main basis for discussion. The other papers, which countries contribute to the meeting, are welcome and the issues raised in them will also be discussed under relevant agenda items. In addition to papers, examples of disseminated statistical stories, analysis and commentary are welcome.

12. Invited and supporting papers will be made available on the UNECE website:

<http://www.unece.org/stats/documents/2003.12.commentary.htm>

Delegates are encouraged to download the papers from the website and bring their own copies to the meeting. Documents posted on the website before the meeting will not be distributed in the conference room.

V. EXPLANATORY NOTES TO THE AGENDA

Topic (i): How to make a story out of statistics. Recruiting and training of storytellers, and the creation of a favourable culture.

Session organizer: Dag Ellingsen, Statistics Norway (dag.ellingsen@ssb.no)

13. The meeting will consider why it is important to publish statistics with explanatory notes and analytical comments and how to make a tradition and culture of statistical commentary or story-telling inside a statistical agency. This deals with both changing a culture within an organization, and attracting and keeping the human resources needed to make a story of statistics.

14. This session is also expected to discuss what are the obstacles to disseminating statistical analysis, commentary and stories, and what are the reasons that it is not spread more widely: legal obstacles, desire to keep a low profile, lack of capable staff, not enough knowledge and experience, etc.

Topic (ii): How to decide which stories to tell and ensure that they are of high quality.

Session organizer: Ted Wannell, Statistics Canada (Ted.Wannell@statcan.ca)

15. National statistical offices (NSOs) generally have very broad mandates to report on the economic and social conditions and so potential topics for statistical commentary are almost limitless. However, since NSOs have limited resources for statistical commentary, a process of topic selection is necessary.

16. The selection criteria are wide-ranging and could include: the potential interest for varied audiences, the desire to enhance the NSO reputation for relevance, the pertinence to current government policy issues, the need to interpret complex statistics, the degree to which they challenge received wisdom or the standard interpretation of social or economic conditions, and past media coverage of the subject matter. In other words, is the topic newsworthy?

17. These criteria are shared by the publishing organizations or other news media. But the situation of NSOs is unique. They likely have a set of legislated relationships with other government bodies, a privileged position with respect to the collection of information and legal responsibilities to their respondents. Furthermore, their credibility is predicated upon professionalism and impartiality. Some mechanism is therefore essential to ensure that the commentary strictly conforms to the institutional values of the NSO and does not cross the line between statistical commentary and political commentary.

18. This session will invite discussion on the following themes: What are the topic selection criteria, how are they applied, and how do NSOs ensure that commentary conforms to their institutional values? In setting their publication agenda, should NSOs seek the counsel of outside experts or stakeholders? If so, how do they guard their impartiality?

Topic (iii): Dissemination of statistical commentary and stories; how to get them through to the user - general public and the media.

Session organizer: Per-Åke Bladh, Statistics Sweden (perake.bladh@scb.se)

19. This session will look more closely at how the statistical commentary and stories are disseminated and how to ensure that they reach their target audience. Information from NSOs usually is disseminated through several channels at the same time - by telefax, by email and on the internet. Is it possible to use the same methods of dissemination with statistical stories? Or should there be a more targeted dissemination depending on the topic? If so, what about the equal availability to statistical information?

20. The session will also touch upon how to tell a story based on statistics in such a way that it would attract the interest of readers. What are the elements of such a story and how do they relate to people's everyday lives? How much of the story should be written by the NSO and how much should be left to the journalist to complete?

Topic (iv): How to integrate statistics from different subject-matter areas to provide analysis that could attract the attention of users.

Session organizer: David Marder, Office for National Statistics, United Kingdom (david.marder@ons.gov.uk)

21. Telling a story about one particular set of interesting figures can be straightforward and enlightening. It can have a simple message and exist as a fascinating nugget of information on its own.

22. But there is the bigger picture. How does this fascinating nugget fit within the context of the numerous other findings from different sources and subject areas? For example, how can we weave together dry and factual but important macro-economic data with the human-interest picture of social, health and demographic statistics? We are moving from a one-dimensional story to a two- or even three-dimensional picture. Another problem here is that sometimes different sources provide different data - how to explain this to the user?

23. Can we get data-producers to work together to make two or more seemingly unrelated sets of data come together and spring to life? Can we create a vivid picture that will spark the attention of users?

24. For this session we are looking for ideas on how we can change the culture in national statistical offices to think of bringing their data together in a much broader context – and turning this into a story the media or public will find interesting. We are looking for illuminating examples of where this has been tried – whether successfully or unsuccessfully. Is there a willingness in NSOs? Is there a particular friction or drag-point? Do data-producers feel this depth of analysis is the pure domain of specialist academics? Can we, or should we, break down the culture of each to their own silo?

VI. ACCOMMODATION

25. Participants are requested to make their own hotel reservations. As Geneva is often quite busy with international meetings, it is advisable to make the hotel reservation as early as possible. For more information on accommodation please consult the Internet website <http://www.unece.org/stats/geneva.e.html> (follow the link “Hotels in Geneva”). This site provides also useful information on Geneva and the UN.

VII. INFORMATION AND CORRESPONDENCE

26. All queries concerning the meeting should be addressed to:

Ms. Tiina Luige
Statistical Division, United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
Palais des Nations
1211-GENEVA 10, Switzerland

Tel.: +41 22 917 10 97
Fax: +41 22 917 00 40
e-mail: tiina.luige@unece.org



UNITED NATIONS OFFICE AT GENEVA

Meeting Registration Form

for meetings included in the work programme of the Conference of European Statisticians

Please Print

Date

Title and dates of the meeting

UNECE Work Session on Dissemination of Statistical Commentary (4-5 December 2003, Geneva)

Delegation of country, Organization or Agency

Participant

Family Name

First Name(s)

MR.
Mrs.
Ms.

Date of birth (DD/MM/YYYY) / /

Participation Category

Head of delegation (member country) Observer (international organization) Other (Please specify below)
Delegation member (member country) Non-governmental organization
Observer (country) (in observer status with ECOSOC)

Participating From / Until From Until

Do you have already a valid (at the time of the meeting) badge for entry to the UN Office at Geneva? (leave blank if not sure)

Document language preference English French Russian

Place of issue of the passport or ID	Passport or ID Number	Valid Until
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I intend to submit a paper on (working title and topic)

On Issue of ID Card

Participant Signature

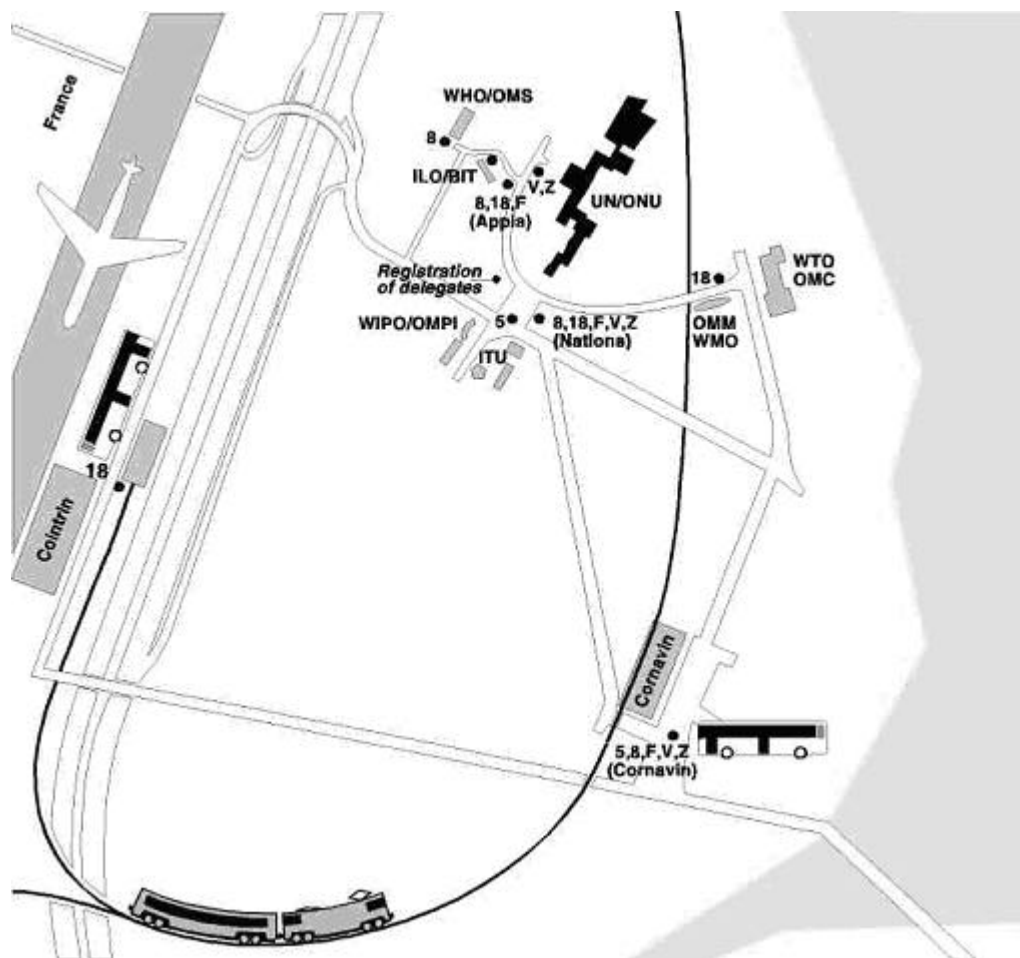
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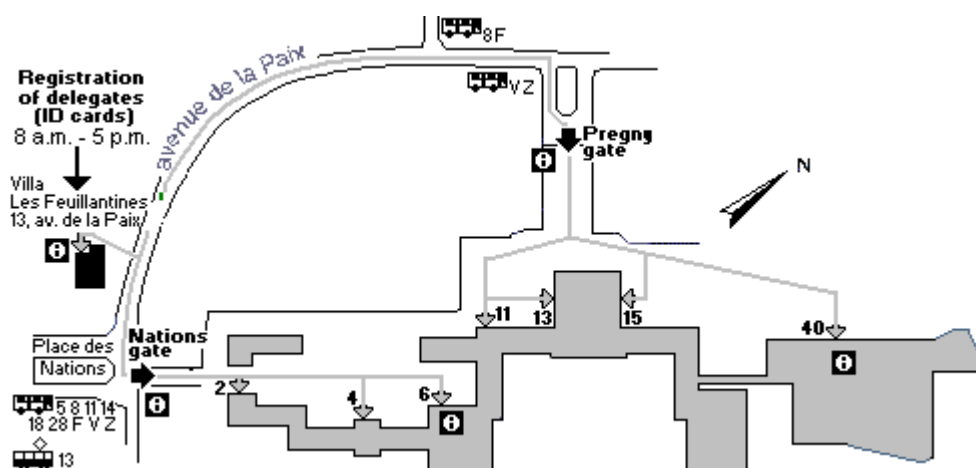
Card N° Issued

Initials, UN Official

How to find the UN building in Geneva:



Where to obtain the entry pass (Security Identification Office, Villa les Feuillantines, 13 avenue de la Paix):



Entry for delegates with valid ground pass: "Place des Nations gate" and "Pregny gate"

Entry for visitors: "Pregny gate" only

Note: a valid photo ID is needed to obtain the ground pass and to gain the entry to the UN premises.