How to reach the public with climate change-related statistics? Lessons learned from interviews with journalists in the UNECE region

Malgorzata Cwiek (UNECE) and Sara Svantesson (Statistics Denmark)

on behalf of Group D of the UNECE Task Force on the role of NSOS in achieving national climate objectives:

Haykanush Azizyan (Ministry of Environment of Armenia), Emil Mammadov (State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan), Otto Swertz (Statistics Netherlands), Angela Watkins (Office for National Statistics of the United Kingdom), Arturo de la Fuente (Eurostat), P. Bhanumati (IMF), Malgorzata Cwiek (UNECE)

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Agenda

- Background
- Why informing the public matters?
- Characteristics of climate change-related statistics
- Interviews with journalists
- How NSOs can contribute
- Recommendations and questions

Task Force on the role of NSOs in achieving climate objectives

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Objective

Develop guidance on **how NSOs can contribute to achieving national climate objectives** – identify **concrete ways** in which NSOs can be involved and **showcase what the statistical system already offers** to support climate action.

Timeline

- Established by the CES Bureau in **February 2022**; end of the work in **June 2024**
- **Interviews conducted in July – November 2022**
- Initial findings presented in September 2022; draft chapter on informing the public in August 2023

Active Members (± 30)

- **National statistical offices**: Netherlands (Chair), Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Canada, Costa Rica, Denmark, Ireland, Italy, Poland, Serbia, Spain, Türkiye, United Kingdom, Ukraine, …
- **Ministry of Environment / GHG inventory**: Armenia, Belarus, Poland, Costa Rica …
- **International organizations**: UNFCCC, UNSD, UNEP, UNECE, ECLAC, ESCAP, ECA, IMF, IEA, EEA, Eurostat, OECD, PARIS21, …

Content of the Guidance

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1. **Introduction**
2. **Institutional landscape and the role of NSOs**
3. **Reporting under the Paris Agreement**
4. **Meeting information needs of national policymaking on climate change mitigation**
5. **Meeting information needs of national policymaking on climate change adaptation**
6. Data needed to support a just transition
7. **Informing the public**
8. Climate finance
9. Guidance on cross-cutting issues (coordination, engagement with policymakers, collaboration with researchers, use of geospatial data etc.)
10. Conclusions/recommendations and future work

Each chapter from 3 to 8 examines policy context and identify how NSOs can contribute

Chapters 1-5 and 7 largely completed. Work in progress on chapters 6, 8-10.
Draft Guidance presented to the Expert Forum is available here

Why informing the public matters

- Achieving climate goals involves all parts of society
- Action for Climate Empowerment in the Paris Agreement (art. 12)
  - Education
  - Training
  - Public awareness
  - Public access to information
  - Public participation
  - International cooperation
- Related to the core mandate of NSOs and Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics

Characteristics of climate change-related statistics

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- Environmental, economic and social statistics relevant for climate change policies and analyses
- High policy relevance
- No strict boundary
- Complex institutional landscape – many stakeholders with strong mandates including other data providers
- Role of NSOs mostly not prescribed by international agreements
- Multiple approaches exist - territory-based vs. residence-based

Audiences and user needs for climate change-related statistics

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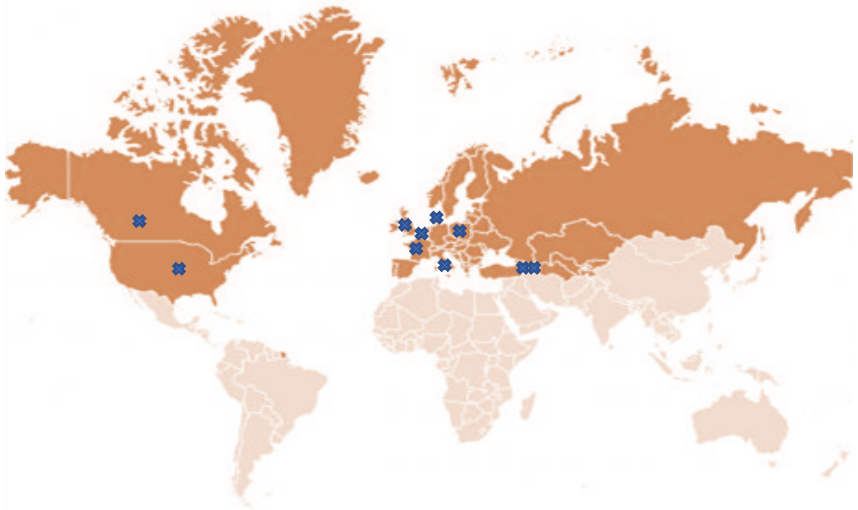
	"The public"	General **journalists**, teachers, students, consultants	Climate **journalists**, ministries, agencies, NGOs, climate activists	Data **journalists**, researchers, experts, developers
	Generally interested	**Specifically interested**	**Professionals and policymakers**	**Expert analysts**
Overview content Interactive maps, infographics, graphs Key figures, dashboards Simple wording, engaging visuals and titles	■	■	■	■
Commented statistics Press releases, reports, analysis Thematic webpages		■	■	■
Statistics Tables Documentation of statistics			■	■
Data, including microdata Tailored and detailed data Anonymized micro data Geospatially enabled data				■

Table 2.Needs for climate change-related statistics products by user group

Rationale and approach

- **Why ask journalists?**
  - Public go to the media for information
  - Journalists are a key group responsible for obtaining and disseminating information, data and statistics to the public
  - Experts in current topics and ways to effectively reach their audience

- Collecting experiences through **structured interviews**
  - Conducted via phone in July – November 2022
  - Prewritten questions with option to elaborate and give examples
  - Coverage: Geography, type of media, journalists' technical skill
  - 11 interviews



Climate related data of most interest to the public

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- Wide range of stories and topics
  - “Traditional” story-focused narratives
  - Graphics, visualizations
  - Analyses
  - Specialized data or GIS analysis skills
  - Stories with data as an essential element

Data and sources most used by the journalists

- Climate data from different **sources** – NSOs, international organizations and other:
  - Hydro-meteorological institutes, Ministry of Environment/ Energy and other national government sources
  - Universities
  - Private actors, social media
- Physical **measures –** weather, emissions and energy are generally well available on national level
- Resources in **English** and easily **accessible** will be used more often
- Time, resources and technical skill dictate the **format** used:
  - Mostly raw data/tables (4)
  - Both data and graphs/press releases (3)
  - Mostly graphs and press releases (3)

Which data are difficult to access?

- **Topics**:
  - Climate adaptation, business and finance, impact of climate change on health and nature, consumer carbon footprint measures
- **Issues**:
  - **Coverage:** Lack of availability, particularly for parts of Africa, Asia and Latin America; different scales, geographies and lack of coherence
  - **Insufficient timeliness:** Periodic (annual publications) are too old; up-to-minute data is missing
  - **Granularity:** Local level data to inform local stories
  - **Accessibility:** Open access to data; Ready-made visualizations and interpretations

Preferences and needs

- **Less technical** journalists' needs
  - Help desks and direct contact
  - Fewer reference values and periods are preferred
  - Fact sheets and dashboards with most relevant data
  - Pre-releases under embargo
- **More technical** journalists' needs
  - Geospatial data in usable formats (shape files, JSON, vector format etc.)
  - Free and open-source raw data
- **Too little** data is not good, but **too much** is not good either
- Attractive format helps to draw attention to what is available but big media will do their own visualizations anyway

Different approaches to measuring GHG emissions?

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Yes, but…

… I cannot explain the details

… I will consult an expert if I need to explain the different approaches

… I am not confident enough to describe it in detail

… I have never researched the details

… I do not think it is important

… I feel it is fine as long as the approaches do not contradict

… I am not sure this has ever complicated a story narrative

… I always stick to one of the approaches

… I think the IPCC approach presents an incomplete picture

Conclusions

- It is **difficult** to be a climate journalist using data
- Data produced by NSOs are used and appreciated, but often **not the first thing** that comes to mind
- **Local and current** data are of most interest, but not exclusively
- **No data vs. too much data**
- What comes first – **data or the story?**
- Reliable data is very important but sometimes **pragmatism** wins
- Very useful execrise but difficult to carry out

Strengths and what could be done

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- **Strenghts:**
  - Producing statistics for public good
  - Trusted data provider on a topic that can be highly politicized
  - Expertise in making data available and accessible
  - Broad perspective of the data landscape
- **What could be done - data:**
  - Emissions: data and user guidance
  - Other climate-related topics of public interest: foreign climate-aid, climate-related health expenditure, waste management, low-carbon energy consumption, business analysis on micro level
  - Collect and present relevant data from other agencies, e.g. energy statistics
  - Granular data and geospatially-enabled data

Dissemination and communication

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- **Static and interactive data presentations**
  - Statistical yearbooks, bulletins, articles, websites, portals, dashboards, social media, tables, graphics, mapping tools, downloadable files etc.
- **Proactive outreach, e.g., to schools**
- **Social media activities**
  - Infographics, videos or highlights on LinkedIn, Facebook, X (formerly known as Twitter), Instagram
  - Dialog with users – can be resource costly
- **Searchability and machine-readability**
- Serving those who look for **a quick answer** – and those who want to know **(much) more**
- **Cooperation between communications and domain experts** at the NSO

Draft recommendations for NSOs

- Map and regularly evaluate **user needs**
- Improve **machine readability** and **searchability**
- Consider **thematic websites or dashboards** for statistics and indicators
  - Structure “drivers”-”emissions”-“impacts”-”mitigation”-”adaptation” - helping to tell the story
  - Increase relevance with international comparisons
- Provide **user guidance** on the different methods/approaches
  - Short format: key figures or short fact box
  - Long format: Technical note and documentation of statistics

Questions to the Expert Meeting

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- What do you think about the recommendations?
- What other **good practices** and **innovations** in dissemination and communication could help with the identified issues?
- What examples of user engagement and mechanisms for following user needs could be given?
- Is it still a political topic? How to balance policy-relevance and impartiality?
- **Any other feedback and input are appreciated** – in the Q&A or by e-mail (cwiek@un.org and srs@dst.dk)

Thank you!

Malgorzata Cwiek
cwiek@un.org

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