UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS

UNECE Expert Meeting on Dissemination and Communication of Statistics   18 December 2023

11-13 October 2023, Lisbon, Portugal

REPORT OF THE EXPERT MEETING

1.   The expert meeting was organized as part of the Conference of European Statisticians' work programme for 2023, within the context of the High-Level Group for the Modernisation of Official Statistics (HLG-MOS) activity. It was held on 11-13 October 2023 in Lisbon, Portugal, hosted by Statistics Portugal.

2.   There were 98 participants, including representatives of national statistical offices and government agencies of the following 31 countries: Albania, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Canada, Croatia, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Indonesia, Israel, Italy, Lithuania, Mexico, Republic of Moldova, Netherlands (Kingdom of the), North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Türkiye, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and United States of America.

3.   In addition, there were representatives from Eurostat, International Monetary Fund (IMF), Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE). The meeting was also attended by representatives of the private sector (Microsoft Portugal and the Sensible Code Company, UK).

4.   The expert meeting was chaired by Aeidin Sheppard (CSO, Ireland). The Organizing Committee of the expert meeting includes: Emily Liddel (U.S. Bureau of Labour Statistics), Lukasz Augustyniak (Eurostat), Lígia Nunes and Luís Campos (Bank of Portugal), Terri Mitton, and Vincent Finat-Duclos (OECD), Kerstin Hänsel (Destatis, Germany) and Ellen Dougherty (U.S. Department of Agriculture).

5.   The agenda included the following substantive topics, each comprising its own session within the meeting:

- Session 1: Building trust and brand;
- Session 2: Engaging with hard-to-reach audience;
- Session 3: Innovation in communications; and
- Session 4: Measuring the effectiveness of communication.

6.   Thirty-one substantive presentations were made within these sessions. The timetable, papers, presentations, and other outputs from the meeting are available at the UNECE website https://unece.org/statistics/events/DissComm2023.

7.   The key messages and takeaways of the sessions and Q&A included (more details available in Annex I):

- Building trust amid societal changes requires enhanced statistical literacy (among all categories of users) and a comprehensive communication strategy.
- The effective communication strategies with partnerships, brand identity and employer branding are important aspects in fostering trust, combating misinformation, and enhancing public awareness of the organization's mission and data practices, and amplifying the understanding of statistics' social significance beyond mere data dissemination.
- It is vital to enhance collaboration between statisticians and communication professionals.
- Transparent communication on NSO mission, data sources and methodology is vital to overcome stakeholder resistance and improve communication strategies. The obstacles in data access may arise due to limited public understanding of the mission and role of an NSO.

- The NSOs focus on engaging diverse audiences, including children, adolescents, and the broader public, through educational apps, revamped websites, and social media initiatives.
- Education and increasing literacy of statistical users, starting from the young ages, ensures engaging children in a continuous learning journey, emphasizing their rights to information and fostering an active citizenry.
- Utilizing social media platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok and user-friendly tools and resources helps to bridge communication gaps and promote statistical awareness among children and young users.
- The evolving landscape of statistical communication and dissemination practices among various NSOs and agencies reveals innovative approaches in leveraging technology, such as AI, chatbots, and interactive tools can help enhance statistical communication's effectiveness and accessibility.
- The dynamic shift in communication strategies emphasizes the importance of user-centered design, ensuring that statistical information is easily comprehensible, interactive, and tailored to diverse user groups.
- Challenges and opportunities in utilizing AI, improving data accessibility, maintaining ethical considerations, and effectively measuring the impact of communication strategies were mentioned among the issues NSOs have to deal with.
- The emphasis on ongoing monitoring, user-centric approaches, and impact evaluation has emerged as a key priority for NSOs, enabling to steer communication efforts effectively, make data-driven improvements, and enhance the overall impact of their dissemination activities.
- The focus now shifts towards establishing robust impact evaluation frameworks that go beyond mere metrics, capturing audience perceptions and fostering continual refinement of communication campaigns and strategies.
- Overall, NSOs are engaged in a continuous process to adapt, innovate, and effectively communicate statistical data, ultimately fostering a more informed, engaged, and empowered society.

8.   Two broad themes were identified as future works during and after the workshop (through evaluation survey):

- **Building and maintaining trust**: one of a common observation made throughout the sessions was the need for our citizens to trust what statistical organizations do in terms of both data we produce and how we do our works (e.g., privacy), therefore communicating our commitment.
- **Artificial intelligence**: AI will play an even bigger role in coming years and influence the communication works of the statistical organisations. More activities should be focused on AI area.

9.   Throughout the meeting, the participants shared resources and tips that were deemed useful for other participants (through sli.do). Annex 2 compiled the list.

Annex I. Summary of proceeding and discussions

Session 1: Building trust and brand

10.   This topic was organized by Emily Liddel (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics) and Lukasz Augustyniak (Eurostat). It included the following presentations:

- Building Trust in Numbers and Communicating Statistics - Suzanne Halls (Office for Statistics Regulation, UK)
- Increasing trust in official statistics in the Republic of North Macedonia - Jasmina Gjorgjieva (State Statistical Office, Republic of North Macedonia)
- A wake-up call: Why we have to strengthen awareness about our mission - Karen Longva and Kristin Goa (Statistics Norway)
- Building trust through a layered communication strategy - Wendy Schelfaut and Nicolas Duriau (Statistics Belgium)
- Cooperating with other institutions to increase trust in official statistics (and statistical literacy) - Patrizia Collesi (Istat, Italy)
- Presenting iNews, a Communication Product - Maria Manuela Martins (Statistics Portugal)
- BPstat: speaking official statistics with a stronger brand voice - Lígia Nunes (Bank of Portugal)
- Defining a brand of a statistical institute - Experiences and lessons learned - Hanna Ikäheimo (Statistics Finland)
- The Employer Branding - Anna Borowska (Statistics Poland) and Aeidin Sheppard (CSO, Ireland)

11.   In addition, there were 2 papers shared as room documents:

- #IstatNewsletter: how to increase audience and strengthen brand reputation - Michela Troia (Istat, Italy)
- Official Statistics in the Data Science Worldview: Actors and Stakeholders - Rita Lima (Istat, Italy)

12.   The points raised during the presentations and discussions include:

- UK Statistics Authority has showcased its role in monitoring and intervening against misuse while advocating for the responsible use of statistics in government communications to foster trust and informed decision-making. The importance of numerical accuracy in various communication media was emphasized recommending the **close collaboration between communication professionals and statisticians** to ensure that statistics complement rather than overshadow key messages.
- With societal changes and rapid digitalization, **trust in state institutions is weakening** and NSOs struggle in maintaining credibility. **Re-building trust** is a long journey through enhancing statistical literacy, emphasizing the significance of official statistics, branding itself as a reliable data producer, and implementing a comprehensive communication strategy to engage the public.
- Limited public understanding of social mission and mandate of Statistics Norway has **hindered their ability to access card and transactions data** to effectively deliver statistics and information.
- The negative reactions from various stakeholders can be addressed by
    - **Better communicating and informing in a more transparent way on the (traditional and new) data sources, statistical methodology, process and expected outputs**.
    - **Assessing Communication Strategy**: Reviewing past strategies and pinpointing areas needing improvement, especially in effectively conveying the organization's purpose.
    - **Trust and Awareness Enhancement**: Stressing the need to boost public awareness and trust by communicating the NSOs social mission, detailing a comprehensive plan to achieve this goal.
- Statistics Belgium's **layered communication strategy** supports trust building and a better brand identity focusing on data literacy, transparency, misinformation combat, and partnership.

- **Partnerships** strategy through diverse projects highlighting the value of statistics in real world applications at Istat led to increased number of users and statistical literacy, which also enhanced **corporate reputation and trust in official statistics**.
- Statistics Portugal's Newsletter employed a modern approach for its institutional magazine (e.g., story-telling approach, high-quality visuals, active voice), and it played an important role in **fostering an informed society, combating suspicion, establishing direct communication, and aiding internal communication in the organization**.
- **Brand identify** is more than just **visuals** and includes **brand voice** - the way we use words to communicate the personality of a brand (e.g., trustworthy, caring). **Well-defined brand voice** can improve communication and trust as seen in the example of Banco de Portugal.
- Defining a brand is important for statistical organizations as it helps to clarify the identify, expertise and values of the organizations. Statistics Finland's **brand definition process** in 2022 emphasized importance of engaging internal stakeholder broadly and being ready to tell the story behind the new visual identify.
- There is a need for **effective employer branding strategies** across NSOs, focusing on attracting engagement beyond financial incentives by offering meaningful work and development opportunities.
- It is important to enhance public awareness and focus on **communicating not just the statistics but also the organization's social mission and mandate**.

Session 2: Engaging with hard-to-reach audience

13.   This topic was organized by Lígia Nunes and Luís Campos (Bank of Portugal). It included the following presentations:

- TurkStat Child - Serhat Atakul (Turkish Statistical Institute, Türkiye)
- Towards a child-centered approach: Making a data literacy training journey - Andrea Fernandez Conde (INEGI, Mexico)
- My life with statistics – statistical training for teenagers - Marianne Mackie (Statistics Denmark)
- Engaging with hard-to-reach audience: young people and Statistics Finland - Mervi Ukkonen (Statistics Finland)
- Reaching out to non-advanced users: Eurostat's Education corner - Romina Brondino (Eurostat)

14.   The points raised during the presentations and discussions include:

- TurkStat and UNICEF collaborated to create the **TurkStat Child app**, to enhance children's statistical literacy and engagement with statistics in an entertaining manner. Beyond statistics, the app integrates lessons on children's rights, sustainable. development goals, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, aligning with key international frameworks. It is continuously updated and celebrated on special occasions to encourage usage.
- Revamp of INEGI's educational section on their website aimed to **engage children in a long-term learning journey** by providing tailored statistical and geographic information, recognizing children as current users with rights to information. The ultimate goal is to **empower children by democratizing statistical and geographic information**, nurturing an informed and active engaged societu capable of using data for societal change.
- Statistics Denmark introduced "**My life with statistics**", an **educational portal** targeting 13-17-year-old students, designed to enhance their statistical literacy and critical assessment skills for figures encountered in daily life and on social media. The approach involves **accessible communication and gamification features** to engage students effectively.
- **Engaging young people and statistical literacy** has been a long-term endeavour for Statistics Finland. This involved outreach to schools, educators, and recent initiatives through social media platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok, with an aim of bridging the generational communication gap and promote statistical awareness.
- **To address declining respondent rates**, especially among young men in Finland, Statistics Finland has implemented various campaigns, including video content, social media campaigns (#pleaserespond), and collaborations with platforms such as TikTok, while emphasizing the importance of participating in statistical surveys.

- Eurostat is committed to enhancing statistical literacy among citizens by offering **user-friendly tools and resources**, consolidating them in an **Education Corner** on its website, targeting the non-advanced users, students, teachers, and individuals seeking to understand statistics better. This initiative involves a range of updated products including explanatory tools, interactive content, and data visualizations, all tailored to improve accessibility and comply with Eurostat's new brand identity, ensuring a seamless user experience.

Session 3: Innovation in communications

15.   This topic was organised by Terri Mitton, Laura Belli and Vincent Finat-Duclos (OECD). It included the following presentations:

- The Digital Transformation at the CBS (Israel) – Eran Ropalidis (Israel CBS)
- From storytelling to scrollytelling – modern digital publications that strengthen and develop the data literacy of our users – Pedram Ghanfili and Urs Frei (FSO, Switzerland)
- Data to see. Statistics to listen to. Video and audio to innovate digital and social communication of Italian National Institute of Statistics – Giovanni Prattichizzo and Cristiana Conti (Istat, Italy)
- Invited presentation: From Data to Art – a journey into generative AI – Alexandra Neves (Microsoft)
- Results from the survey on the use of Generative AI for communication – Terri Mitton (OECD)
- INSEE Chatbots: A new tool to help users – Vincent Lapegue (Insee, France)
- Use of AI in Statistical Communication and Dissemination – Maulana Faris (Statistics Indonesia)
- Statistics rides Grand Depart – Jose Jabier Zurikarai (Bask Statistical Institute, Spain)
- Shining a light on the population: Finding new ways to release the value of the 2021 Census – Gerald Williams (ONS, UK)
- How a strong community and a user-centered design approach is key to .Stat Suite product excellence – Laura Belli (OECD)
- "Making progress in communicating progress" Example of innovative approaches in communicating data and statistics for 2030 Agenda – Olga Świerkot-Strużewska (Statistics Poland) and Carolina Fresta Santos (INE Portugal)
- How to reach the public with climate change-related statistics? Lessons learned from interviews with journalists in the UNECE region – Svantesson Sara (Statistics Denmark) and Malgorzata Cwiek (UNECE)

16.   In addition, one paper was shared as a room document:

- The new contact centre: a single portal for all Dissemination and Communication services of Istat - Giulia Peci, Roberta Roncati and Maria Assunta Scelsi (Istat, Italy)

17.   The points raised during the presentations and discussions include:

- The Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) is implementing a comprehensive multi-year plan aimed at **modernizing data collection, processing, and dissemination** (presenting the 2022 census data in user-friendly formats, introducing responsive web design, dashboards, and user-friendly applications).
- This initiative **integrates innovative technologies such as BI tools, AI, and APIs** to enhance data accessibility and user experience, intending to facilitate evidence-based policymaking and evaluate government actions.
- Statistical institutions have witnessed a shift towards interactive digital publications, departing from traditional PDF formats. To avoid the complex and overwhelming publications, similar to scientific statistics of the past, the Swiss Federal Statistical Office has embraced "**scrollytelling**," a form of **visual storytelling that evolves with the user's scroll**, providing an engaging and streamlined experience. The "**scrollypubs**," enhance user engagement, along with an assessment of emerging trends like **AI-generated content and SEO optimization** in shaping modern statistical publications.
- Istat is adopting **innovative approaches** in utilizing Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube, and Twitter to leverage video and audio content in statistical communication. This has led to increased user engagement and interactions garnered by these formats through analytics.

- The **podcasts** become increasingly popular in **promoting statistical culture**, citing increased audiobook production and stimulating personal reflection and building user trust through narrative storytelling.
- To translate data into competitive advantage, NSOs must take into account the latest innovations in data and AI tools and platforms. In 2023 the ML, AI and Data landscape is enormously diverse and fragmented posing additional challenges to statisticians and communication experts.
- A survey on the use of generative AI technologies in communication activities was conducted prior to the meeting. One of the main findings is that while most respondents **plan to or use generative AI** in communications, their organizations **lack well-defined policies and guidelines for its use**, and they are concerned about quality, reliability, data privacy, and ethical considerations.
- INSEE, receiving over 170,000 contact requests annually, **introduced multiple chatbots** in 2022 **to offer automated responses to commonly asked questions**. These bots cater to various domains such as business surveys, population census, and enterprise registration and handle queries 24/7. Following a well-defined procedure their interaction resulted in **80% to 90% accuracy in responses**, streamlining user interactions effectively.
- Statistics Indonesia (BPS) recognizes AI's immense potential and started leveraging tools such as **ChatGPT** and others in interactive discussions, drafting, and presenting statistical information in more engaging ways and empowering better decision-making based on accurate data. While the AI can greatly enhance the efficiency of communication works by generating texts of high quality, the role of human copywriters remains important as they would need to direct and guide the AI.
- The **Tour de France's "Grand Depart"** in Bilbao stirred massive engagement in the Basque Country which made the **Bask Statistical Institute to opt for a less traditional approach.** The dissemination department started a collaboration with the event team, and this resulted in unexpectedly successful video launches.
- The 2021 census in England and Wales presented an opportunity for a significant overhaul in data dissemination strategies. It emphasized on innovation by leveraging new technologies and enhancing the accessibility and utilization of population statistics. Targeting **user personas**, ONS developed tailored products, including **visual storytelling, online games, and interactive data visualization tools**. Notably, the **'create a custom dataset'** tool ensures **real-time statistical disclosure control**, enabling rapid release of anonymized census statistics while protecting individual respondents.
- The **.Stat Suite**, a standardized open-source platform, facilitates efficient statistical data production and dissemination. Employing a systematic user-centered design approach, the development process **integrates various research and design techniques to ensure evidence-based improvements, prioritizing usability, accessibility, and interactivity**.
- Despite remarkable data stories about Agenda 2030, there has been a challenge in their dissemination and accessibility, prompting international organizations to facilitate collaboration and exchange of ideas. The Task Team on Communication of the **UNECE Steering Group on Statistics for Statistics for SDGs** initiated "Communication forthnights" to provide a platform to delve into specific topics through invited talks (e.g., data visualisation, monitoring publications) and exchange experiences and lessons learned. The experience highlighted the **importance of collaborations and the exchange of ideas for fostering creativity**.
- Effective communication of climate change-related statistics requires **tailored communication** for **various groups and journalists** play an important role as public often go to the media for information. The structured interviews with the journalists conducted by the UNECE Task Force on the role of NSOS in achieving national climate objectives revealed insights regarding their needs, preferences and challenges.
- The Task Force developed a guidance with recommendation on communication areas such as improvement of machine-readability, development of thematic dashboards and provision of user guidance.

Session 4: Measuring the effectiveness of communication

18.   This topic was organized by Kerstin Hänsel (Destatis, Germany) and Ellen Dougherty (U.S. Department of Agriculture). It included the following presentations:

- How to communicate effectively? Destatis experience with an integrated media monitoring system -

Kerstin Hänsel (Destatis, Germany)
- Measuring The Success of Communication Using Social Media Statistical Dashboards - Maulana Faris (Statistics Indonesia)
- Practice what you preach: use statistics to make better decision - Leonardo Almeida (Bank of Portugal)
- Ensuring effective steering the dissemination function based on actionable monitoring - Susanne Taillemite (Eurostat)
- How the OECD measures and evaluates the effectiveness of data dissemination - Stefano Contratto (OECD)

19.   The points raised during the presentations and discussions include:

- In 2020, Destatis implemented a comprehensive **newsroom organization with an integrated monitoring system** that evaluates the success of activities across various media platforms, including online, TV, radio, and print, as well as on social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn.
- This **ongoing monitoring** is crucial in the rapidly evolving digital communication landscape, enabling to assess developments early, tailor communication formats to specific audiences and channels, and strategically prioritize topics.
- Through the extensive use of **key performance indicators**, Destatis continuously evaluates and adjusts communication strategies, gaining insights into user demographics and needs, and setting realistic goals for media reach and engagement, all while ensuring efficient dissemination of data to fulfil legal mandate.
- To gauge the effectiveness of their communication in the digital age, NSOs now rely on **data analytics**. They **track social media interactions**, including reach, engagement, sharing, and user behaviour, to gain insights and evaluate their communication strategy, ultimately guiding improvements for future outreach efforts.
- In addition to Google analytics, Banco de Portugal utilizes data on BPstat logs **to capture further insights. Understanding user behaviour through these helps shift from a producer-centric to a user-centric approach**, focusing on delivering relevant content to its audience.
- By analysing user behavior and preferences, the bank gains insights into who accesses their statistical portal, how they do it, and their content preferences. The **dashboard displays user requests by the statistical themes and topics**, and this help production area see the impact of their products and make informed decisions (e.g., reduce efforts on some products that are not used as much as anticipated). This **data-driven strategy** allows them to **proactively adapt their content to meet evolving user demands**, ultimately improving engagement and value.
- In an environment saturated with information, monitoring the communication to **check if products reach their target audience** is important. Eurostat, similar to other statistical organizations, faces the challenge of effectively steering its dissemination function, which involves a multitude of data releases and communication products across various channels.
- The monitoring encompasses **activity measurement**, **channel analysis, and qualitative user feedback** obtained through **various means** such as **surveys, usability testing, user dialogue, and social media**. The findings help Eurostat assess **performance against communication objectives and make necessary adjustments to its products and services**. Although steering based on evaluation is not always easy (e.g., some products may still be argued to be needed for certain policymakers), monitoring results should be used more actively for developing products as well as for the resource allocation.
- The conclusion is **the need for a comprehensive, user-focused, and agile monitoring system** which should be an integral and ongoing part of the dissemination function management, allowing for continuous improvement and adaptation.
- The OECD's Communication Directorate has successfully **integrated monitoring & impact evaluation approaches** into its communication practices, with a particular focus on data dissemination, a vital aspect of the organization's effectiveness.
- Implementing an **impact and data-driven approach toward evidence-based communication** required significant time and effort, including the creation of new roles, tools, processes, and operational methods.
- It is vital to establish **impact evaluation framework**, moving beyond short-term reach metrics to capture audience perceptions and long-term impact, and how these insights inform changes in the organization's communication campaigns and strategies.

Annex II. Compilation of resources shared during the meeting

Session 1: Building trust and brand
- Brand management guide https://unece.org/statistics/news/branding-and-reputation-management-are-key-safeguarding-trust-official-statistics
- Regarding the promotion of the value of official stat in an entertaining way: Swiss FSO video "what have statistics ever done for us"?: https://youtu.be/HigpKOWNdXU
- Strategic communication framework: https://unece.org/statistics/publications/strategic-communication-framework-statistical-institutions

Session 2: Engaging with hard-to-reach audience
- Wired "Computer Scientist Explains One Concept in 5 Levels of Difficulty" https://youtu.be/fOGdb1CTu5c

Session 3: Innovation in communications
- Finding new ways to release the value of the 2021 Census ONS: Create a custom dataset' https://www.ons.gov.uk/datasets/create NISRA: Flexible Table Builder https://build.nisra.gov.uk/en/
- Useful AI resources: https://linktr.ee/ai4u

Session 4: Measuring the effectiveness of communication.
- UNECE publication on the Value of Official Statistics: https://unece.org/statistics/press/what-are-statistics-worth-determining-value-official-statistics
- Value of Census: "The benefits to users forecast ... for [UK] Census 2021 totalled £5.5 billion over the 10-year appraisal period." https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/articles/assessingthebenefitsofcensus2021englandandwales/2022-09-28