

**UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC COMMISSION
FOR EUROPE (UNECE)
CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS**

**Work Session on the Communication of Statistics
(Geneva, Switzerland, 18-20 June 2014)**

Report of the work session on the communication of statistics
Prepared by the UNECE Secretariat

1. The Work Session on the Communication of Statistics was held in Geneva, Switzerland, from 18 to 20 June 2014. Participants from the following countries attended the meeting: Austria, Belgium, Canada, China, Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Luxembourg, Mexico, Moldova, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Romania, the Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America. The European Commission was represented by Eurostat. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), Eurasian Economic Commission, Institute for Statistics of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and United Nations Statistical Division (UNSD) were also present.
2. Ms. Lidia Bratanova of the UNECE Secretariat opened the meeting and outlined the role of the UNECE in implementing the work programme of the Conference of European Statisticians, of which this work session is a part. Mr. Michael Levi (United States of America) was elected as the Chairperson.
3. Mr. Georges-Simon Ulrich, Director General of the Swiss Federal Statistical Office, gave a key-note speech on enabling stakeholders to use statistics. He highlighted the importance of having a user-driven approach, identifying stakeholders with the goal to help them use statistics. Mr. Ulrich stressed the importance of communicating statistical methodology to users to increase their understanding of the ways the data are collected. He also noted the value of statistical literacy and the importance of educating journalists and the public about statistics.

Session 1: Statistical literacy

4. Austria presented a project which started in 2011 to improve statistical literacy in schools. The presentation outlined the background of statistical literacy activities for pupils along with activities to promote statistical literacy. The statistical literacy project had a programme for

students and teachers. The topics for students were developed according to their curriculum and experience. Topics for teachers included statistical topics and methods of teaching statistics. According to the evaluation after the programme, the overwhelming majority of participants found it useful and well-organized. It was noted that the programme was most appreciated by students of secondary academic schools. In conclusion, Austria highlighted their plans to conduct the programme twice a year.

5. Canada talked about adopting a strategy combining traditional and innovative communication practices to expand media coverage and improve the accuracy of media coverage concerning the Canadian economy and society. The presentation outlined the proactive, multi-channel approach adopted by the agency to educate journalists and be more responsive to their needs. Media relations activities ranged from determining and improving the content and style of statistical releases, to hosting concept brief sessions with lead analysts and media lockups, to training spokespersons and publishing new media content to increase Canadians' understanding of the state of the country.
6. The U.S. Department of Agriculture talked about the international programme "Census at School" that the USDA had also joined. The presentation focused on the development of a Food Preference Survey lesson plan of the U.S. Census at School program. The USDA and the American Statistical Association, with guidance from the National Agriculture in the Classroom organization, developed Food Preference Survey lessons, activities, and extensions that build on the existing Census at School activities, with an agricultural tie-in. The Food Preference Survey was launched at the National Agriculture in the Classroom annual conference for teachers in June 2013. The USDA plans to expand the project and continue promoting the use of this project.
7. The U.S. Census Bureau continued the presentation about their Census in Schools programme. It was noted that the evolution of this program had provided the U.S. Census Bureau with the opportunity to turn this decennial programme into one that provides educators, students, and families with an understanding of the relevance and importance of the Census in their daily lives on an ongoing basis. The presentation stated that the Statistics in Schools programme would replicate and improve upon the 2010 Census in Schools programme's success in reaching hard-to-count populations across the country. It would also provide the U.S. Census Bureau with a means to network and develop partnerships with a host of other federal agencies, education associations/organizations, and other countries who disseminate data and education information to educators and students.
8. The second presentation from the U.S. Census Bureau talked about a variety of information tools and different presentation methods in the U.S. Census Bureau's communication efforts. The presentation showed the earliest attempts to visualize census data in the U.S. from the 19th century up to the present day. The presentation also noted the present and future importance of those tools and stressed that a key motivation was to be able to meet the needs of the many audiences consuming statistical information, from power to novice users and those in between. Rapidly changing technology will play a major role in how information is delivered and the agency will need to constantly adapt. Furthermore, the work by information specialists and partners in the field will continue to play a vital role as this staff interacts directly with data-user groups at the local level.

9. The Netherlands outlined efforts and strategies to reach young users of statistics. The organization decided to use teachers at schools as a primary way to attract and communicate with the young audience. Currently, the organization uses interactive online lessons, an annual “predict the economy” competition and direct contacts to work and communicate with teachers at schools. The Netherlands also conducted an evaluation of the organization’s website among teachers to determine the ways they use the online materials. The evaluation showed that the teachers were happy with the website but wanted more explanatory text for the modular content of the website. The organization took those recommendations into account and plans to maintain the predesigned lessons and increase the modular tools with adjacent explanatory text and will continue to be in touch with the teachers’ panel.

10. Latvia presented a new project called “School Corner” to promote the understanding of statistical data and correct the usage of data among pupils of secondary schools by illustrating and explaining indicators significant for the society in simple language and expressive form. The main tasks of the organizations in relation to that project were to reflect statistical data in a meaningful and attractive way and to develop informative materials for the needs of pupils and teachers. The materials included definitions of statistical indicators explained in understandable, short, simple and illustrative form. Those materials were promoted through press releases, e-mails to teachers, video presentations, seminars and school visits. Latvia plans to continue developing the project by training pupils in collecting and producing statistics, such as producing diagrams and charts, conducting a simple survey and using simple statistical calculations.

Session 2: Communication with respondents and evaluation of communication campaigns

11. The presentation from the Netherlands talked about the work of the Modernization Committee on Products and Sources of the High-Level Group for the Modernization of Statistical Production and Services that, among other things, deals with re-branding official statistics to make them a well-recognized brand. The presentation gave several examples of how NSOs use different approaches to deal with the challenges of communicating statistics and improve their value propositions. It was noted that there were opportunities for collaboration with partners outside an NSO that can increase the NSO’s value proposition. Those opportunities include reaching out to the research community to add value to data, collaborating with external developers of data apps, and engaging more broadly with stakeholders, users and respondents to better understand their needs so that statistical products and services can be better tailored to their requirements.

12. The Russian Federation talked about its experience with an awareness raising campaign aimed at popularization of economic and social official statistics. The organization regularly monitors traditional media and social networks to measure the impact of the campaign by counting the number of references to the organization and measuring the tone of those references. Different tools, such as informative videos, are used to communicate the messages of official statistics. The presentation also shared statistics on how those messages were perceived by the users and focused on users’ feedback. The organization works closely with prominent media outlets to transmit statistical information in easy-to-understand way. Those projects are aimed at communicating with public, getting their feedback and encouraging them to use statistics. The presentation also mentioned statistical literacy initiatives by the organization.

13. Issues raised during the discussion at the end of the day 1 included:

- Communication offices at NSOs need to be more proactive within their organizations in promoting the importance of the communication of statistics;
- While preparing books on statistical literacy for schools, it is important to involve schoolteachers in developing those books;
- The need for an online forum to share best practices on statistical literacy activities and initiatives;
- Social media and videos are vital in communicating messages to people under 18;
- A lot of NSOs are moving toward electronic services to gather information from respondents but it may be difficult to keep the response rate up while using those services;
- In general, falling response rate is a challenge that many statistical organizations face. It is important to educate respondents on the importance of their data;
- One of the challenges in implementing statistical literacy initiatives is the lack of resources to sustain those initiatives;
- Public information about statistical offices is often lacking; transparency demands that NSO be more forthcoming about staff, budgets, methods, etc.
- Collaborations among statistical organizations can be very useful in conducting statistical literacy projects;
- The need for training journalists on statistics;
- People need to see example of how data are used. To provide those examples, NSOs need to communicate more with data users;
- New media are seen as a challenge but also an opportunity to engage with different audience;
- There is a growing important of NSOs reaching schools and teachers.

Session 3: Quick wins on low and zero budget

14. The Office for National Statistics of the United Kingdom presented the work and initiatives of a Government Statistical Service (GSS) Good Practice Team. The role of the team was to identify, develop, promote and share good practice across the GSS in the priority areas of presentation, dissemination and user engagement. It was noted that regular user input and interaction could bring many benefits to the dissemination of statistics and adapting statistical products accordingly could lead to increased interest and media coverage. Social media also offers an opportunity for low cost, informal interaction with a wide audience. With strategic direction and collaboration, the potential to reach, understand and interact with a wider audience can be exploited quite easily.

15. Spain talked about the role and use of “statistical pills,” short videos presenting different statistical topics, in promoting statistical literacy. The main purpose of those videos is to explain basic statistical concepts and official statistics definitions and procedures. The presentation outlined the advantages of using videos for explaining statistics and described the process of producing “statistical pills” along with monitoring the way people consume and respond to those videos online. Although there are only six “statistical pills” available at the moment, the team is already working on producing new videos on several statistical topics.
16. Eurostat talked about a special issue of their internal newsletter (Eurostat Infos), called the Eurostat Tales. It included a selection of short anecdotes written by staff members about something that happened to them at the organization. The publication, edited by the communication team, received very positive feedback.
17. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics talked about their use of Twitter, a social media platform, for disseminating statistical information. The organization decided to add images in Twitter messages to increase users’ attention to the underlying content. The presentation talked about the metrics BLS used to evaluate the effectiveness of their tweets with images vs. tweets without images and noted that including images might help to promote the content of a tweet but was not a guarantee of more click-throughs.

Session 4: Good practices in electronic publications

18. Switzerland talked about producing electronic publications. The presentation outlined the classification of electronic publications and listed the organization’s requirements for an electronic publication. The presentation specifically talked about the .folio format used for creating interactive publications and provided a demonstration of interactive features in the publication. The presentation noted that authors and publication specialists face challenges of conceptualizing the content to be communicated and coming up with appropriate ways to present the content.
19. The United Nations Statistics Division talked about the process of transforming *The World Statistics Pocketbook*, an annual publication of the UNSD since 1976, into several digital products: website and UNCountryStats app. The presentation talked about lessons learned during this process and challenges that the organization faced. It also mentioned what steps the organizations plans to take to develop the product further: releasing a new version of the app in 2014, deploying a revised communication strategy for the app’s launch and developing a web-based app.
20. Eurostat presented Statistics Explained, the organization’s fully electronic publication system. This wiki-based system uses the open-source software Mediawiki and its structure is similar to Wikipedia. The talk elaborated on the structure of the product and explained a variety of its functions. Statistics Explained is becoming the centre of publication activities of Eurostat. Primary publications have been integrated into and are regularly updated in this dissemination tool. The usage statistics show that a combination of encyclopedia, glossary and portal seems to attract a continuously wider audience. The presentation also went through several planned improvements to the product that can be implemented to increase users’ satisfaction.
21. The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe talked about its experience in developing an iPad version of “Making Data Meaningful. Part 2: A Guide to presenting

statistics.” The presentation outlined earlier attempts of the UNECE to produce tablet-ready version of its publications and went into specifics of the process of producing an iPad version of “Making Data Meaningful.”

22. The Russian Federation talked about its approach to visualization of statistics including interactive applications, videos and static infographics. A consumer price monitor, personal inflation calculator and age-sex pyramid were mentioned among interactive applications. The presentation also included the demonstration of a video and distribution of infographics.
23. Issues raised during the discussion at the end of the day 2 included:
 - More and more countries realize the benefits of using social media for dissemination of statistical information but more attention needs to be paid evaluating social media’s contribution to dissemination;
 - It is important to involve statisticians in checking media releases before they go public;
 - Infographics can be beneficial in telling stories without much text;
 - Moving to electronic publications can meet some resistance from people as they sometimes prefer printed copies to electronic ones;
 - Development of APIs and open data can provide topics for discussion at the work session in the future;
 - More and more organizations are forced to do more with less;
 - There is a need for an online platform where countries can share their experiences in the communication and dissemination of statistics.
24. Switzerland, the United Kingdom, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe and the United States of America gave hands-on demonstrations of a variety of tools and workflows for producing interactive publications and infographics using different software.