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

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UNECE Expert Meeting on Dissemination and Communication of Statistics 2023
11-13 October 2023

Agenda

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

UNECE work on climate change-related statistics

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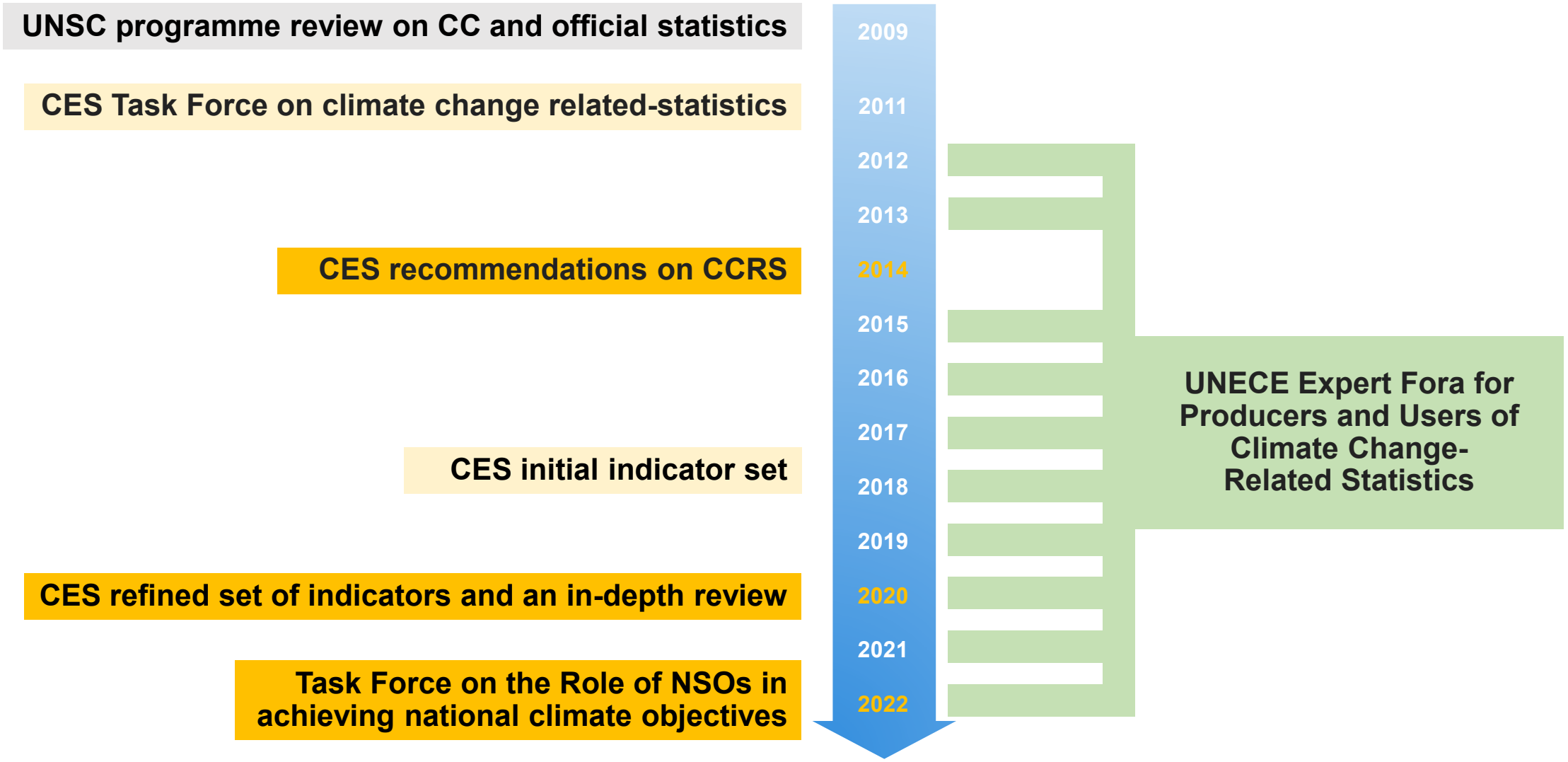

Task Force on the role of NSOs in achieving climate objectives

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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.

Mission

To inspire and support people working in NSOs who want to start or develop their work in this area.

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, …

Organization of the Task Force's work

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Timeline

- *Completed:*
  - **February 2022** – Task Force established by the CES Bureau
  - **September 2022** – presentation of the work plan and first findings from interviews with climate journalists to the 2022 Expert Forum
  - **August 2023** – presentation of the draft Guidance for consultation to the 2023 Expert Forum
  - October 2023 – presentation to other expert meetings
- *Planned:*
  - **January 2024** – submission of the final draft to the CES Bureau
  - **March-April 2024** – consultation with CES member countries and international organizations
  - **June 2024** – endorsement by the CES plenary session

Organization of work

- Parallel groups established to expedite the work on thematic chapters
- Most of the work carried out by e-mails and videoconferences
- Three in-person meetings

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

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

Examples of actors by main stakeholder group

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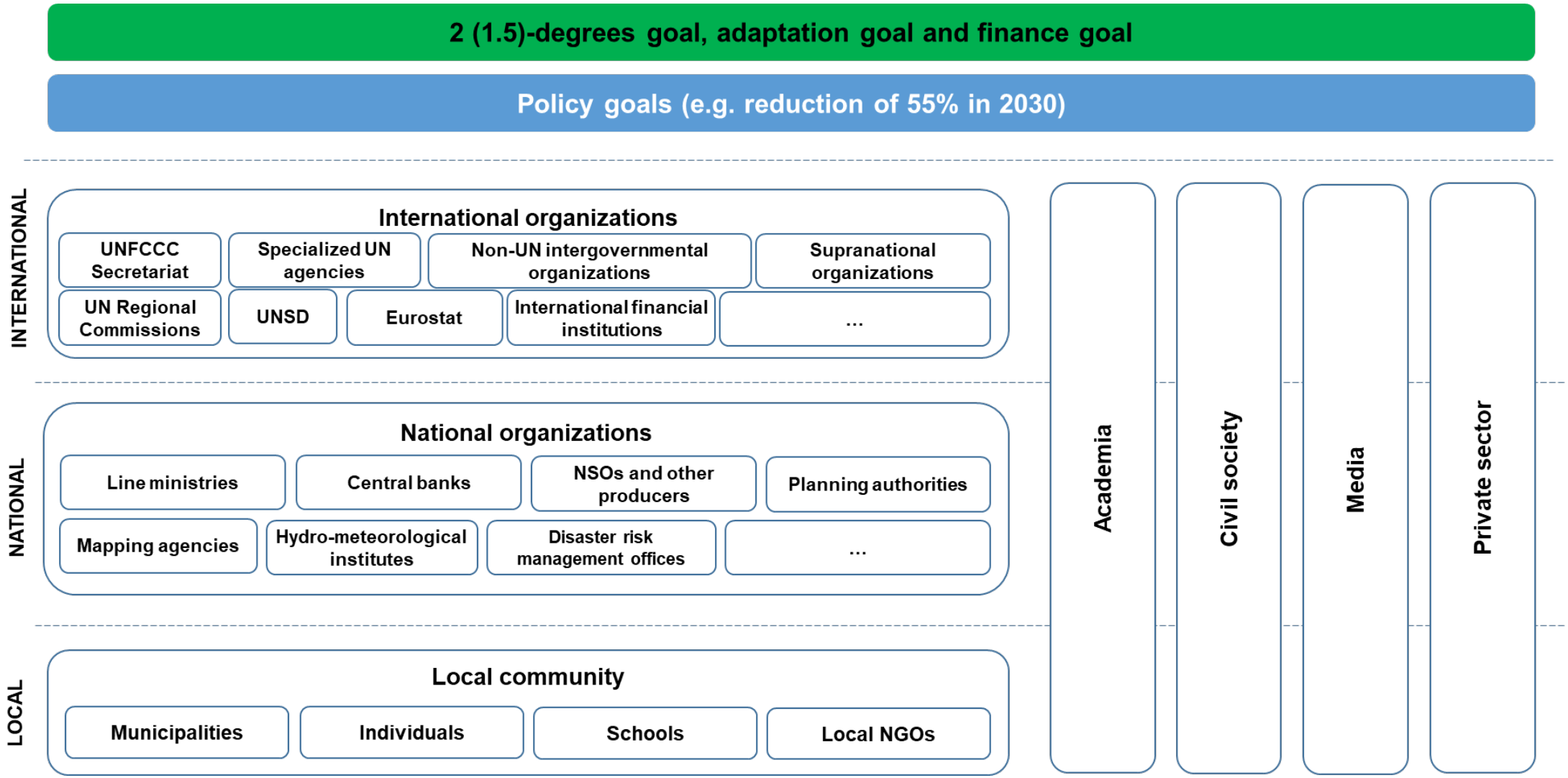
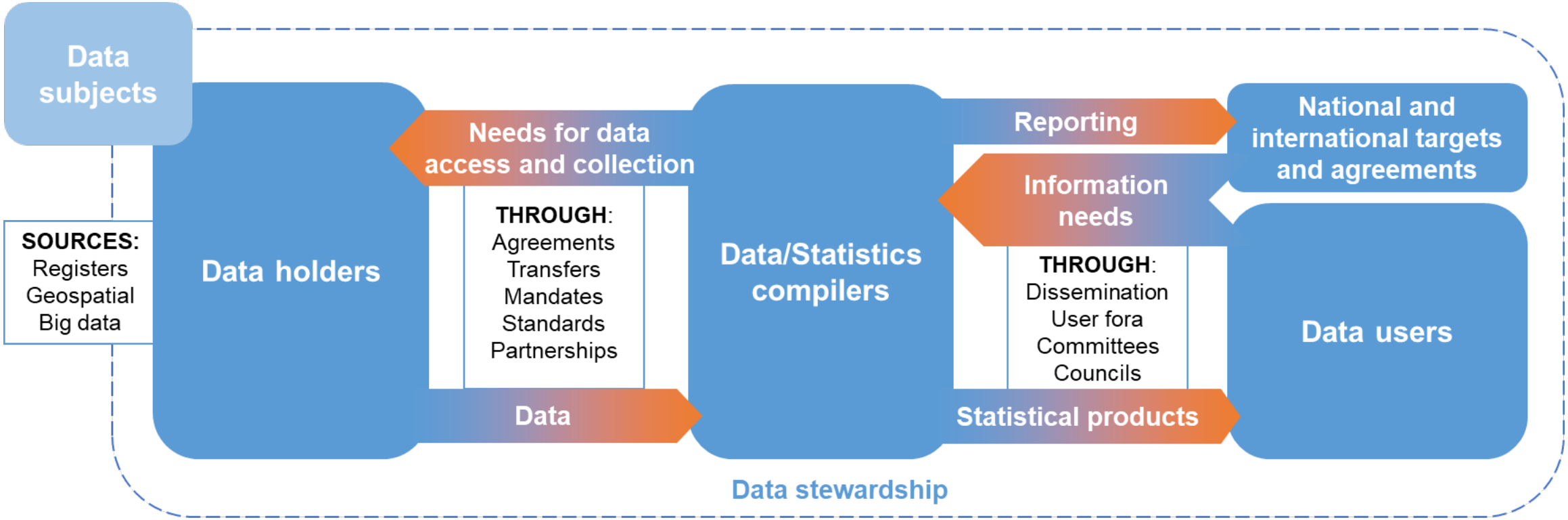


Roles in producing statistics and data



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

Audiences and user needs for climate change-related statistics

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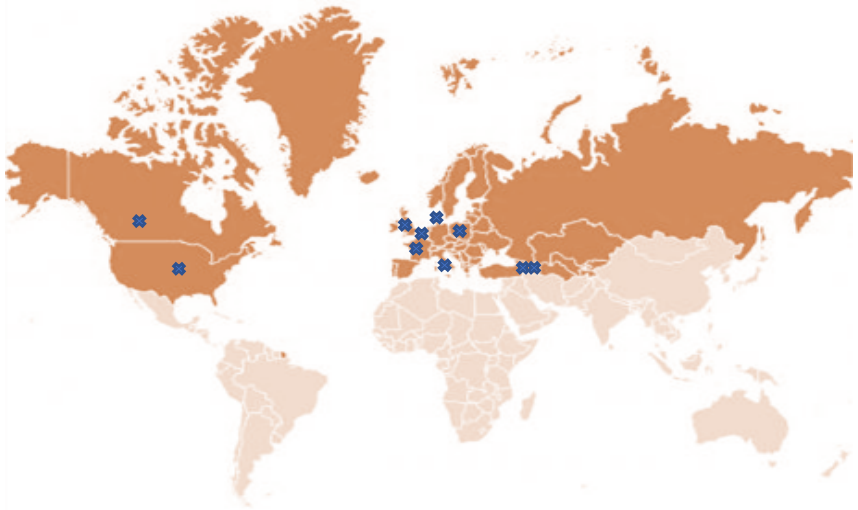
	"The public"	General **journalists**, teachers, students, consultants	Climate **journalists**, ministries, agencies, NGOs, climate activists	Data **journalists**, researchers, experts, developers
	Generally interested	**Specifically interested**	**Professionals and policymakers**	**Expert analysts**
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 exercise 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**
- Assist users with **thematic websites or dashboards** for statistics and indicators
  - Structure “drivers”-”emissions”-“impacts”-”mitigation”-”adaptation”
  - 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 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 and how to balance policy-relevance and impartiality?
- What do you think about the recommendations?
- Any other feedback and input are appreciated – in the Q&A or by e-mail (cwiek@un.org and srs@dst.dk)

Thank you!

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12 October 2023