

UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS

UNECE Work Session on the Communication of Statistics

(29 June – 1 July 2011, Geneva, Switzerland)

REPORT OF THE WORK SESSION ON THE COMMUNICATION OF STATISTICS

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Participation

1. The UNECE Work Session on the Communication of Statistics was held from 29 June to 1 July 2011 in Geneva, Switzerland. It was attended by participants from: Armenia, Australia, Austria, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Georgia, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Lithuania, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, the Russian Federation, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Tajikistan, Ukraine, the United Kingdom, the United States of America and Uzbekistan. The European Commission was represented by the Statistical Office of the European Communities (Eurostat). The European Central Bank, European Institute for Gender Equality, European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, International Monetary Fund (IMF), Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), World Trade Organization (WTO), United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) were also represented.

B. Organization of the meeting

2. The Director of the UNECE Statistical Division, Ms Lidia Bratanova, welcomed participants. She stressed her appreciation of the interesting and valuable work done by the group, particularly in preparing the very useful handbooks on Making Data Meaningful. This work is highly appreciated in official statistics and beyond. It is a major challenge to make statistical information understandable to the man in the street. Other challenges include the importance to attach to using social media to reach different groups in society, and whether we should compete or collaborate with key private sector players in the provision of data.

3. Ms. Frances Comerford (Ireland) was elected as Chairperson. She thanked the UNECE Statistical Division who organized the meeting and presented the members of the Steering Group.

4. Representatives of Google gave the key-note speech concerning their perspectives on disseminating public statistics. They presented several initiatives, including their “Public Data Explorer”, which is designed to help make public statistics accessible, useful and well organised. They have developed a dataset publishing language (DSPL) to facilitate data and metadata exchange, and are working with Eurostat to develop tools to convert between this format and SDMX (Statistical Data and Metadata Exchange). They are willing to discuss cooperation with any organization. Google also announced their new “Google Plus” project, to allow more selective sharing of information.

5. Issues raised during the discussion included:

- Embedding visualization tools in a government website can sometimes conflict with government policies on accessibility for groups such as the visually impaired.
- Providing a quality stamp for official data – although the public can upload and view their own data, only data from official sources are visible in the menu and search results.
- Providing facilities for users to discuss the data – currently this is done via the organizations web site, rather than directly through Google.

6. The UNECE secretariat presented a summary of the various organization reports based on information provided by participants about their use of social media, how they gather user feedback from websites, and issues relating to internal and external communication.

7. The UNECE Secretariat also presented progress in the preparation of “Making Data Meaningful Part 4”. This new guide will cover improving statistical literacy. A first draft is available for public review at <http://live.unece.org/stats/documents/2011.06.dissemination.html>. Comments are invited by 1 September 2011.

II. SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION OF SUBSTANTIVE TOPICS

A. Social Media

8. Ireland shared its experience on using Twitter to announce new statistical releases. The presentation focused on the examination of the policy applied to the use of Twitter and assessed the public reaction to this new facility. The presentation also covered the cost benefits and the risks involved in using Social Media for dissemination purposes.

9. The United States presented best practices for managing detractors on social media properties, specifically an agency’s Facebook page and an open comments section on an agency’s blog. It stressed the importance of allowing negative comments on an agency’s social media platforms and focused on the importance of a comprehensive comment policy.

10. The United Kingdom presented two cases studies that used a mixture of channels to digitally engage with audiences in order to meet project objectives. Both have accelerated the use of social media engagement by the Office for National Statistics.

11. Germany talked about social media monitoring with the help of a special tool allowing users to search through different social media platforms and pick the topic and themes related to 2011 Census. It helps to identify the misuse of data, upcoming discussions and critics. The presentation stressed that an organization has to search regularly and invest some time in preparing definitions (search terms) to avoid missing relevant articles, blogs or tweets.

12. Australia talked about the use of Web 2.0 along with its successes and learning. It outlined *ABS BetaWorks*, a sandpit environment and associated blog to collect feedback from clients on new website designs and concepts for communicating statistics. It also talked about communication and consultation blogs, Twitter, Facebook and YouTube usage.

13. Issues raised during the discussion included:

- More governments are adopting the idea of transparency and social media is often used as a tool for engagement.
- Social media makes organizations more transparent and contributes to a positive image of those organizations since people respond positively to transparency.
- A key strategy to building your social media audience is to know your audience and respond to the audience's needs.
- Social media demands constant attention. Regularly updating Facebook and Twitter, for example, leads to more visibility of an organization.
- Promoting free quality data online will lead to bigger communities around these data.
- Monitoring social media platforms is very important. It allows an organization to quickly respond to negative comments and minimize the harm that can be done by those comments.
- Organizations should be aware that there are costs to not getting involved in social media, as well as cost to getting involved in social media.
- The role of YouTube is increasing. People use it almost as much as they do Google to find information.
- Social media may not be taking over other forms of communication. It is merely adding to a standard news release, or press conference, or webinar etc..
- Users should be educated about good and bad statistics, help distinguish them online.

B. Gathering User Feedback

14. Sweden talked about its new website launched in the spring of 2009. The project to create a new website included the important components of so-called personas and focus groups. Follow-up to see how scb.se functions is done continuously and small adjustments are of course done regularly. The presentation also described the methods used to collect and analyse viewpoints and behaviour of users to improve the website.

15. OECD presented its website that is one of the primary means of communicating with the public. The organization stressed that the success of the website should be based on the users' success in quickly finding what they are looking for and accomplishing their tasks. To achieve success, an organization must manage the top tasks of the customers. A good way to encourage the support within the organisation is to show evidence that the website is working for users.

16. Austria gave an overview of the online user survey it conducted in 2010 in order to evaluate Statistics Austria's website www.statistik.at from the user's point of view and to ask them for potential improvements. In addition to this, an expert review with an external consultant group and usability testing were carried out to reveal further issues concerning usability and to optimize the user experience. The presentation also talked about the actions taken to improve the website based on the results of the survey.

17. Russia presented the results from their user satisfaction pilot surveys and the conclusions drawn from them. These surveys are felt to improve the navigation and structure of the website. Developments were discussed in relation to improving the availability of data and communication with target user groups, in particular, in 2010 "Press club" was established at Rosstat for better communication with mass media. The unified information statistical system is being implemented in Russia and Rosstat will collect, combine and maintain statistical data of 50 agencies which will be available for users at special internet portal and so create additional way to meet users needs in diverse official statistics.

18. UNCTAD presented its strategy and methods for gathering user feedback. The organization uses three channels for this purpose: a website, direct mailing and presentations/private interactions. UNCTAD has several websites targeted at different groups of users and actively deploys social media platforms for that purpose.

19. Eurostat presented *Statistics Explained* (http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics_explained), a website for publishing statistics. It targets the general public, offering them statistical and background articles, complemented by a glossary, using a Wikipedia-like structure and the same open-source software, Mediawiki. The presentation also covered the usage of *Piwik*, an intuitive and user-friendly tool generating customisable reports with very detailed and real-time data on visitors and usage. Eurostat stressed that the information was valuable as feedback and input for further improvement, in line with users' behaviour and needs. The most relevant features in this context were search key words used, referring external sites, page rankings, bounce rates and actions.

20. Issues raised during the discussion included:

- The importance of developing communication with new or underrepresented groups such as social media users, groups such as teachers, journalists, etc. This requires clarity on communication goals along with the identification of and focus on these groups.
- The expert review may be particularly useful in the evaluation of a website's quality since they can point out issues that may be unintentionally overlooked by regular users and internal staff.
- The main user groups or 'strategic' users can already be well catered for, the difficulty lies in ensuring equality of access to other users such as journalists, students etc.
- Establishing a user dialogue is important but it requires additional resources to insure constant moderation and fast responses.
- Usability testing with representative users is a good way to measure the success of a website.

C. Internal Communication

21. Canada's presentation defined the context in which Statistics Canada communications have evolved. It also described some current initiatives at Statistics Canada, with a focus on how internal communications can help manage these changes within the organization. Canada has developed several internal communications channels which allow the organization to quickly disseminate information from senior management to staff. These channels have also been used in consultations, and for sharing the organization's priorities with its entire workforce.

22. IMF's presentation stressed that a good product alone is insufficient to ensure its acceptance by an institution, in particular when it involves a change of a work process. The presentation also noted that an effective communication strategy with a long-lead time and with sufficient collaboration among stakeholders is critical success factors for product acceptance. A successful implementation would not only support the product's usage but could pave the way to potential development of new products.

23. Spain presented its new project *Magaz-INE*, an e-zine on the website with the objective of promoting greater use and interest in statistical information. It is a different way of showing the statistical information to make it more attractive and engaging to the general public. *Magaz-INE* aims to draw attention to other data than those normally covered by press releases. It will be written in a direct style, using plain language with an extensive use of links. *Magaz-INE* will have

a logical structure so users know where to look for information, an easy-to-use interface to get users to that information and easily-to-understand information.

24. Denmark talked about new workshops that ensure a better cooperation between the communication centre and the subject matter units despite differences in cultures and educational background. Two subject matter units are asked to comment on each other's outputs. A small survey showed that the participants of the workshops prefer the new setup. Using a laboratory setup improves the work atmosphere and creates an innovative environment where focus is on professional interaction. This is opposed to the previous setup that was dominated by conflicts between demand for change and maintaining status quo.

25. Issues raised during the discussion included:

- One of the major issues in the internal communication field is to motivate the producer unit to create content for the public. That can be achieved by the spirit of competition (putting a writer's name on the article) and encouragement (distribute the data they create to media).
- Some data released by statistical offices may displease a government. One way to deal with this situation is to release a calendar for projected data publishing in advance, so that the timing of releases can not be considered to be politically motivated.
- When using a wiki to release information, it can be good to create a system of control over the content at the beginning of the project. If everything is going well, the authors can start to post on the wiki directly.

D. External Communication

26. Mexico presented its communication campaign designed to convince the population of the importance of participating in the 2010 Census and, at the same time, to show the transparency of the census operation to achieve 100% response. The campaign consisted of 4 parts: advertising, sponsorship/partnership (private sector, public sector and academia), information in mass media, usage of social media and apps. The result of the communication campaign was the coverage of 98.4 percent of the households.

27. Mexico also discussed its *INEGI at Hand* project. It responds to the needs of identified strategic users of statistical and geographical information in the public, private, academic and social sectors. It also includes an online access to INEGI information, capacity building among strategic users for optimizing the use of information and feedback from strategic users.

28. Sweden presented its strategy for external communication to take control of its target groups and their needs. Previously, there has been no common view on the target groups and it has been up to the different subject matter departments to decide how they communicate with their "own" target groups. In 2011, the Communications Department undertaken a target group analysis that will be a basis for a new strategy for external communication. This strategy will serve as a road map for our channels and audiences that have highest priority. Sweden talked about the objective of this work, the approach and the lessons learned.

29. Issues raised during the discussion included:

- The human factor is very important in the relationship with external audiences.
- The involvement of top management and their commitment to promote those relationships help a lot. It pays to initiate the contact with top people in private companies without waiting for them to come to a statistical organization first.

- For a statistical organization with limited resources, it is important to prioritize what user needs to address first.
- The competition in the field of presenting statistical data is growing. It is important to identify the competitors and conduct workshops with users to establish personal relationships with them.
- The respondents need also to be included in a communication matrix.
- One way to approach relationships with strategic users of data is to sign an agreement of confidentiality and provide them with some sophisticated services, since the big strategic users of data are often also producers of the data.
- It is evident that statistical organizations need to have a sound practical classification of their audiences (public policy makers, private sector and academia, for example), due to the different need structures of different customer groups and their uses of statistical information.