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**Work Session on the Communication of Statistics  
(Geneva, Switzerland, 27-29 June 2012)**

**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 27 to 29 May 2012. Participants from the following countries attended the meeting: Austria, Azerbaijan, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Israel, Japan, Luxembourg, Mexico, Netherlands, Norway, Russian Federation, Serbia, Singapore, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, Uganda, United Kingdom and United States of America. The European Commission was represented by Eurostat. The European Central Bank, European Institute for Gender Equality, Institute for Statistics of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), United Nations Conference of Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) were also present.
2. Mr Steven Vale 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. Ms. Frances Comerford (Ireland) was elected as Chairperson.
3. Mr Benjamin Wiederkehr of Datavisualization.ch gave a keynote presentation outlining seven key principles for engaging users with data visualizations, illustrated with practical examples.
4. Key themes from submitted organization reports were:
  - Some organizations are still struggling with adoption social media policies and strategies because of the fear of losing credibility and jeopardizing the security of data or due to the lack of human and financial resources
  - Several organizations choose to partner with external firms or media to target larger audience
  - Twitter is the most popular tool among the organizations followed by Facebook and YouTube
  - When exploring new ways of engaging audiences, organizations usually choose to create apps and interactive graphs.

**Session 1: Measuring the effectiveness of communications**

5. The United Kingdom talked about a campaign to raise awareness and increase media engagement during the Census 2011 in England and Wales. The campaign combined different methods of communication with target groups using traditional and new media platforms. The presentation also covered techniques for measuring the effectiveness of the communication campaign.

6. The European Central Bank covered the results of three surveys of professional users of statistics it conducted to improve the effectiveness of its communication campaign. The organization placed a heavy importance on research (interviews with different groups of professional users of statistics) prior to modifying the communication strategy.
7. Estonia covered the innovative aspects of the 2011 Population and Housing Census communication campaign: the goals of the communication, the main activities undertaken to achieve the goals, and measuring the effectiveness of communication. During the campaign, emphasis was placed on the information available on the Census website (days left until the start of the Census and the number of people who participated in the Census). The organisation used media monitoring (including social media), web analytics and a post-Census survey for evaluating the effectiveness of the communication campaign.
8. Issues raised during the discussion included:
  - There are some concerns in differentiating the impact of different tools in the field of social media and allocating resources to a particular tool in the most effective manner.
  - Tracking media mentions is a helpful way to evaluate the effectiveness of a communication campaign.
  - Statistical organizations should be aware that journalists covering statistics differ in their understanding of the subject and resources available to them for analyzing the data. As a result, the approach toward communication with media should vary.
  - Placing a bigger importance on educating the public about a census resulted – in the case of the United Kingdom - in higher participation rate.
  - Web analytics are often used as the most accessible tool to analyse the effectiveness of online communications.
  - Tracking data from call centres in combination with web analytics can provide a better measurement of the effectiveness of communications.
  - “Output versus outcome” question can be very important in measuring the effectiveness of communications. The number of Twitter followers, for example, does not necessarily demonstrate effective communications with target audiences.

## **Session 2: Building credibility**

9. The United Kingdom presented its proactive media strategy. It was noted that engagement with media improved the trust in official statistics. Good relations should, in theory, lead to better day-to-day coverage. Fostering a ‘can do’ culture also helps the organization’s reputation survive occasional bouts of negativity that invariably affect all statistical organizations. Feeding storylines and products direct to the media helps to ensure ONS statistics are reported clearly at source. Since 2009, ONS Media Relations Office (MRO) has sought to actively promote the most newsworthy bulletins from its annual output of 400 releases and articles. MRO has also produced ‘ad hoc’ media stories to promote its numbers.
10. The US Census Bureau presented its application programming interfaces (APIs) that enable open, stable and secure access to Census Bureau statistics for use by applications, including mobile applications, user mash-ups, data visualizations and web applications. The APIs allow direct access to an organization’s data resources without the need to go through front-end channels (e.g., interfaces designed for user access like websites, web applications, download centres and mobile applications) provided by the organization. It noted that this new strategy aims to liberate the US Census data and allow external collaborators to harness them and thereby assist in their dissemination.

11. The Russian Federation presented its work in the field of communication and collaboration with media. The organization increased its work in the field during the last year. Along with traditional ways of communication (creation of the Club of Business Journalism involving leading Russian media organizations, for example), ROSSTAT works on increasing its audience via Livejournal.com, the most popular blogging platform in Russia, and Facebook.
12. The United Kingdom outlined its strategy for telling the story behind the numbers as a key driver of the dissemination strategy within the ONS. The presentation stressed the importance of storytelling as the data collection that forms the stories as it is important to give the information that citizens and businesses provide back in a meaningful and understandable format. Among the formats that ONS uses for that purpose are short text stories, video summaries and infographics.
13. Issues raised during the discussion included:
  - In choosing the preferred channel among traditional media, it is important to consider several factors like the size of the audience and genre of the channel.
  - Video stories (with heavy use of infographics) can be an excellent tool in popularizing the statistics if they are kept short (4 minutes) and to the point.
  - Journalists can be more reluctant to participate in traditional media briefings due to time pressure introduced by immediacy of online news. That is why online short stories pitched to media become more important.
  - Storytelling is extremely important in popularizing statistics. One of the approaches that ONS deploys in that regard is to try to tell a statistical story using the minimum amount of numbers.
  - Some organization also train and accredit their staff to talk to the media.

### **Session 3: New ways of engaging audiences**

14. DESTATIS introduced Wikidata, a new platform that applies the collaborative approach to the collection of data. The presenters explained the concept of Wikidata and elaborated on the ways it can be used for statistics purposes. The platform also can serve as a repository for free data or a source for third-party projects. Wikidata is scheduled to be launched in Spring 2013.
15. The Netherlands outlined the best practices in using social media in the field of statistical dissemination. The office actively uses Twitter and YouTube for its purposes and conducts social media workshops for the staff. It is an on-going challenge to get a strategy for social media approved by senior managers.
16. Sweden talked about transformation of the Statistical yearbook of Sweden from a print product to iPad app. The app includes features like text search, favorites and functions. It also contains links to the Statistics Sweden website and a possibility to submit comments and suggestions. Compared to the 1,000 copies of the printed yearbook that were sold, the spreading of the application has been very satisfying and it received positive comments in the media and on blogs. The organization also released the Statistical yearbook of Sweden 2012 as an app with improved features.
17. OECD presented the "OECD Better Life Initiative" website that it had launched in 2011. The aim of the website is to help users understand what drives well-being of populations and nations and what needs to be done to achieve greater progress for all. The website is targeted at a general audience and allows users to visualise well-being outcomes in OECD countries; it is an interactive tool which allows users to look at how countries perform according to the importance they give to the various components of well-being. The presentation also outlined lessons learned from the launch of the website and plans to improve and expand it in the future.

18. INEGI outlined the ways to increase the interaction with data users and make the user experience better. The organization highlighted the importance of adding value to the data, create new ways to visualize, search and explore statistical data and meet the changing expectations of users. The presentation also talked about a customer relation management system that helps to maintain and create new relationships with users.
19. Denmark presented their experience with Web-TV as one of the new ways of engaging audiences. The presentation focused on the considerations and strategic decisions made in the process (choosing how to prioritize subjects and statistics in video communication) and lessons learned. The organization has chosen to put its resources into producing a mix of different kinds of videos presenting figures and complex concepts and highlighting external comments.
20. Finland talked about its experience in developing and launching the web-service "Findicator." It aims to provide users with up-to-date, relevant information on the development of Finnish society. Set up together with users and information providers, it brings together statistics and indicators that are already available in different formats and presents in the form understandable for larger audience. Although the original version was launched in 2009, Finland recently updated the user interface and introduced the mobile version of the service.
21. Issues raised during the discussion included:
  - Convincing the management to use the social media can be a challenge. But it is still important to work on that to introduce the social media practices in the organization.
  - The more places an organization can find online to share the information with users, the more chances it will have to get the correct and timely information to those users.
  - When considering transforming a print publication to an app, it is important to think about added value that the app will have in comparison to traditional forms of publication.
  - Attracting younger generation of statisticians to work for NSOs can be a challenge. But reaching out to universities and conducting competitions among young statistician can improve the visibility of NSOs among students and prospective young employees.
  - Making it possible to people to embed the content from NSOs' websites will result in reaching the new and wider audiences.
  - Outsourcing video production may be one of the ways to ease pressure on human resources of an organization.

#### **Session 4: Internal communication**

22. Eurostat introduced the concept of employee engagement, analysed its importance for a modern organisation and gave examples of work being done in this field by the internal communication team at the organisation. The internal communication section at Eurostat is working on ways to increase the level of staff engagement in the institution using intranet, company's newsletter, face-to-face meetings and social media.
23. Sweden introduced its process to improve internal communication at the organization. The internal survey showed that internal communication varies substantially within the organisation. There was a request for better tools for internal communication, better structured and faster intranet and more structured information from top management. The goals for improved internal communication the organization set up were to make the information from top management easy to understand and to access, to improve the intranet and to improve the leaders' communicative competence.
24. The United States Department of Agriculture's National Agricultural Statistics Service talked about the efforts to improve internal communication within the organization. Those efforts include: direct

and transparent communication to and with employees, employee participation in communication planning and implementation and products and services that enable employees to communicate more effectively.

25. Issues raised during the discussion included:

- Finding a balance between internal and external communication can be a challenge. It may require a change in the culture of an organization to ensure the improvement in internal communication.
- Despite constant messages on intranet and newsletters, employee still can miss important news due to their absence from the office (business trips and vacations, for example).
- The lack of financial support and resources is the common problem that NSOs face.
- Connecting internal communication with external communication is extremely important because employees often serve as information channel for the organizations.