1. What is a statistical story?

On their own, statistics are just numbers. They are everywhere in our life. Numbers appear in sports stories, reports on the economy, stock market updates, to name only a handful. To mean anything, their value to the person in the street must be brought to life.

A statistical story is one that doesn’t just recite data in words. It tells a story about the data. Readers tend to recall ideas more easily than they do data. A statistical story conveys a message that tells readers what happened, who did it, when and where it happened, and hopefully, why and how it happened. A statistical story can:

- provide general awareness/perspective/context; and
- inform debate on specific issues.

In journalistic terms, the number alone is not the story. A statistical story shows readers the significance, importance and relevance of the most current information. In other words, it answers the question: Why should my audience want to read about this?

Finally, a statistical story should contain material that is newsworthy. Ask yourself: Is the information sufficiently important and novel to attract coverage in the news media? The media may choose a different focus. But they have many other factors to consider when choosing a story line.

Statistical story-telling is about:

- catching the reader’s attention with a headline or image;
- providing the story behind the numbers in an easily understood, interesting and entertaining fashion, and;
- encouraging journalists and others to consider how statistics might add impact to just about every story they have to tell.