

**Summary Report on the Seminar on “Innovative Approaches to Turning Statistics into Knowledge”,  
Washington D.C., 15-16 July 2009**

A two day seminar on “[Innovative Approaches to Turning Statistics into Knowledge](#)” was co-hosted in Washington DC by the OECD, World Bank and US Bureau of Census. The seminar was organised under the aegis of the OECD Global Project on Measuring the Progress of Societies and followed on from the previous events organized in Rome and Stockholm. Its main aim was to review existing tools and applications for making statistics more popular and accessible.

There were more than 300 attendees from the international community that included statisticians, statistical managers, communications specialists, IT technicians, academics and other users of data. This was almost twice the number who participated in last year’s Stockholm event and was a strong indicator of the increased interest in this subject, along with the large number of candidates who applied to present at the conference, many of whom had to be turned down because of insufficient time available.

The meeting was organized around 4 main themes for the presentations that covered the following topics:

- **Storytelling** - the ability of the tool to describe a sequence of events using the data, graphics and descriptive text saved and viewed as a ‘story’ that can be shared with others.
- **Discovering data across organizations** - combining data from multiple sources and presenting it together via the same interface.
- **Mapping Tools** - software making use of maps to select and visualize the data.
- **Visualisation tools** - viewing data and graphics in a way not covered by the other themes.

There were some 27 presentations in total. See here for the agenda which includes links: [www.oecd.org/progress/ict/statknowledge](http://www.oecd.org/progress/ict/statknowledge)

The presentations were followed by a Round table on the subject of “Engaging Media in the Communication of Statistics” devoted to the potential role of media in this field and in communicating “stories” based on statistics. The round table included representatives from radio, the Wall Street Journal, Fox News and USA Today and focused discussions on the opportunities, as well as the obstacles, to make statistics on the state and the progress of a country/region/community as popular as those on other issues, such as sport performances.

A video of the whole event can be obtained on a DVD from the Statistics Directorate.

## Main Conclusions of the seminar

- The innovative use of graphical and mapping software for 'storytelling' has increased significantly since the last seminar in Stockholm (May 2008) and even more so from the first seminar held in Rome in 2006.
- The messages of the seminar reinforced those of the 'DD4D' (Data Designed for Decisions) conference organised jointly by the International Institute for Information Design and the OECD in May 2009 which presented many powerful and innovative tools for presenting data to enable decision making by the general public using complex data.
- There is much greater awareness that providing data is not enough in the web 2.0 age. Tools now exist for making compelling stories available for general consumption but it is clear that expertise is required to create and communicate these stories (as per Hans Rosling and Gapminder or the BBC video on eXplorer). Good stories require good narrators and the means via powerful visual interfaces to communicate this information.
- The trend to form partnerships between providers of data (such as Statistical Agencies and International Organisations) and innovators is continuing, as demonstrated by the very successful collaboration between the OECD and NCVA Research Institute of Sweden to develop the 'eXplorer' tool. We expect such partnerships to increase.
- The media will have an increasing role to play in communicating these stories – these will be discussed in a collaborative space with journalists and other media experts as a follow-up action from the round table.

## Next steps

- Collaboration between organisations will continue to be encouraged via seminars and conferences and official bodies (such as the MSIS Task Force on Software Sharing) .
- Developments with Web 2.0 tools such as wikis will proceed. At the OECD these include the 'wikigender', 'wikiprogress' and 'wikichild' projects that will become forum for sharing information in the future. New developments such as the means for the public to upload data to a wiki as well as text will be presented at the [3<sup>rd</sup> OECD World Forum in Busan, Korea in October 2009](#).