

Eurostat podcast: Stats in a Wrap

How to promote statistical literacy?

Release date: 18 October 2023

SPEAKERS

Konstantina Michalopoulou (Eurostat), Romina Brondino (Eurostat), Juliane von Reppert-Bismarck (Lie Detectors), Gundega Kuzmina (NSI Latvia), Jukka Hoffren (NSI Finland), Ana Beljan Šćuric (NSI Croatia), Jonathan Elliott (Host)

Jonathan Elliott

Stats in a Wrap - the podcast series from Eurostat

Jonathan Elliott

Welcome to another episode of Stats in a Wrap, the podcast all about statistics from Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union. Now, if you've been listening to our podcasts, you will know that we think data are delicious. And we like nothing better than to slice and dice and wrap them into bite-sized morsels whilst enjoying the intriguing stories, the fascinating conversations and startling truths about the everyday and not so everyday stats that surround us.

Now in the Wrap Café we normally talk about the people who make the stats: the data scientists, the demographers, statisticians, communicators, and policy experts who analyse, compare and present the official statistics of the 27 Member States and more. But all their work depends on us, the public, to understand them and use them properly. You can have the fastest car in the world, but if no one can drive it, it's going to go nowhere.

So, you can have the best stats in the world, but if no one understands them, you've got a problem. So today, we'll be taking a good look at ourselves, the citizen body and our role in making official statistics work to get the best understanding of the world around us. This podcast is all about statistical literacy. We depend on many experts to help us decode and understand the numbers.

Chief among them are journalists. But there are also educators - teachers in schools are interested in teaching about statistics to help children develop critical thinking. And Eurostat has stepped up to help them in a wide variety of ways, along with the national statistical offices of the 27 Member States. And one organisation has already done much to introduce into classrooms critical thinking about factual news reporting, which relies heavily on statistics.

Lie Detectors is an independent and award-winning media literacy organisation in Europe, whose remit is to counter the corrosive effect of online disinformation. To do this, it empowers young people and teachers to tell fact from fake online and understand how professional journalism works.

To guide us on what's being done to prepare young people to be good stats users of tomorrow, we have with us in the Wrap Café today three experts: from Eurostat Romina Brondino, who is at the Dissemination and user support unit. Hello, Romina.

Romina Brondino

Hi, Jonathan. I'm happy to be here today.

Jonathan Elliott

Lovely to have you here. We also have her colleague, Konstantina Michalopoulou, who specializes in social media outreach. Hello, Konstantina.

Konstantina Michalopoulou

Hello, everyone. Nice to be here today.

Jonathan Elliott

And joining our friends from Eurostat we're particularly honoured to have from Lie Detectors Juliane von Reppert-Bismarck, who is its executive director, and founder: Hello, Juliane.

Juliane von Reppert-Bismarck

Hi, Jonathan, and Romina and Konstantina.

Jonathan Elliott

Lovely to have you here. Now, let's just find out a little bit more about our guests. Juliane, let me come to you first: nearly all the experts we invite into the Wrap Café normally have one way or another a science background. But before Lie Detectors, you had an illustrious journalism career.

You graduated from the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism in New York, you worked for the Wall Street Journal, Newsweek, Reuters, Der Spiegel, among others. What on earth made you give up the glamorous world of international journalism to run a charity?

Juliane von Reppert-Bismarck

That's a very good question. I never thought that I would be doing that - I was very, very happy being a journalist. But in about 2016, I had a bit of an epiphany and thought: what's the point of doing really beautiful journalism when people don't know how to tell the difference between the great stuff good journalists do, and complete and utter fabrications and distortions? So that's why I started Lie Detectors.

Jonathan Elliott

Wonderful answer, and Romina, let me ask you a bit about how you came to your current role, what your background was and what you love about your work?

Romina Brondino

I joined Eurostat about 10 years ago. I have a background in intercultural communication and European studies. I spent quite a few years in Eurostat's press office working for journalists. And then I moved on to work on projects and activities more targeted at public at large, students and teachers. And what I like about my work here at Eurostat is to turn the numbers and the data into stories people can relate to and make statistics easier to understand and grasp.

Jonathan Elliott

A fun job and a very important one too. Konstantina, you are in the world of social media: Twitter, LinkedIn and so on, which all of us know whether we like it or not and some of us have to deal with it

professionally. Tell us a bit about how you came to this role. Have you always been a bit of a sort of digital native and are you a lover of social media?

Konstantina Michalopoulou

I am a lover of social media and Eurostat, I would say. My background is in economics and EU studies. And I started working for Eurostat social media in 2020. So, I have really witnessed all the changes and explosion of Eurostat's presence on social media.

Currently we are active in four channels: Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn. And the most fun part of my job is finding engaging ways to promote Eurostat data. And it's really interesting to see that the same topic or piece of information triggers different kinds of conversation among followers in different channels.

Jonathan Elliott

What better group of people to have to find out how to tell fact from fiction when you're reading news stories online or elsewhere? Now I'm not really a fact checker, I kind of go with gut instinct. If a statistic looks like it could be shaky, I kind of just shrug and try not to think about it.

If I think it's great, I perhaps read a bit more. But do I do fact checking? Hmm...yes, sometimes professionally, I have to, maybe sometimes personally, too, but Juliane - how do you respond to 'hey, wow stats' or incredible facts? Do you just go to start fact checking or do you just trust instinct?

Juliane von Reppert-Bismarck

It's super easy to just go with your gut instinct, isn't it? But I have to say that, with all of the competition for attention floating around online, a lot of these things are flamed up. And so, what I like to do is actually just to stop for a moment and think and slow myself down.

Because rather than reacting to something, saying 'oh, that's fantastic', or 'that's terrible' and 'that's outrageous', I wait a bit and wait for, you know, system to kick in and do a little bit of logical thinking. And then, yeah, compare some sources, look at what other people are writing. If they look a bit dubious to me, is this the only source that's publishing this, and certainly read beyond the headline.

Jonathan Elliott

Romina, what do you do? Do you check facts and carefully assess and weigh up information you get? Or are you one of those people like me who just flies by gut instinct?

Romina Brondino

I usually check out the source. And when I read an article, for example, I look up the author's credentials to see if the author is someone who is specialized in the topic that is being discussed. And when it comes to data in particular, I want to understand what they really mean. For example, comparing different countries, checking how the data have evolved over time. Even when I discuss news with friends or with my family, I really like to go and check out the exact data.

Jonathan Elliott

Konstantina, if you're in the social media, you're being bombarded constantly with facts and stats and stuff that's going to make you think one thing or think another. What do you do?

Konstantina Michalopoulou

When I am on social media, and I see something striking, the first thing I do is to check the profile of the person sharing this information in order to find out more about their incentives, and what might be behind specific information they share.

Jonathan Elliott

Let's just talk now about what we do and how we work. Juliane, tell me a little bit about what Lie Detectors is and how it works. And what its purpose is.

Juliane von Reppert-Bismarck

The Lie Detectors is an independent and philanthropically funded media literacy organisation. What we do is we actually select journalists with very strict criteria, they've got to be willing to also speak critically about their job. And we match them with classrooms across Europe. And we also match them with teacher training facilities.

And what the journalists are doing is they're handing over their professional skills of how to do news gathering, how to put together the priorities of the day and how to make sure that they are correct, and handing them to children aged 10 to 15. There is real electricity when a journalist walks into a classroom, starts talking to kids about their work and starts asking the kids about their own media consumption.

And increasingly, we're teaching teachers themselves because we really do have to create these multipliers - journalists have got to be carrying on doing their journalism. We've got to be getting the teachers ready to be teaching this themselves. And I think there's no clearer indication of the urgency of this as the pandemic that we've just lived through, but also the new war in Ukraine. So that's what we do.

Jonathan Elliott

Romina, just tell us a bit about what you do in your unit and what the unit does.

Romina Brondino

I'm part of a unit that develops different types of resources and tools to communicate statistics for different types of users, from non-expert to more advanced users. In my team in particular, we work on materials and resources for the general public, students, teachers, anyone who wants to learn more about statistics.

For example, we do interactive publications on different topics: energy, population, where people can visualize the data, and they can play with interactive tools, they can choose their country, they can compare it with others. Then you've got our Statistics for Beginners series, which is a collection of workbooks that explain the different statistical concepts.

For example: what is GDP, what is employment, unemployment, and this is done in a very easy way, with simple text, visualisations and animations. And specifically for classroom activities we developed a set of videos on different topics, for example prices, which are accompanied by sets of exercises and can be used by teachers in the classroom.

Jonathan Elliott

Konstantina, tell us about what you do. You're part of Romina's unit, the two of you work together, but you have a particular responsibility, don't you, which is critically important, especially for young people. Tell us a bit about what you do.

Konstantina Michalopoulou

So, I am Eurostat's social media coordinator in terms of content, but also different promotional activities. And our main objective of being present on social media is to help people understand our data.

And for this, we rely a lot on [Statistics Explained](#) articles that tell the story behind a dry table. But also, the [glossary](#) that explains the statistical concepts. And this is something that people come back with questions when they don't really understand something. And we are there to respond to their questions and comments, and also get their feedback.

Jonathan Elliott

Let's just talk about what our individual takes are on this, this mysterious phrase: statistical literacy. It's quite loaded in some ways, because we all know that it's important to avoid fake news, for example. But it's a much broader and bigger subject than that and has different kinds of nuances and permutations. Can you tell us Romina, in your view, why you think statistical literacy is important? Why do you think your work is important?

Romina Brondino

Statistical literacy is important to understand the real story behind the data and to understand where we are and where we want to go, where do you live, which kind of energy are we using, what are the main issues in our environment. I think this is particularly important for the younger generations, because they are the ones who will be the future decision makers.

Jonathan Elliott

Getting children to think critically about numbers is quite an art. I mean, getting the children to think about numbers at all is quite difficult. As a parent of a school aged child, I know that. But Juliane, perhaps you could just tell us what actually goes on in the classroom when Lie Detectors goes in.

Juliane von Reppert-Bismarck

Every classroom is its own little microcosm, you never know quite what you're going to get. And we start by asking is, you know, where do you get your facts from. What happens is we find that they are extremely active on different apps. And they're very fast, they're very confident, but they don't necessarily think about different sources.

They want to know, and when you tell them 'Actually, there's a difference between the credibility in different sources', they really want to know the tools of how to fact check, how to use their common sense, because, while we are biologically predisposed to carry on believing what we already believe, neither do we want to be hoodwinked.

This is what a lot of people call pre-bunking. We talk to them about disinformation, things that are really black and white. We get them to talk about the words that they would use. We get them to talk about the concerns they have about what they find online.

Jonathan Elliott

Journalism is a fascinating job because it has an investigative element frequently to it, and you're digging around finding out new stuff. You're not so much lie detectors, as lie detectives. Romina, you have video packages as well, don't you, for your students in classroom? Just tell us a bit about those.

Romina Brondino

Yes, correct. A few years ago, we launched a project, which is called Statistics in the classroom. And we developed a series of videos, which are like additional materials for teachers. And in these videos, statistical concepts are explained in a very easy way. And they are accompanied by exercise sheets that can be used with students to practice the topics presented.

So that's really a practical tool for teachers and children alike. We also organise visits for students. And I must say, as Juliane said, I'm always impressed at the questions they ask, which really are a proof that they have a critical awareness already, and they can be sceptical about the data. They don't simply trust what they're told, which I think is a great thing today.

Juliane von Reppert-Bismarck

Can I add something to that, Romina? I think it's really fascinating. I really love it, that you're working with exercise sheets and things, we also do that - we call them News challenges. And in fact, in German - we work also in Germany - they often translate us into being lie detectives, rather than lie detectors.

So, Jonathan, you're on the right track there! Our materials are exactly that. We want to put them into the skin of being a journalist, like – 'Now you're a journalist, go! Here are your tools, here are the questions you can ask.' And then we're like 'Okay, go, here's an example. Is it true, is it not?' and they love it, they really love it.

Jonathan Elliott

Well, we're going to bring in another perspective to the Wrap Café now, which is the work of the national statistical institutes (NSIs) that Eurostat works with when compiling national data. But in this case, the NSIs have been developing educational projects to get their young people to think about stats. And earlier I spoke to Jukka Hoffren at Finland's national statistics office; I asked him to tell us about his work with children and students.

Jukka Hoffren

This project relates to the idea that the statistical office is...we are basically producer organisations, and we haven't paid enough attention to the customer side. One important aspect is raising new customers, new users for statistics. And children and pupils, students, they are our main target group. And we want to increase their knowledge about statistics and statistical literacy.

And we have conducted several school visits. But the problem is that they last only from 30 to 45 minutes. It's quite impossible to explain everything about statistics in such a short time. And we wanted to support these presentations by establishing this website that phase by phase guides students how to compile a statistical study for school projects or poster competition or Statistics Olympics.

Jonathan Elliott

So, the website itself contains a number of exercises and it contains information about statistics, just talk us through about how it works.

Jukka Hoffren

Well, first - they are students. One important thing is to explain how statistical data is collected. Because if you have bad data, you will end up into wrong conclusions. So, it's very crucial that input data is reliable. You have to follow the statistical procedures in order to get well known and well based facts, and that's one important.

The other is that what you ask is what you get. So, formulate your research questions very precisely and use the definitions that are understood by everyone. If you use very hazy definitions, you'll get hazy answers.

Jonathan Elliott

It's quite fun. When you go to the website, you see quite a lot about dogs. And you learn that there are, for example, more dogs in Finland than there are people in Helsinki. What inspired you to bring in the idea of counting pets to get kids into stats?

Jukka Hoffren

Well, the case is that normally, people are not so interested about statistics. They think statistics, they are boring. For example, with pupils and students, you have to focus on the phenomena that are important and are interesting for them.

That's why we have selected as an example the pets, and the dogs and the cats, and the relationship between the children and pets - that's important for the children. In that way, also towards the statistics and how to collect statistical data about an issue that is important for the children.

Jonathan Elliott

Do you feel it's been a success so far? Tell us a bit about the feedback and the reaction to it.

Jukka Hoffren

I think the feedback has been very positive. It has been used to support these statistical competitions and participation to Statistics Olympics. And I think the students have used it quite widely and been very satisfied with it.

Jonathan Elliott

Jukka Hoffren there at the Finland national statistical office. Konstantina, how do you handle communicating numbers, often complex sets of numbers with a generation that's often not that interested in ideas of quantification and mathematical concepts, or which may even have a general fear of numbers?

Konstantina Michalopoulou

Actually, what I see on social media is that people really love statistics, they like to see how their countries perform in relation to other countries. So, I don't really see any fear. And on the contrary, I can confirm what Juliane and Romina said - that younger audiences have really critical thinking. And they don't really take for granted what they just see that we post. They question this information, and they come back with questions. And they try to understand really the concepts, the statistical concepts.

Jonathan Elliott

I think, what can't be understated, from what I've heard from my experts here in the briefings as well is the way in which that handheld devices, apps on phones, determine the way in which media is

consumed among a certain generation to an extent that was unimaginable even 15-20 years ago. Can we just tap into that, Juliane? I mean, are young people becoming more internet savvy, but perhaps, you know, they're maturing as well in the way that they handle information?

Juliane von Reppert-Bismarck

Every time we walk into a classroom, we ask the kids: 'Where do you go to collect information? Where do you go for general information about the world?' And we ask the teachers the very same questions. And then we compare the answers. Teachers are in the places that we would expect, and probably a lot of the listeners here are probably on these as well.

They're on WhatsApp, they're on Facebook, they're on Twitter. Well, less so at the moment, they're on LinkedIn. This is not at all the landscape that the kids described. They say to us: Instagram, YouTube, Tik-Tok, Twitch, and then Discord, and Fortnite. And other names that I have frankly never heard of before.

And you know, a lot of these places are gaming platforms, there's a couple of things that's really interesting about this, but first of all, these are sites that are very image and video based. And that makes outside content moderation really difficult. They are also often encrypted, which means that it also makes content moderation really difficult. The kids are entirely by themselves.

And if you think about it, you know, the QAnon theory that we hear about in the US and now has, you know, representatives in the House of Representatives in Washington DC pushing them - that QAnon theory was born on a gaming platform. So, these kids are on platforms that teachers have never heard of before, perhaps, and certainly aren't on, and are learning about the world in a totally different place from where the adults are. And to bridge that gap is super important.

Jonathan Elliott

Konstantina let's just pick up there on something that Juliane mentioned, which was about how visual representation is now such a huge part of social media, and you use infographics and things like that. Tell us about your experience with visual culture on social media.

Konstantina Michalopoulou

Admittedly, we live in a visual era. And this has always been the case, in the sense that an image always prevails over a text. And in Eurostat we know that very well and we invest a lot in our visual identity.

We have a team of graphic designers who have developed a distinct and consistent visual identity, so that users immediately understand from the layout of the infographics that this comes from Eurostat when they see something on social media. This is particularly important nowadays, because we have a quite competitive environment with a lot of different data providers.

Jonathan Elliott

You just talked about being in competition with other data sources. And this brings me to a question that Juliane brought up, but I'm going to ask Romina about it first, which is credibility, and overcoming excessive scepticism.

Even in the people who kind of, you know, they can go from being gullible to being they will not believe anything except what their friends say. You've got as Eurostat to cut through that and say: no, really,

truly, honestly, this stuff that we do here is about as true as true stuff gets, right? So don't worry. But how do you do that?

Romina Brondino

Yeah, well first, we explain very, very simply to when we meet students, how we work. You know, we explain to them: the national statistical institutes are responsible for collecting the data, they send them to us, we check, we validate them, and we make them publicly available. They can trust us because all what we do is very transparent and is available to anyone at the same time.

We don't only publish the dissemination products, we do publish information on our methodologies, on the way we work, on the [Code of Practice](#), on all our manuals. So, people can go and check how statistics are made, what are their legal basis.

Jonathan Elliott

Fabulous! Juliane, how do your journalists going into a classroom of 30 children or so persuade them that Lie Detectors has got something important to say, and persuade these children that the journalist before them can be trusted?

Juliane von Reppert-Bismarck

We actually train our journalists specifically. And we request that whenever they have an interaction with students, that they actually also describe a moment when in their career they have messed up, when they've made a mistake.

Because one of the really important things here is to make sure that there is a difference between deliberate distortions online, deliberate fabrications, manipulation on the one hand, and then, you know, the *bona fide*, the ethical journalism, that we do actually sometimes make mistakes. And therefore, our output is not always 100%.

But it's still created with the intent of informing the public, and that there is a difference between those two things, and that it is important to seek out that difference. Practically speaking, a journalist has got to take time to say: I, you know, here are the standards to which I aspire. And yet here's how I sometimes mess up. When the kids hear that admission of fallibility, it makes a real impact.

Jonathan Elliott

Yes, I can see how that would make a really significant impact. Well, it's time again to hear from another national statistical office, this time in Latvia, and learn a bit about what they're doing in their work educating children about statistics. Earlier on, I caught up with Gundega Kuzmina, who told me a little bit about a project they've developed using storytelling.

Gundega Kuzmina

At Statistics Latvia, we have a school corner for all materials for teachers and students. Our materials are based on storytelling. We tried to do storytelling with statistics. And we try to explain socio-economic terms and provide current data on Latvia, and also sometimes compare Latvia to other countries.

They tell stories about migration, immigration, birth rate, topics like transport, production, GDP per capita. So actually, it's all our official statistics but just streamlined.

Jonathan Elliott

What were the origins behind it? Can you tell us a little bit about that?

Gundega Kuzmina

Yeah, we saw that students are learning about Latvia based on old data - GDP or employment and migration. So, this was the initial idea, that we have more current data.

Jonathan Elliott

So what age groups are we talking about here?

Gundega Kuzmina

We are focused on these last four years before university I would say so. So, these are not very small children, but those who already use and understand terms like migration or GDP.

Jonathan Elliott

Gundega Kuzmina at the Latvian national statistics office there. Romina, how do you make it easy for teachers who might be interested in checking data, to find the right tools?

Romina Brondino

We developed a specific website section, which is called the [Education corner](#), to help students and teachers access their specific resources which they need. And the Education corner is a kind of single-entry access point to all the services and initiatives we have that can help them understand better statistics.

And as I said before, we don't work alone, because our users potentially are all the schools in Europe. So, we work in a partnership with the national statistical institutes and support them with their own initiatives, we exchange practices, experience, we do common projects, we try to see what works, what doesn't work.

And together with this network, we are approaching the educational world. Eurostat also runs together with the Member States the European statistics competition, and these are ways that help students engage themselves and get an idea of how things are using statistics. They are actually eager to become independent users of statistics.

And what we notice when we have students coming here is that they don't simply want to know what we do. They don't content themselves with that - they want to become independent users of our data. They ask for training on the database: how can I find this, how can I find that? They don't want to be dependent on us. And this is simply great!

Jonathan Elliott

That is indeed great. Konstantina, perhaps you could tell us a bit more about some of the services that you offer in this area.

Konstantina Michalopoulou

Yes, sure. We have a general support service available in 28 languages, and a specific one for journalists and fact checkers. We also offer online webinars on various statistical topics where people can ask immediately their questions to our experts, and users can find more about the services on our website.

Jonathan Elliott

Juliane, I was talking to Romina just now about educators. Have you found that there's a change in the attitude of educators to your work? Has it become easier to persuade them that your work is important?

Juliane von Reppert-Bismarck

So COVID made all the difference. Teachers who approached us for our material, for our interactive sessions or for their own training. The teachers are more and more motivated in getting trained themselves. So, by now, when we ask them, you know, having seen what we do with your kids, do you think that this is something that you ought to be doing with your kids?

Almost a 100% of them say 'yes', regardless of the subject area. And then when we ask them: 'And have you ever discussed this with the kids?', then the story is quite different. And there's about a 30-percentage point gap between the intention of teaching this stuff and the actual doing of it.

When we ask them: 'So, what is it that's keeping you and you think it's so important, why are you not teaching this?', they tell us different things. They say there's a lack of incentives for the teachers; they don't get the time to get trained on this; they don't get the time within their teaching plans to put this in.

And really importantly, they say they don't feel capable of talking about it because they don't understand it enough. And that is why the training is so important - the more we can train the teachers, the more we can motivate them, the better, the faster we're going to get to a solution to our information crisis.

Jonathan Elliott

Time for another visit to one of the EU's national statistical offices now. We've been talking to a number of them about how they're innovating in engaging children and young people on the subject of statistics. So, let's hear from Croatia and Ana Šćuric, who with her colleagues has pioneered an app to interest young people in stats.

Ana Beljan Šćuric

We are all aware that lack of statistical literacy can easily lead to misunderstandings, so it is important to know how to use statistics. Most students today prefer using interactive educational applications than holding a book in their hand. Having that in mind, the Croatian Bureau of Statistics has decided, as a part of Eurostat project support for statistical literacy actions in the area of competition, gamification and e-learning, to launch a statistical educational portal Stedy.

Our intention was to bring statistics closer to students, professors and teachers in a different and more interesting way. The portal has been out for almost four years now. We received very positive reactions and comments from teachers and students. So, some of the teachers decided to use the portal in their classes as well, and that is something that makes us very happy.

Jonathan Elliott

To what extent did you make the Stedy applicable to tangible things in everyday life and to what extent was it very strictly about abstract statistical theory?

Ana Beljan Šćuric

Well, we try to move away from the classic approach, so Stedy is not limited only to the theoretical background. It also gives practical examples, interactive visualizations, and tasks in which users can

immediately check their understanding and application of statistics. It is divided into five chapters, each dedicated to a certain statistical concept ranging from some basic measures, for example, median, to more complex methods.

So, we can say that the portal is intended both for users who have some basic knowledge about statistics or maybe some advanced knowledge so they can renew their knowledge or just remind themselves about some statistical concepts and check their knowledge through tasks available on the portal.

The statistical office of Slovenia has taken over and adopted the portal, which is now in addition to Croatian and English also available in Slovenian. This makes us very happy because the purpose of the portal is to be used and accessible to as many users as possible.

Jonathan Elliott

Ana Šćuric at Croatia's national statistics office there. Romina, the task of your unit and the team there involves ensuring there is a lot of content available in different languages, of course - the EU is a multilingual community, let's not forget. Could you just tell us a bit more about that?

Romina Brondino

Together with the Member States we have developed a section on the Eurostat's [Education corner](#), which is called Materials by language, and it includes a list of all tools and resources developed everywhere in Europe by national statistical offices, listed by language. So, this on one side gives the idea of the wide range of resources available and on the other side, it allows people to just go and look what is available in their own language.

Jonathan Elliott

Konstantina here, this is a good point about social media and how it can generate conversations - you can get teachable moments out of people interacting with each other. It's not just a top down, Eurostat disseminating staff putting out lots of nice infographics getting people to come to the website, etc, etc. It's about people talking to each other - are you finding that you're building meaningful communities of discussion around statistics on your social media channels?

Konstantina Michalopoulou

Indeed, usually people comment on the data presented on their country in relation to other EU countries. And this can trigger discussions around their own experience and way of life. Or, in the context of more light-hearted topics, like for example, top chocolate exporters, they might discuss what their favourite chocolate is. Obviously, we don't engage into these types of conversations. Our main objective of interaction with the users is to help them understand the information presented in our posts.

Jonathan Elliott

Romina, I think you want to talk about usability testing and user surveys, which is something which I don't think we've discussed before. So perhaps you could tell me a bit more about that.

Romina Brondino

Yes, I just wanted to mention that we regularly conduct usability tests, which means we ask users to interact with our products, and we listen to their needs and preferences. And we have regular user surveys, because it's important for us to keep in contact with the users and understand what their

needs are and how they are evolving. So, it's important to make this exercise as a regular one and not only one off, so we can always make sure that our products and services remain relevant for our users. We participate every year in a testing panel meeting which is organised by the Commission's Directorate-General for Communication.

And this panel includes a group of primary and secondary school teachers from all over Europe, and representatives from the Europe Direct centres - the European information centres in the Member States. And this panel gives us the opportunity to present the latest products and tools we have developed for young people. And also, to test products in development. So, it's a very useful exercise and experience.

Jonathan Elliott

So, here's a hypothetical question for each of the experts to consider: How would you handle say, a 14-year-old coming up to you and saying: 'You know, I really want to understand how these numbers work and what they mean. But I keep coming, I keep coming away feeling frustrated, TIK-TOK is full of nonsense. What do I do? How do I become informed better about the world?'

Romina Brondino

Well, I would say 'Come to my place, I will show to you Eurostat's websites'. And I won't scare him with the full database all of a sudden, but I would just draw his attention to one of our interactive visualization tools for young people where, you know, you can choose your avatar, select your age, compare yourself with your peers in Europe, and get data there. And from there, I would like to show to him how does it work, how he can get to those data.

Jonathan Elliott

Lovely. Okay, Konstantina, what would you say?

Konstantina Michalopoulou

When Eurostat participates in events for schools we came in contact with a lot of students. And I saw that people are very interested in this [Education corner](#). And they like to play because there is an interactive way to get to know our data, and it is well received by students.

Jonathan Elliott

Okay, that's a good tip. Juliane, if you're in a situation where you're being personally asked - you're probably one of the most prominent experts in this field. So, what's your advice?

Juliane von Reppert-Bismarck

So first of all, I would say 'How brilliant that you're asking this question'. And then I think I would probably say, you know, it's not always easy to fact check, but neither is it rocket science. And then I would probably tell them to go and have a look at the IFLA checklist, which is what we use a lot.

And IFLA is a group of brilliant librarians who have put together this wonderful list of nine easy ways to check whether something is true or not. And it goes all the way from super, super simple things like: 'read beyond the headline' to, you know, 'use your common sense'. And if you use those guidelines, I think you can go a really long way to have a healthy relationship with the information you find online.

Jonathan Elliott

Fantastic, IFLA is: I F L A, International Federation of something? I don't know, tell me.

Juliane von Reppert-Bismarck

Of librarians' associations.

Jonathan Elliott

Fantastic. And of course, listen to Stats in a Wrap, which is a fantastic disseminator of authentic and well researched and well produced information about the world around us.

Juliane von Reppert-Bismarck

And if you want to know more, then by all means, get on our website, and ask for one of our journalists to either come into a classroom and talk to the kids or come to your teacher training facility and train up a bunch of teachers.

Jonathan Elliott

And as well as Lie Detectors, you might also want to contact Eurostat and its national partners for help with your classroom work, or visits to a statistical office. Folks, I could talk all day about this, but we have to wrap up there. Thank you to our guests: Juliane von Reppert-Bismarck, thank you so much for being here today.

Juliane von Reppert-Bismarck

Thank you, all of you. It was a really wonderful conversation.

Jonathan Elliott

And Romina Brondino at Eurostat. Thank you so much for joining us.

Romina Brondino

Thank you, all of you. I've really enjoyed that.

Jonathan Elliott

Perfect; and Konstantina Michalopoulou - thank you so much for your contributions today.

Konstantina Michalopoulou

Thank you, it's been a pleasure.

Jonathan Elliott

If you've enjoyed the show, don't forget to share with friends and colleagues, where Stats in Wrap can be found on Spotify, Apple, Google, and all the usual places. And if you'd like to know more about the subjects discussed today, just search 'Stats in a wrap Eurostat'. And of course, join us for the next episode when the Wrap Café will be dishing up more flavoursome insights. Join us then to find out more but for now, goodbye.