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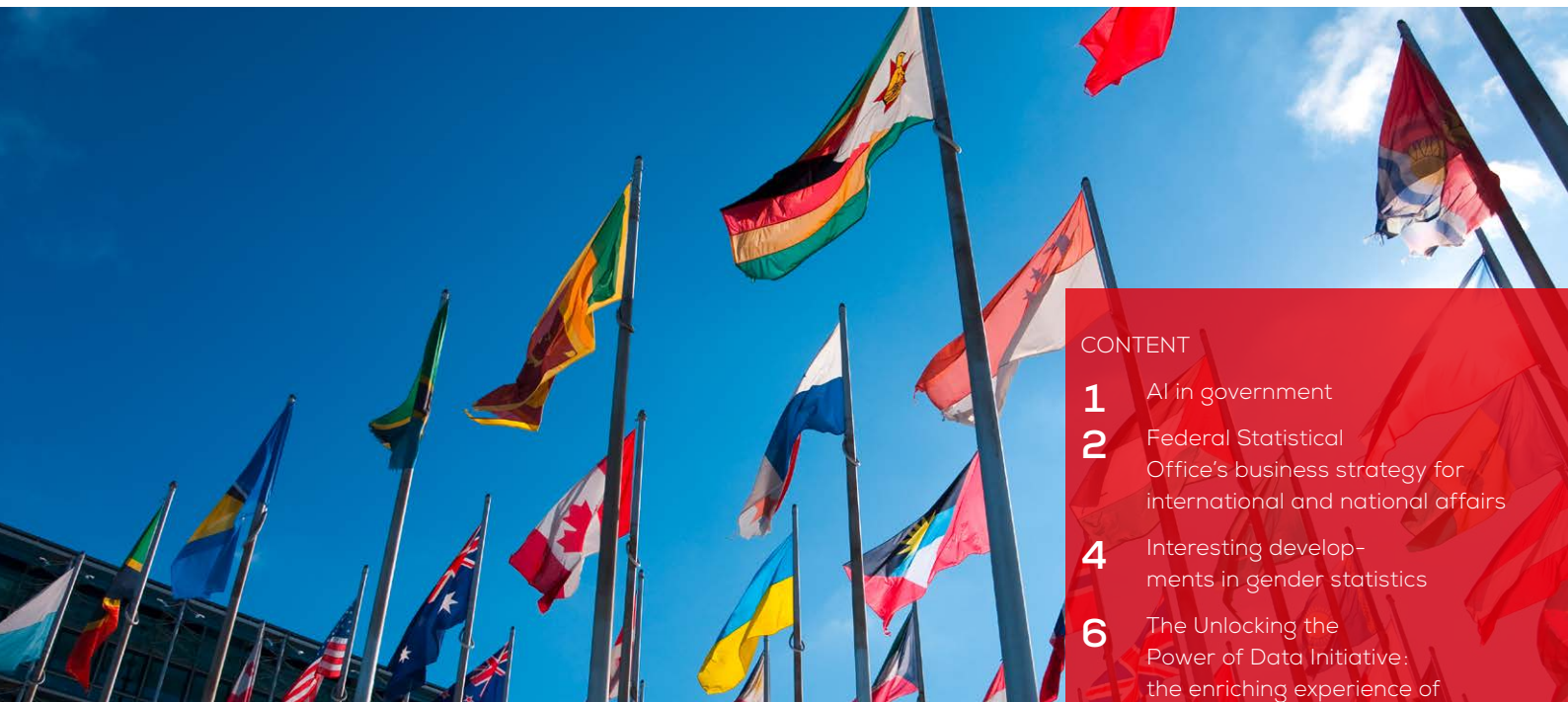
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BEYOND THE HORIZON

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EDITORIAL

AI IN GOVERNMENT

Dear readers

For official statistics itself, AI's potential to transform our work is certainly considerable. The prospect of automating repetitive tasks, gaining valuable insights from new data sources, and improving our data analytics capabilities in general is being increasingly embraced by national and international statistical organisations. But my focus here is that we must also ask ourselves what kind of contribution we can make to the broader question of AI in government. We now have the opportunity to help further define our countries' approach to AI.



Georges-Simon Ulrich,
Director General, FSO

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First, the principles that govern official statistics – such as impartiality, reliability, and confidentiality – are not only fundamental to statistical integrity, but can also provide a blueprint for the development of trustworthy and human-centric AI. Trust is not something that is given, but instead has to be won by proving trustworthiness. Official statistics has demonstrated its excellent record in providing trustworthy and relevant statistical information. By helping to operationalise these principles in the context of AI, we can contribute to AI applications in government that are not only efficient, but are also fair and respect individual rights. This alignment is also critical to fostering trust among citizens that their data will be used responsibly.

Next, our expertise as official statisticians in data management is invaluable in improving data quality for AI. We understand the nuances of how data are found, collected, and processed. Our expertise can be instrumental in improving the quality of data fed into AI systems. We can also help ensure that AI decisions are grounded in a broad and factual understanding of

societal developments, which is critical for human-centric AI applications.

Furthermore, it is essential to embrace the role of democratic processes in shaping the use of AI in government. Decisions about what we should and should not do with AI must be made transparently and inclusively, involving a wide range of stakeholders. Such a participatory approach, which is well established in official statistics, is key to ensuring that AI applications reflect the values and needs of the society they are intended to serve.

So, by helping to anchor AI initiatives on the ethical foundations of official statistics, by contributing our expertise, and by engaging in democratic deliberation, we can all help to ensure that AI in government becomes a tool for improving quality of life and fostering more equitable and just societies. As we are about to face the challenges and opportunities of 2024, I invite all official statisticians to use our knowledge and skills with the aim of ensuring that AI in government around the world upholds the values of trustworthiness, human centricity and, above all, peace.

With this in mind, the article on our new business strategy in this issue of our newsletter gives you a first impression of how we at the FSO are combining data management, data science and AI with our statistical expertise. As always, you will also find a number of articles on international activities, be it the exciting bilateral discussions with the NSOs of Ireland, the UK and the Netherlands or various international events, such as the article on this year's ISI by Elizabeth Richards of Statistics Canada or our own UPDI events and the IMAODBC conference in Switzerland. Finally, Vjollca Simoni from INSTAT gives you a very personal impression of her experience as an EU trainee at the FSO.

I sincerely hope that you and your loved ones are well and that 2024 will be a good year for you all. Wishing you an enjoyable read

Georges-Simon Ulrich,
Director General, FSO

FEDERAL STATISTICAL OFFICE'S BUSINESS STRATEGY FOR INTERNATIONAL AND NATIONAL AFFAIRS

Based on the FSO's overall business strategy, the "business strategy for international and national affairs" details the Federal Statistical Office's priorities and activities in its contacts at international and national level.

The aim is to position the FSO as a central player in three areas – statistics, data stewardship and data science

– while cultivating contacts with those able to lend more weight to Swiss concerns¹.

In the field of official statistics, in accordance with its Federal Council mandate and the legal framework at international and national level, the FSO ensures the consistency and comparability of official statistics by increased cooperation with

national government agencies and international partners.

In the field of data stewardship, the FSO has established a database at national level that is as harmonised and thus interoperable as possible. The aim is to enable the reuse of data while keeping the burden on respondents as low as possible and to process statistical information more efficiently. These

¹ e.g. <https://www.eda.admin.ch/eda/en/fdfa/foreign-policy/implementing-foreign-policy.html>

approaches are also important at international level and can serve as a model for data stewardship.

In the field of data science, knowledge acquisition is further improved with new processes and methods. The aim is to react as flexibly as possible to society's needs and further increase efficiency in the production of statistical information.

In line with Objective 6 of the FSO Business Strategy and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,² the FSO's vision for international and national relations is as follows:

In order to improve the availability and comparability of data and statistics, to exploit synergies and demonstrate leadership, we will take an active part in national and international work on data and statistics.

INTERNATIONAL LEVEL

This vision is implemented at international level thanks to membership of the following organisations:

Switzerland is a member of the

- United Nations (UN);
- Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD);
- International Monetary Fund (IMF);
- European Statistical System (ESS) and thus closely cooperates with the European Union (EU) in the area of statistics.³

Membership to the above-mentioned organisations gives Switzerland direct access to international data and statistical systems. This access should be used to ensure knowledge transfer between Switzerland and its partners, exploit synergies, promote comparability and put forward Switzerland's interests.

NATIONAL LEVEL

To guarantee the necessary coordination and support of stakeholders at the national level, the FSO organises its relations with communes, cantons and the Confederation by means of various administrative bodies. This means that the coordination of these bodies at national level includes the following elements: planning, organising and holding regular meetings, ensuring the exchange of information between the different bodies, as well as their participation and inclusion in establishing their legal bases. Needless to say, an active dialogue with the different stakeholders is also maintained beyond the various committees and other bodies.

OVERARCHING OBJECTIVES OF INTERNATIONAL AND NATIONAL AFFAIRS

1. The FSO is perceived as a stakeholder and leader in the field of data and statistics.
2. The FSO is visible in the international arena as the official representative of the Swiss population in the three following areas of activity: statistics, data stewardship and data science;
3. Swiss expertise is incorporated into all three areas of activity in international organisations and Switzerland benefits from an exchange of knowledge at international level.

4. Knowledge transfer to interested partner countries takes place using existing resources in countries that are already partner countries of the SDC and SECO;⁴
5. Improved coordination and communication between all statistics and data producers in Switzerland is ensured.

ANNUAL OBJECTIVES AND THEIR IMPLEMENTATION

Annual objectives and their implementation should be formulated so as to be measurable (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Reasonable and Time-Bound = SMART). They are drawn up every year, presented to the board of managers and approved at the end of the year. This information is communicated through existing communication channels (e.g. the "Beyond the Horizon" newsletter).

Volker Täube,
Data Science Competence Center, FSO

² <https://www.eda.admin.ch/agenda2030/de/home.html>

³ Regulation (EC) No 223/2009 contained in the bilateral agreement stipulates that Switzerland "be closely associated with the reinforced cooperation and coordination" in the field of statistics at European level. In addition, Switzerland engages in international cooperation with countries on a bilateral level.

⁴ SECO Cooperation | Projects and programmes in partner countries; Cooperation with Eastern Europe

INTERESTING DEVELOPMENTS IN GENDER STATISTICS

2023 was an important year for gender statistics in the international arena. The Group of Experts on Gender Statistics from the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) met from 10 to 12 May at the UN Headquarters in Geneva. Taking part were 80 experts from national statistics offices in Europe, the Caucasus, Central Asia and North America as well as international organisations such as the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the World Health Organization (WHO), UN Women and other organisations and regional UN economic commissions.

The following topics were discussed from a gender perspective: the pay gap and income inequality, the digital divide, climate and the environment, measuring sex and gender, measuring violence against women, new data sources and emerging issues, trade statistics, new approaches to measuring unpaid work and work-life balance, and current and future work.

At the end of August, the stage became even more global in Johannesburg. The date had not been chosen by chance: every year in August, South Africa celebrates women's month. The 17th Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Gender Statistics (IAEG-GS) meeting set the ball rolling on 28 August. The approximately 50 members discussed and made progress on work relating to the mandate received from the Statistical Commission in 2020, "Mainstreaming a gender perspective into the work of the Statistical Commission". The first step is to focus on two statistical areas in which no or little gender perspective has so far been integrated: business and trade statistics and environment and climate change statistics. Members learnt of the advances in



17th IAEG-GS meeting: Ms **Katja Branger**, Senior Statistician in charge of gender statistics, Swiss Federal Statistical Office, hands over the role of chairperson to Mr **Solly Molayi**, Chief Director of Social Statistics, Statistics South Africa

9th GFGS opening podium, from left to right: Mr **Innocent Modisaotsile**, Officer in Charge of the Country Office for South Africa, United Nations Population Fund, Mr **Risenga Maluleke**, Statistician General, Statistics South Africa, Ms **Francesca Grum**, Assistant Director, and Chief of the Demographic and Social Statistics Branch, United Nations Statistics Division, Ms **Yandiswa Mpetsheni**, Statistics South Africa, Deputy Director-General South African National Statistics System. Mr Stefan Schweinfest, Director, United Nations Statistics Division, delivered his opening speech via video message.





methodology helping to narrow the data gap in relation to technology-facilitated violence against women. Next, individual countries, regional commissions and custodian agencies presented their, in part innovative, initiatives to strengthen gender statistics. At the end of the event, Ms Katja Branger, gender statistics expert at the Federal Statistical Office of Switzerland, after three years as chair of the group, passed the torch to Mr Solly Molayi, Chief Director of Social Statistics, Statistics South Africa.

This meeting was immediately followed, from 29 to 31 August, by the 9th United Nations Global Forum on Gender Statistics (GFGS) reuniting some 240 gender statistics experts from national statistics offices around the world and from international organisations. The following topics were discussed: measuring and valuing care, time use and unpaid domestic and care work, gender mainstreaming building on what is available, but also going beyond traditional areas, innovations to close gender data gaps, violence against women and girls, from data to evidence-based policy, as well as some more specific topics related to the realities of gender statistics in the African continent, e. g. a legal identity for all, ensuring access to birth, marriage and death registration, in order to achieve gender equality and protect citizens against social exclusion.

The following quote from Mr Risenga Maluleke, Statistician-General, Statistics South Africa, cited in his opening speech to the 9th GFGS on 29 August 2023, sums up strategic direction and the challenges of international activities in the field of gender statistics: "Effective management and accurate reporting of gender data is critical for the way ahead. As national statistical agencies we must prioritise innovative approaches to collect and analyse data that we will provide to policy makers so that they can have essential insights in the way we need to address gender parity and deal with matters of gender equality. Let us work together to create a better future for all, where everyone is treated with dignity."

Katja Branger,
Senior Statistician in charge of gender statistics, FSO

9th United Nations Global Forum on Gender Statistics, Johannesburg, South Africa

LINKS

[Group of Experts on Gender Statistics | UNECE](#)

[9th Global Forum on Gender Statistics](#)

THE UNLOCKING THE POWER OF DATA INITIATIVE: THE ENRICHING EXPERIENCE OF MY THREE-MONTH TRAINEESHIP IN SWITZERLAND

As I sit down to write about my traineeship in Switzerland, I can't help but notice that nearly five months have passed since my return. This period of reflection leading up to the article's publication has given me the chance to fully process my experiences and recall the special moments that have left a lasting impact on my professional and personal journey.

Embarking on a three-month traineeship in a foreign country is similar to stepping into a world of endless possibilities, both professionally and personally. My journey with the European Union, IPA Multi-beneficiary Statistical Cooperation Programme, hosted by the Swiss Federal Statistical Office (FSO), was nothing short of transformative. In this article I will recount my experiences, detailing the activities, challenges, skills I have gained, and the social dimension that enriched my stay in Switzerland.

My traineeship began in mid-April 2023 with the aim of supporting the Unlocking

the Power of Data Initiative, a global scheme that is a follow-up to the Road to Bern. This initiative strives to bridge the gap between the data and statistical community and various stakeholders, fostering data ecosystems and enabling fact-based decision-making. The initiative consists of six distinct workstreams, each with their own unique focus.

My role involved coordinating and contributing to various aspects of these workstreams, including event management, communication, and international collaborations. One notable achievement was organising the event



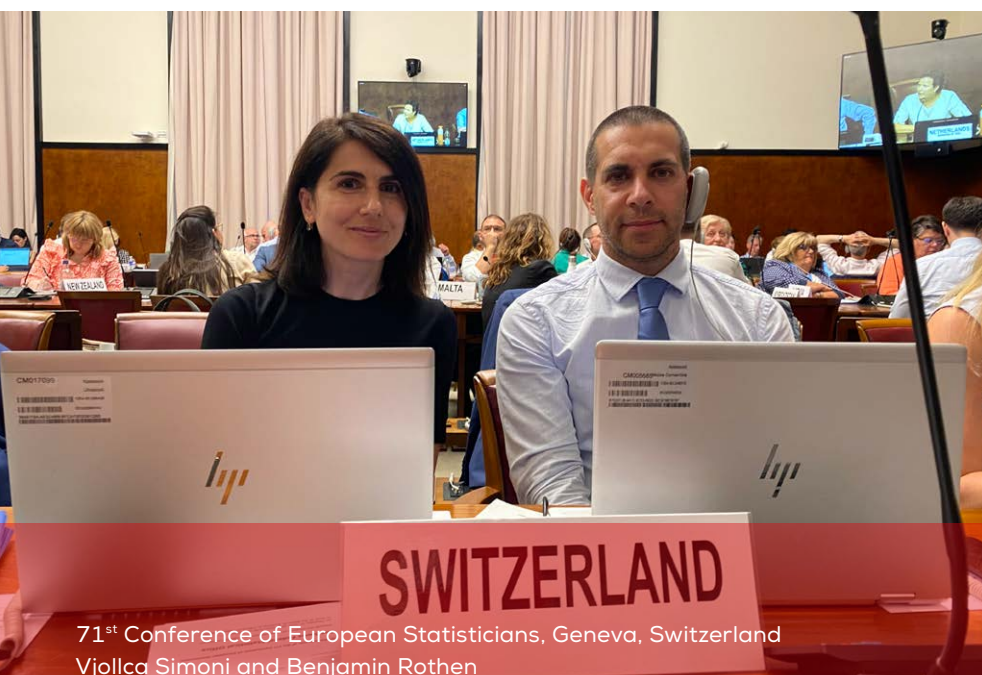
"SDGs with a Focus on Data Literacy" in Tirana, Albania, together with the Albanian Institute of Statistics and the Swiss Embassy. The experience was unique, ranging from event preparations to engaging with diverse stakeholders.

Another highlight was my involvement in planning an event in Geneva intended to foster collaboration among data stakeholders. While the event was postponed due to technical issues, the extensive planning process provided valuable insights into coordinating an international event.

During my traineeship, I had the privilege of acquiring a wide range of skills that will undoubtedly shape my professional journey. These include event management, communication, coordination, report writing, and stakeholder engagement. Proficiency in WordPress and Content Management Systems (CMS), a deep understanding of quality processes, and experience in preparing country positions at the UN level were also among the valuable skills I gained.

Beyond professional growth, the social dimension of my traineeship was equally enriching. Switzerland's welcoming culture allowed me to connect with people from diverse backgrounds and nationalities. I explored the country's stunning landscapes, charming towns, and cultural treasures.

I attended local festivals, museums, art exhibitions, and musical performances, immersing myself in Swiss traditions and fostering connections with the local community.



One remarkable social experience was the 5th Tech for Sustainability Circle Event, where discussions revolved around using technology to address climate change. The event not only expanded my knowledge but also provided an opportunity for bilateral meetings with Microsoft Norway, Qatar, and Switzerland, fostering potential cooperation between data and statistics and tech companies.

As I return to my role at the Albanian Institute of Statistics (INSTAT), I take away with me not only new skills and experiences but also a broader perspective of international collaboration. I plan to apply my newfound knowledge to enhance event management, strengthen INSTAT's visibility nationally and internationally, and ensure quality in various processes.

The lessons learned and the memories created during this traineeship will have a lasting impact on my career and my commitment to advancing statistical cooperation on a global scale.

My three-month traineeship with the Swiss Federal Statistical Office was a journey of growth, learning, and international collaboration. It showcased the significance of global cooperation in

the field of statistics and the profound impact it can have on both individual professionals and organisations.

The blend of professional development and cultural immersion made this experience truly transformative. It reaffirmed my belief in the power of data to drive positive change and the importance of connecting with diverse stakeholders worldwide. As I move forward in my career, I am confident that the skills, knowledge, and memories from this traineeship will continue to shape my path and inspire me to unlock the power of data for a better world.

Working with the FSO has been an incredible experience for me. From day one, I felt like I was right at home, and I couldn't have asked for a more welcoming group of colleagues across the FSO, especially the International and National Affairs team. I would like to take the opportunity to once again thank all the people I had meetings with for their time and dedication as well as Benjamin (Beni) for initiating this exchange, which was also a new experience for the FSO.

The list of people I met and had a great time with is long but they all know who they are, THANK YOU!

It's not just about the work; it's about the people you work with, and I've been fortunate to make new friends along the way.

Since it's already December, I would like to take a moment to extend my warmest wishes for the holiday season. May the spirit of Christmas fill your hearts with joy, and may the coming year be filled with new opportunities, success, and happiness for each and every one of you.

And I will finish this article with a quote from one of my favourite books called 40 Rules of Love: "East, west, south or north makes little difference. No matter what your destination, just be sure to make every journey a journey within. If you travel within, you'll travel the whole wide world and beyond." Thank you all for making me feel at ease and respected.

Vjollca Simoni,
Head of International Cooperation
and European Integration Sector at
Institute of Statistics Albania

BILATERAL DISCUSSIONS WITH IRELAND AND THE UNITED KINGDOM

Aim of bilateral discussions

The Swiss Federal Statistical Office (FSO) visits one or two countries every year to strengthen collaboration as well as to exchange views on different specific issues. Switzerland has a regular exchange with Germany and Austria in the "DACH-Treffen" (Germany, Austria and Switzerland), and has visited the following countries in the past: Italy,

Finland and Estonia. In 2023, discussions were conducted in collaboration with the statistical offices of the United Kingdom and Ireland.

Bilateral discussions with Ireland and the United Kingdom

On Monday 18 September 2023, an FSO delegation consisting of the Director General Georges-Simon Ulrich,

the Head of the Health and Social Affairs Division, Marco D'Angelo, Samuel Schütz, Advisor to the Director General, the Head of the International and National Affairs Section, Benjamin Rothen and the Deputy Head of the Statistical Methods Section, Daniel Kilchmann, visited Ireland's Central Statistics Office (CSO). The CSO delegation was led by Director General Pádraig Dalton and

included Paul Morrin (Assistant Director General – Statistical System Coordination), Declan Smyth (Irish Statistical System Horizontal Reports – Head of Division), Frankie Kay (Assistant Director General – Technology and Statistical Services), Pamela Lafferty (Administrative Data Centre, Head of Division), Justin McGuirk (Methodology Division), Elaine O'Mahoney (Acting Assistant Director General – Corporate Affairs) Adrienne Harrington (Enforcement, Legal and Governance – Head of Division).

In all, five topics were discussed in depth, based on some very well-prepared presentations by the CSO or FSO:

- a) Governance of the Statistical System in Ireland,
- b) Data Management,
- c) Data ethics (with focus on the provision of microdata for planning and research),
- d) Metadata Catalogues for Data Stewardship (presentation by Georges-Simon Ulrich) as well as
- e) Unlocking the Power of Data Initiative (presentation by Benjamin Rothen).

The next day, after their arrival in London, the FSO delegation met the Swiss Ambassador to the United Kingdom, Markus Leitner and the Head of the Economic and Financial Affairs Section,

Marcus Rothen for discussions focusing on artificial intelligence with a view to the Global AI Safety Summit, which the Ambassador would be attending in November.

On Wednesday, 20 September 2023, the FSO delegation visited the United Kingdom's Office for National Statistics (ONS) where they were welcomed by the Chief Executive Sir Ian Diamond (National Statistician), Nikki Shearman (Head of International Relations), Will Marks (Principal Private Secretary), Simon Whitworth (Head of Data Ethics and Research Accreditation) and Mary Gregory (Deputy Director, Data Science Campus).

Talks focused on the same topics that had been discussed in Ireland, once again on the basis of well-prepared presentations. In contrast to the meeting with the CSO, discussions with the ONS also included the role of the Data Science Competence Centre with regard to data science and artificial intelligence (presentation by ONS and FSO, Daniel Kilchmann).

These bilateral discussions bring great added value by highlighting the challenges faced by other countries. For the most part, they coincide with those

of the FSO. Depending on the country's circumstances, the approaches adopted to deal with these challenges may be similar or may be understandably quite different. For example, the CSO and ONS are not allowed to keep personal and household register data that is fed with administrative data. This leads to greater complexity in providing statistics in this respect compared with Switzerland.

Apart from many reciprocal suggestions on how to deal with the five topics mentioned, the CSO also gave us detailed information on their remote access system for researchers, "Researcher Online System for Applications" – ROSA. The CSO and ONS also explained their communication strategy with regard to stakeholders. These two examples illustrate that such inputs are not usually able to provide ready-made solutions, but they can reveal helpful approaches which could be incorporated into the FSO's further development.

Daniel Kilchmann,
Deputy Head of the Statistical
Methods Section FSO



From left to right: **Daniel Kilchmann**, Deputy Head of Statistical Methods Section, FSO, **Marcus Rothen**, Head of the Economic and Financial Affairs Section of the Swiss Embassy in the UK, **Samuel Schütz**, Advisor to Director General, FSO, **Marco D'Angelo**, Head of Health and Social Affairs Division, FSO, **Georges-Simon Ulrich**, Director General FSO, **Sir Ian Diamond**, Chief Executive ONS, **Benjamin Rothen**, Head of International and National Affairs Section, FSO, **Nikki Shearman**, Head of International Relations, ONS, **Will Marks**, Principal Private Secretary, ONS

BILATERAL MEETING WITH STATISTICS NETHERLANDS

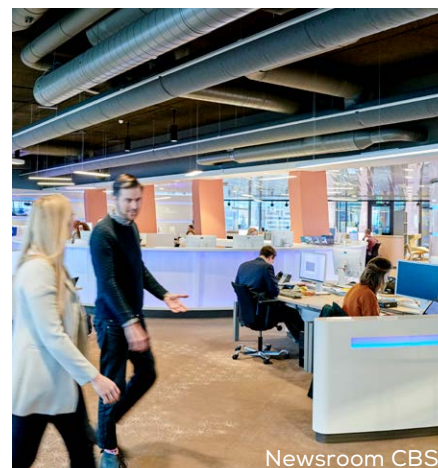
Within the space of a few weeks, we were visited twice in Neuchâtel by our colleagues from Statistics Netherlands. There's so much we can learn from each other, as the challenges we face are often similar! If you would like to find out more about the visit concerning the large case units, please go to page 12. In this article I will be talking about the discussions on strategy held by the two management boards. At the beginning of November, Angelique Berg, Director General of Statistics Netherlands, and three members of her management team travelled to Neuchâtel amid a slew of flight cancellations! Their determination was rewarded – the discussions we had were interesting and each party felt at ease to ask many questions in order to understand the innovations currently underway.

The Netherlands and Switzerland both work with registers, and both offices are convinced that there is a role to be played in the data ecosystem. The [14Y interoperability platform](#), which is Switzerland's national data catalogue, piqued our partner's interest. A demonstration allowed them to see how it works and to reflect on the relevance of such a tool in their national context.

For its part, the FSO was able to learn more about the close cooperation between Statistics Netherlands and academia (the universities), with numerous framework agreements and professors by special appointment. As a final point, there was mutual interest in tackling how we communicate and in the organisation of newsrooms. At the heart of our discussions was the question of how to attract the media's interest and how to communicate with them. The organisation of the communications division and its interactions with the statistics producing divisions was also discussed.

There are plenty of opportunities at European and international level to meet up again with our Dutch colleagues so that we can continue the discussions started in Neuchâtel in such a collegial atmosphere. And perhaps the opportunity will arise for the FSO to travel to the Netherlands for a "return match"?

Muriel Meister-Gampert,
Deputy Head of International and national affairs, FSO



Newsroom CBS

"Although we meet each other regularly in international meetings, this bilateral meeting between the Swiss and the Netherlands delegations has been inspiring and very pleasant at the same time. A huge compliment to the Swiss Statistical Office that has made such a big step in creating an accessible tool for data management."

Erik Bruinsma, Director Corporate Strategy, CBS



Newsroom FSO

"It was really interesting to learn more about how the statistical bureau in the Netherlands collaborates closely with most universities in their country. Their way of organising their newsroom was also inspiring. We are looking forward to continuing those discussions."


Petra Keller Gueguen,
Head of Director General's Office, FSO



From left to right: **Lara Ankersmit**, Senior Director Communication and News, CBS, **Urs Frei**, Head of Division Communication and Publishing, FSO, **Joost Huurman**, Senior Director Data Services, Research and Innovation, CBS, **Angelique Berg**, Director General, CBS, **Erik Bruinsma**, Director Corporate Strategy, CBS, **Georges-Simon Ulrich**, Director General, FSO, **Muriel Meister-Gampert**, Deputy Head International and National Affairs, FSO, **Petra Keller Gueguen**, Head of Director General's Office, FSO, **Samuel Schütz**, Advisor to the Director General, FSO, **Ambre Crettenand**, International and National Affairs, FSO

HOW TO STRENGTHEN THE GENEVA DATA COMMUNITY? – A UPDI EVENT IN OCTOBER

The discussion “How to strengthen the Geneva data community?” took place on 10 October 2023 at the International Conference Center Geneva with around 25 participants. The aim of this exchange was to address the lack of clarity regarding available datasets and organisations that use them and to encourage collaboration and knowledge sharing between stakeholders to facilitate more effective data management and analysis. The event was part of the Unlocking the Power of Data initiative.

On 26 January 2023, the Swiss Confederation, in cooperation with the World Health Organization (WHO), organised an event called  **Can we beat the chimps with data and statistics?** with the aim of bridging the gap between the data and statistical community and a diversity of stakeholders in order to advance data ecosystems. The outcome of this event was bringing together the different data and statistics producers in Geneva in order to build a community to learn more from each other and to strengthen International Geneva as one of the most important data producers. The aim of the event on 10 October was to have the first exchange on a possible platform for dialogue between agencies, international organisations, data holders and data producers, as a follow-up to the January event. During the event, two workstreams were discussed: a vision for a Geneva data ecosystem and the role of international Geneva for the 2030 Agenda (and the post-2030-Agenda).

Benjamin Rothen, Head of International and National Affairs at the FSO, opened the event with a few words. He then welcomed Stephen MacFeely, Director of Data and Analytics at the WHO, who witnessed the data world changing with the digital revolution. Indeed, numerous reports have been produced within UN agencies to reflect, help build a digital infrastructure and innovate further. In addition, Kersten Jauer, Executive Office of the Secretary-General of the UN, introduced his vision of a Sustainable Data Exchange platform to help connect data producers and to build a “physical hub” to support data producers. Geneva enjoys some good reasons for being a good location: the presence of the UN, the presence of international organisations and the private sector, excellence in research, a civil society network and a strong commitment to making the Geneva hub a leader in the digital space. In addition, there is a large community of data practitioners in various sectors in Geneva. The private sector, represented by Vincenzo Chiochia, director at Deloitte Consulting in the Analytics and Information Management practice, believes in the power of the ecosystem.

While developing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the first global social contract ever, it was quickly recognised that a huge amount of these data had not previously been defined statistically. However, the SDG process has been generally positive, as Claudia Walls, Director of Data Use at Development Initiatives, points out. For the first time, the statistical community has come together in an independent process to develop the 2030 Agenda framework by focusing on data and using novel sources, with a particular emphasis on leaving no one behind. The discussion highlighted the importance of data management and data governance.

A wide range of participants from the OHCHR, UNECE, the Group on Earth Observations, DiploFoundation, IOM, UNCTAD, OCHA, PARIS21, SDG Lab, GRID-Geneva and UNITAR contributed to the discussion. We are currently deciding whether we are going to organise a second event.

Ambre Crettenand, International and national affairs, FSO



www.upd-initiative.ch

NATIONAL UNLOCKING THE POWER OF DATA INITIATIVE (UPDI) EVENT: "SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGs) IN SWITZERLAND FOCUSING ON DATA SCIENCE"

The National UPDI event "Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Switzerland focusing on data science" took place on Tuesday 17 October 2023 in the morning, at the Biotech Campus in Geneva. This was the UPDI's first national event and was organised jointly by the Federal Statistics Office (FSO) and the University of Geneva. This event was open to the public and held in French.

The main aim of the event was to showcase the usefulness of data science in measuring the progress made in reaching the 2030 Agenda Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Switzerland.

Bertrand Loison, Head of the Data Science, Artificial Intelligence and Statistical Methods Division of the FSO, opened the event with a speech explaining the importance of data science and the many ways it can be used, including in measuring SDGs.

The presentations in the first part of the morning were centred on the progress made in achieving the SDGs of the UN's 2030 Agenda and the establishment of indicator systems to measure this progress. On the national level, Markus Reubi, the Federal Council's delegate for the 2030 Agenda, delivered the key-stone speech that set the scene of the current insufficient progress in achieving the SDGs in Switzerland by the 2030 deadline. He argued that better data are needed for better decision-making and that Switzerland is uniquely positioned to take a leading role in this field. Peter Major, Vice-President of the UN Commission on Science and Technology for Development, reached the same conclusion at the international level concerning the meeting of SDGs in time. In terms of data, he believes that trust in science must be re-established and scientific and technological methods and results must be put to good use, including in cooperation and governance.

In terms of creating robust indicator systems, Pierre-Yves Burgi, Deputy Director of Information Systems at the University of Geneva spoke of the

long-term conservation of data in DNA which fits the requirements of the SDGs well, thanks to its energy efficiency. Anne-Marie Mayerat, Head of the Environment, Sustainable Development and Territory Section of the FSO presented the Monet indicator system that provides an overview of Switzerland's progress on both the 2030 Agenda as well as the Federal Council's own 2030 Sustainable Development Strategy. Matti Langel from the Geneva cantonal statistics office and Giancarlo Copetti from the Geneva cantonal sustainable development service presented their joint indicator system for the canton of Geneva. The first results of this joint indicator system are to be published at the end of 2023.

In the second part of the event, the focus was placed on data science. Pauline Maury-Larivière, Data Scientist at the FSO, presented different data science methods for decision-making such as causal inference, counterfactuals and potential outcome frameworks. Then, Jean-Marie Le Goff, President of the Information & Data Exploration for Environment and IDE4, explained the concept of visual analytics that combines visualisation, human factors and data analysis. This concept enables the extraction of information from large and/or complex data sets thanks to analytical methods in order to make decisions. Christian Lovis, Chairman of the Division of Medical Information Sciences at the

University Hospitals of Geneva, spoke of the challenge of medical data semantics which can reduce the quantity of information and how data science can create a map of data models and semantic requests that decreases the loss of information. Walid El Abed, Founder & CEO of Global Data Excellence, Pierre-Dominique Hohl, founder & CEO of Easy Shipping 4U and Alain Hugentobler, Chief engineer system at the University of Geneva, shared the stage to present tools that allow decision-making by simply asking data questions in natural language. Lastly, Giovanna di Marzo, Head of the Centre Universitaire Informatique (CUI) at the University of Geneva and Lamia Friha, responsible for R&D Cell and the accelerator of sciences and digital services at the University of Geneva, described how the modelisation of data such as transport and general traffic data in Geneva helps in decision-making for urban planning.

The moderator of the event Gianfranco Moi, Strategic Digital Advisor at the CUI of the University of Geneva, wrapped up the morning of presentations with some final comments and concluded the event.

David Biddle,
International and national affairs, FSO

LINKS

www.updi-initiative.ch

The indicator system will be published on Geneva's sustainability and climate website:

www.ge.ch/dossier/durabilite-climat

A TAILOR-MADE APPROACH TO SUPPORT THE IMPLEMENTATION OF LARGE CASE UNITS

From 18 to 22 September 2023, three colleagues (Dries Butink, Cyrille Pluijmen, and Jeffrey Zinzen) from the CBS (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek NL) were in Neuchâtel. Together with the statistical offices of Denmark, Sweden and Ireland, CBS is a member of a consortium financed by Eurostat which is intended to assist in the creation and development of Large Case Units (LCUs). An LCU is a unit that ensures the quality and consistency of data from the largest multinational enterprise groups in business and macroeconomic statistics. Their implementation is one of the directions taken by the European Statistical System (ESS) in recent years to develop a more systematic approach to measuring the activities of multinational enterprises and their impact on the quality of official statistics. Active since 2019, the consortium has decided to continue its collaboration in 2023 and 2024, when a maximum of eight countries will be able to benefit from its advice. Switzerland is now one of the fortunate beneficiaries of this European support programme.

Among the members of the ESS, the Netherlands has accumulated a great deal of experience in communicating with multinationals and processing their data. At present, their LCU looks after 370 multinationals accounting for around 50% of Dutch GDP. During the visit, CBS showed us how they are organised, the activities of their LCU and their communication strategy with multinationals. Nevertheless, the main focus of the consortium's visits is to help countries diagnose their situation and offer advice that will best help them achieve their objectives in terms of implementing an LCU or any other structure with the same aims.

With this in mind, Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday were devoted to

presentations by the CBS, interviews with the various statistical domains, profiling and the register, and to encouraging dialogue and exchanges of views with the Swiss National Bank (SNB). The latter is also in parallel carrying out a project to ensure the quality of data from the "Large Cases" that have the greatest influence on its surveys. Thursday was then devoted to simulating the actual work of an LCU, working with data from five multinational enterprise groups operating in Switzerland. This last exercise highlighted the type of consistency checks that are possible and the need to work at microlevel to identify inconsistencies between different data sources and correct them.

The Friday sessions provided an opportunity to take a step back from all the work carried out during the week and to discuss the initial conclusions drawn by our CBS colleagues. These conclusions will be set out in an advisory report, which will be the subject of consultation within the relevant sections of the FSO and the SNB before being sent to Eurostat. It will be a central element in guiding future discussions on how the FSO, in close collaboration with the SNB, intends to ensure the quality of the data on multinationals used in business and macroeconomic statistics.

And to round off this intense and studious week in style, what better way to finish than with our colleagues from the CBS over a fondue and a glass of Chasselas at Neuchâtel's fête des vendanges!

This overview of the CBS visit would be incomplete if we did not also express our gratitude to the many employees working in the FSO's WI and IOR divisions and to the SNB for their active participation in the interviews and discussions with the CBS, without which this week's visit would not have gone quite so smoothly.

Camille Gonseth,
LCU Project Manager, FSO



From left to right: **Christine Acker**, Balance of payments and financial accounts, SNB, **Jeffrey Zinzen**, Statistical analyst LCU, CBS, **Stefanie Schnyder**, Head of Balance of Payments and financial accounts, SNB, **Livio Lugano**, Vice Director, Head of Division Economy, FSO, **Dries Butink**, Account-manager LCU, CBS, **Camille Gonseth**, LCU Project Manager, FSO, **David Ackermann**, Head of Survey Data and Profiling, FSO, **Marcel Sieber**, Vice Head of Current Account, SNB, **Cyrille Pluijmen**, Accountmanager LCU, CBS

OFFICIAL STATISTICS IN THE DIGITAL AGE: SOLUTIONS ON THE HORIZON

The Swiss Federal Statistical Office (FSO) hosted the International Marketing and Output Data Base Conference 2023 (IMAODBC) from 24 to 28 September 2023, in Bern. This conference is organised every year in a different country. Some 20 experts in communication and dissemination from 17 countries provided a short country report with their successes, failures and challenges and held a presentation on one of the following topics: user-oriented communication, reaching young people, news and social media, the future of channels, the future of digital publications, innovative approaches in data visualisation, bringing data dissemination forward, interface of output database, achieving more with new technologies (AI).

Since 2001, the annual conference series has established a strong network of communication innovators. It offers a great opportunity for NSOs and other agencies with statistics departments to showcase their work, learn from their peers and identify opportunities for international collaboration. It has evolved into an important forum – active all year round – on the dissemination of data and statistics and has led to improved international practices in the past.

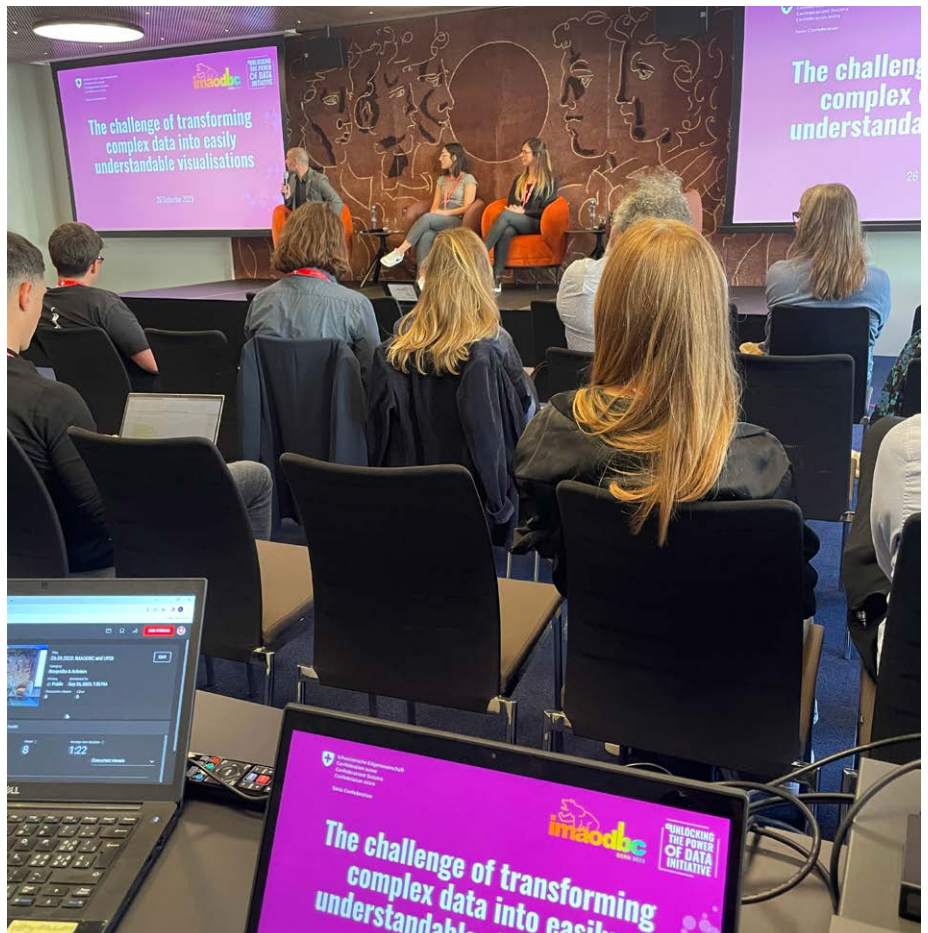
At the end of the first day of the conference, FSO Director General Georges-Simon Ulrich gave a keynote speech on the theme of “Official statistics in the digital age: solutions on the horizon”, recalling that we were gathered to address the evolving landscape of official statistics and the intertwined challenges of data literacy, artificial intelligence, and simplifying complex data through effective visualisations. In a world saturated with information, our

ability to navigate this sea of data with clarity and understanding has never been more crucial, he said, stressing that the challenges we face in official statistics, data literacy, artificial intelligence, and the visualisation of complex data are not insurmountable barriers, but rather stepping stones to progress. He emphasized that we need to commit ourselves to fostering a culture of life-long learning, collaboration, and ethical innovation. By doing so, we can unravel the true potential of data as a force for positive change and empower ourselves to make informed decisions that shape a better future for all. In conclusion, he reminded us that we are facing a phase with many challenges, in which we all need to learn from one other. The IMAODBC is an excellent opportunity to learn from each other.



Over the next three days, the participants presented their topics, including the much-acclaimed presentations by FSO representatives: “Transforming Data Visualisation at the FSO” and “SD-Graphical – a visual approach to communicate the UN Agenda 2023. From book to game to live event with a public audience” (Thomas Schulz, Head of Publishing and Dissemination) and “The Statistical Yearbook of Switzerland revised and redesigned – a new approach in documenting our business in the 21st century” (Rolf Duffner, Head of Topics Management, and Marc Kipfer, Editor in Chief of the Yearbook). As every year, the presentation that the participants found most interesting received an award. This year, our colleague Markku Huttunen from Statistics Finland received this prize with his presentation “ChatGPT – The Swiss Army Knife of All Things”.

Markus Huber,
Vice Head of Publishing and
Dissemination, FSO



Data are useless unless they can be read, interpreted, analysed and used to drive action. At the IMAODBC venue, a separate event was held on the “Unlocking the power of Data Initiative (UPDI)” workstream of data literacy. The session was moderated by Benjamin Rothen, Ambassador, Head of International and National Affairs, FSO. The discussion focused on successful concepts and methods on the challenge of transforming complex data into easily understandable visualisations. Conference participants had the opportunity to present and discuss their own visualisation projects. Also on the panel were Tania Boa and Beatriz Malveiro from [interactivethings.com](https://www.interactivethings.com), who gave their own presentation on “Reach a broader audience with your visualization – Data visualization best practices”. The session was live streamed on the FSO’s YouTube channel.



CANADA AT THE WORLD STATISTICS CONGRESS

Every two years, the World Statistics Congress (WSC) is organised by the International Statistical Institute to promote the development and good practice of statistics worldwide, and finally, 2023 was Canada's turn to host.

As data storytellers, my team was sure we'd be sidelined, while data scientists and statisticians took front and centre. Boy, were we wrong.

From our perspective, even with the most sophisticated modelling, if you're not able to communicate your "so what" and engage people, then what have you really accomplished?

Swiss-led session on Data for Dummies

Every day, we made connections with like-minded passionate colleagues from all over the world. Thanks to my work interpreting economic and social trends for Canadians and the Prime Minister, I was invited to "Reaching the general public: Data and Statistics for Dummies" led by Benjamin Rothen (Ambassador, Swiss Federal Statistical Office).

In great company, we were joined by Georges-Simon Ulrich (Chief Statistician, Switzerland and Vice-chair of the UN Statistical Commission) and Daniel Lapidus (Managing Director and Founder of Data Story, Sweden). Miosotis Rivas Peña (Directora General, Oficina Nacional de Estadística de República Dominicana) joined us by video, talking through where their agency is at with their knowledge mobilisation and communications initiatives.

The catchy title worked, the session was packed, and participants had tough questions, wanting to understand how to build trust with the public or understand their role in fighting misinformation. They offered innovative ideas, like using artificial intelligence to analyse questions coming in from the public.

It can be challenging to grab the media or public's attention, especially in our 24-hour news cycle, so telling a relevant story that sparks a conversation is key. Innovative visual projects by Switzerland and Data Stories at the community level help build that engagement.



At Statistics Canada, we're always trying something new and fun, like a podcast between two colleagues chatting about food prices, or a cartoon explaining gross domestic product. On any given day, our social media ranges from guessing how many gallons of maple syrup Canada produces (it's 17.4 million!) to why the Census matters.

Building bridges between policy and data

I'm lucky enough to have an amazing team of teachers, economists and communicators who can coach these skills in others, bringing both policy and data communities closer together.

This year, we're focused on upskilling, through data literacy training, videos, and piloting new courses to promote the application of disaggregated data in policy to achieve more inclusive outcomes.

We're also launching a new Knowledge Mobilization initiative with plain language skill workshops, expert speakers, and a panel discussion with journalists. Building a communication and engagement plan for different audiences is part of everyone's job – though maybe not an introverted researcher's favourite.

Moving forward as an international community

Some days the climb feels steep, but with initiatives like the Unlocking the Power of Data assisting to increase data literacy and achieve better outcomes for global citizens, we left WSC feeling invigorated to keep moving forward, thankful to be able to share our journey, with all of its peaks and valleys.

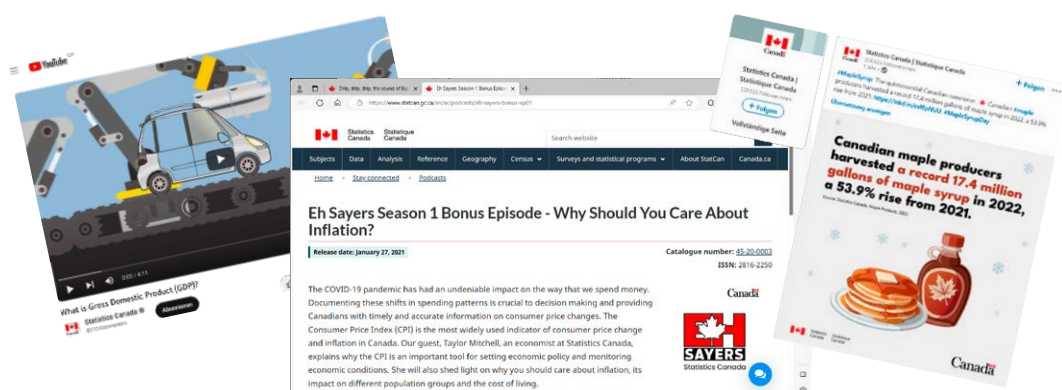
Elizabeth Richards,
Acting Director for Strategic Analysis,
Publications and Training in the
research arm of Statistics Canada

LINKS

Data Quality as Fitness for Use: take the course

Learning catalogue

and for more from Statistics Canada, please click on the images.



PLANNING 2024



Dear readers

The year 2023 is drawing to a close and we are surely all glad that the pandemic is no longer playing an important part in our lives. Planning for next year is in full swing and we are of course assuming that nothing will happen to interfere with our plans.

We will start next year with an event on fake news and AI at the House of Switzerland during the annual meeting of the World Economic Forum. This will be followed by the 55th session of the UN Statistical Commission at the end of February, where the focus will be on the future role of this commission. The question of whether the number of members needs to be increased will also be

addressed. In April, we will hold our first bilateral discussions with two African countries and shortly afterwards we will play an active role at the PARIS21 Spring Meeting in Washington DC on the topic of data and AI. The International Association for Official Statistics (IAOS) conference is coming up in May, where we hope to make a joint contribution with the WHO on the topic of data governance. In June, the German-speaking Directors' Meeting (DACH) will be held in Switzerland for the first time in several years. As the first six months of the year come to an end, the annual OECD and UNECE meetings will take place in Paris and Geneva.

Alongside these fixed dates, there will be many bilateral and informal discussions,

for example around the role that International Geneva can play in relation to data. In addition, we will of course continue to work on the Unlocking the Power of Data initiative and hope to prepare the UN World Data Forum in Medellin, Colombia, with our friends in Latin America.

I wish you all a nice relaxing time at the end of the year and look forward to working with you again in 2024

Benjamin Rothen, Ambassador,
Head of International and national
affairs, FSO



Medellin, Antioquia / Colombia

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