# USING DATA IN CLIMATE SOLUTIONS STORIES

Transitions

Stories about extreme weather events or climate solutions often integrate data to explain what's working and what's not. While there are many ways of presenting numbers in stories, cross-border teams must consider that these visualizations exist for a reason. In this guide, members and mentors of cross-border teams in the Constructive News: Fostering Solutions Journalism Across Europe project (SoJo Europe) talk about how integrating data, navigating differences, and overcoming challenges meet when crafting compelling climate solution stories.
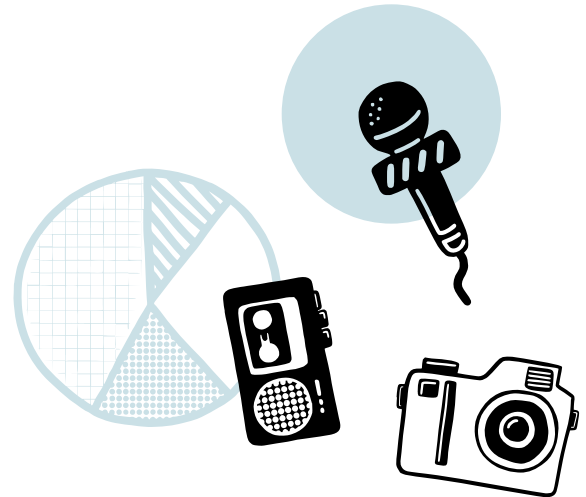
STORIES WITH DATA: WHAT'S THE CATCH?

When reporting or integrating data into climate stories, remember that causation does not equal correlation. Lola Garcia-Ajofrin of *El Confidencial* added: "Numbers can be just the starting point—followed by interviews that explain the 'HOW.'"

For example, Eurostat publishes various datasets, which, for Garcia-Ajofrin, "can be a good starting point to investigate whether something is working over time." One dataset they found—about internet speeds in Europe—became the backbone of their story showing how Romania overtook Spain as the country with the fastest internet in Europe. And their guide question? **"How did Romania do it?"**
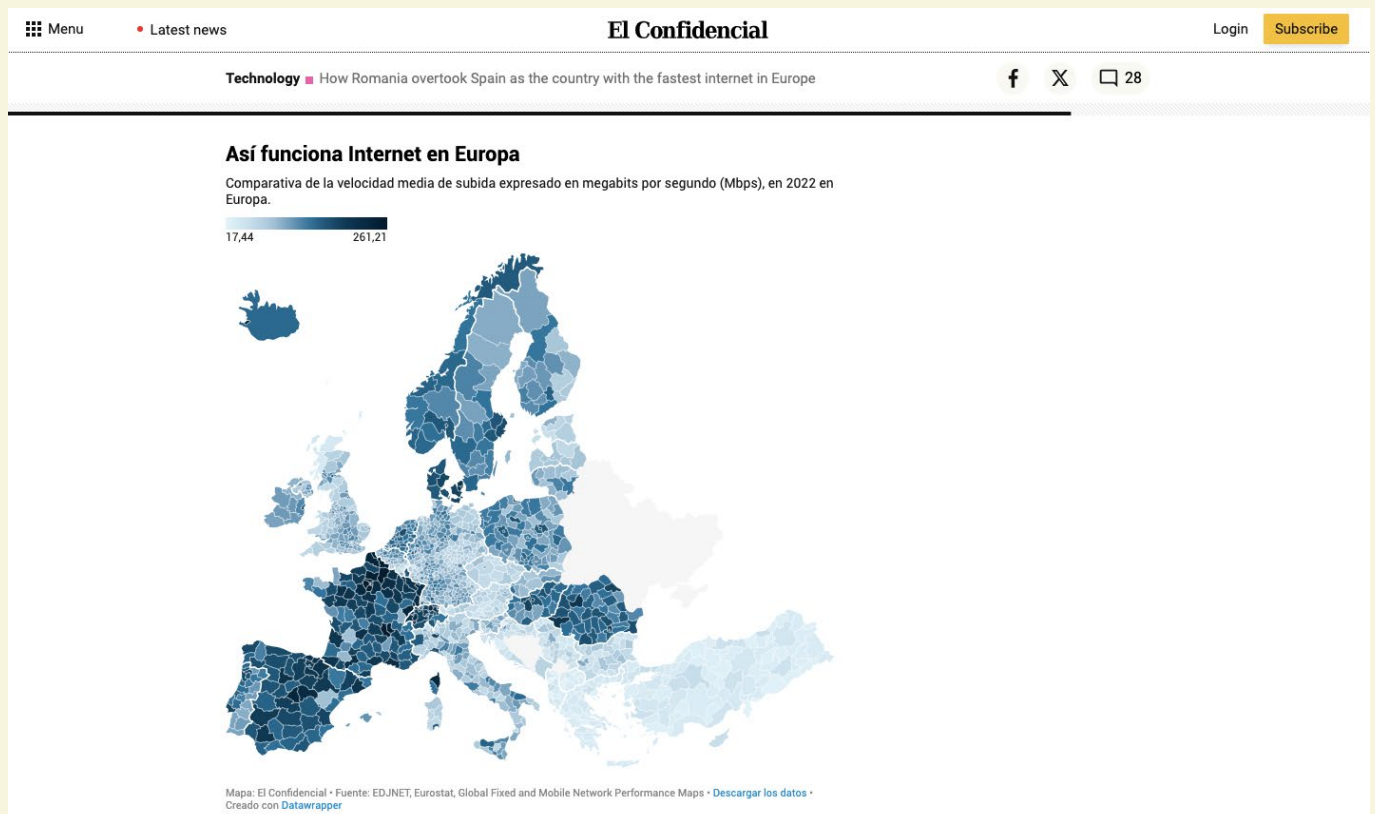
Screenshot of El *Confidencial's graphics about Romania's Internet speeds. The data was derived from Eurostat figures. Source:* El Confidencial

"A good solutions journalism story must include evidence, and for that, data is very important," Garcia-Ajofrin said. "But I believe it should never forget traditional, on-the-ground reporting, which provides context and reveals what rankings often leave out."

El Confidencial's story about Romania's ultra-fast internet integrates figures from reputable sources and comparative graphs into explainers from various interviewees—from entrepreneurs to academics and observers.

"Ultimately, what can we offer the reader that's different? What can they learn from this thing I've been lucky enough to discover?", Garcia-Ajofrin asked. "As journalists, we have the enormous privilege of speaking with so many people and going to so many places—let's use that in the most constructive way possible."

DECONSTRUCTING DATA:
THE "BEFORE-DURING-AFTER" SCHEME

In our first installment of this series, the *Climate Action Playbook: A Journalist's Guide to Solutions Reporting*, we explain how data collection and visualization tools are crucial aspects of climate reporting toolkits. Data can come from many sources and be presented in engaging ways. But which data should you use? And why?

Take, for example, Maldito Clima's story about the ravaging floods of October 2024 in Valencia, Spain, and the increasing likelihood of floods in the country, in which they used the "before-during-after" scheme to deconstruct their investigation's solutions, data sources, and narrative logic. Maribel Ángel-Moreno, investigative journalist and coordinator of Maldito Clima, shared this idea during the "Using Data in Climate SoJo" webinar in late May 2025.
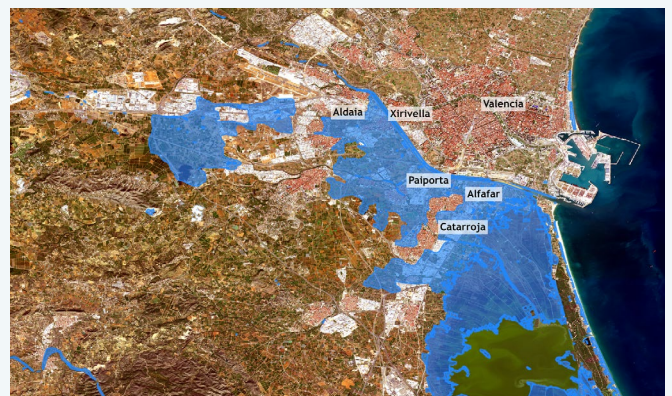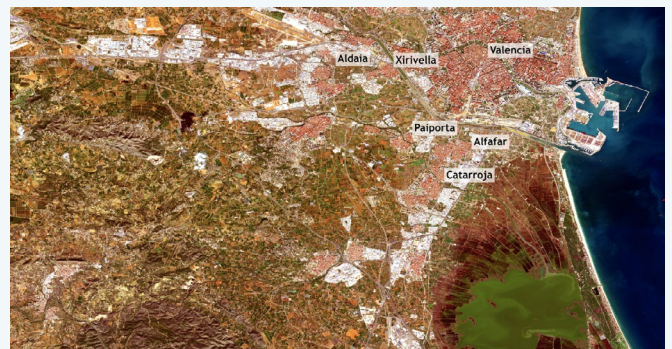
Screenshots of Maldito Clima's scrollytelling graphics, showing the areas in Valencia, Spain before (pictured above) and after (below) the ravaging floods in October 2024. The graphics of flooded areas (in blue highlights) appears or disappears as users scroll the screen of their devices. Source: Maldito Clima

"This case-specific format worked for the flood story, but for other problems/solutions, other schemes could work better," she shares.

"Before-During-After" scheme in deconstructing and conceptualizing data for climate stories

	Before	During	After
Key points	What data sources or solutions already exist before a climate event (e.g., flooding) happens?	What data sources or solutions are affected when a natural disaster happens?	What data sources or solutions can come after the weather event?
Example data points from Maldito Clima's investigative story	Early warning systems; existing anti-flood infrastructures; historical accounts; geographical data	Effectiveness of anti-flood infrastructures or solutions; impact on an affected population	New or updated legislation; relocation schemes
Why look into these?	To provide comparative points of view of the issue vis-à-vis previous events	To see how (in)effective or (in)adequate existing solutions are during the event	To see what actions will be taken or how existing solutions will be improved to address the issue

Source: Maribel Ángel-Moreno, "Using Data in Climate SoJo" webinar, 20 May 2025.

"You cannot classify or compare other floods with what happened in Valencia. There are different kinds of floods, and their impact on the population is affected by many factors, such as the type of land, geography, existing infrastructure, early warning systems, and others. But what we learned from this project is to think about how to visualize data that you will use, already have, and work with for an investigation," Ángel-Moreno said.

While data sharing is central to cross-border reporting, it also highlights the limits of comparability. In a previous cross-border project, *lavialibera* journalists Andrea Giambartolomei and Paolo Valenti tried to gather and compare data across countries, but realized each government used different categories or referred to various periods.

"Eventually, we had to drop the comparative part," Valenti shared. "We had to leave it out," Giambartolomei said, adding that a more useful strategy for a new cross-border project is to look for a common subject "where we can really make some comparison" in terms of data.

LIMITS OF COMPARISONS

Alberto Puliafito
Editor-in-chief, Slow News

"Cross-border SoJo is not just about data sharing. It's about aligning methodologies, expectations, and ethical standards. The best collaborations happen when those foundations are in place.

"Each new story requires fresh eyes, a willingness to challenge prior assumptions, and a recognition that what worked in one place might not work elsewhere—or might work for entirely different reasons."

CONCEPTUALIZING DATA VISUALIZATIONS

Through apps or software, data can easily be presented in interactive formats such as scrollytelling (or "scroll" and "storytelling", a format of presenting scrollable, interactive articles on mobile devices) or webdocs (or "web documentaries", a linear or non-linear narrative storytelling format that mixes multimedia assets). Ángel-Moreno reminds journalists that presentations using these formats may sometimes become overwhelming because readers might feel they are trapped in the current screen and that they are "not free to move, choose, or change" to other parts of the articles.

Aside from this, what else should cross-border teams and story designers consider when producing data-driven articles about climate solutions? Ángel-Moreno shares (see Chart 1):

1. **Use a unifying concept or main idea.** For their flood story, she explains, they used a puzzle piece as a metaphor to connect the problems and solutions to future actions. "If you don't have one piece of the puzzle, you will not have a complete and effective solution. That's how we try to translate the complexity of the problem and the solution it needs into a single idea."

2. **Go straight to the point with visualizations.** Your team will gather and work with a lot of data in the investigation and presentation. All these pieces of data and visuals have a lot of work behind them and are useful for showing bits of information, she says, "but not all of them are actually key to the story." They used scrollytelling, inserting bite-sized explainer boxes accompanying comparative data presented in a linear graph.

3. **Produce a story that is mobile-friendly.** Many articles and productions are viewed on smartphones, so Ángel-Moreno encourages making them mobile-optimized. "From the beginning, we know that this story will be read through a phone, so let's create the story and target it to mobile viewers."
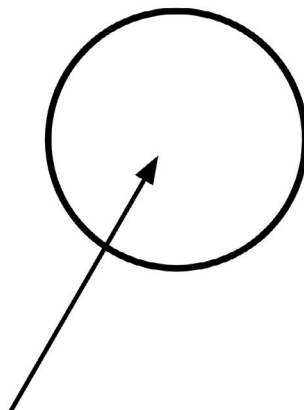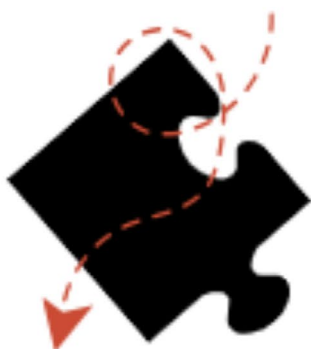

Chart 1. *Source:* Maribel Ángel-Moreno, "Using Data in Climate SoJo" webinar, 20 May 2025.

DATA ALONE DOESN'T MOVE PEOPLE

Even in the most rigorous climate reporting, journalists need to avoid overwhelming audiences with numbers. Instead, focus on action, characters, and narrative arcs that bring abstract issues down to earth. Matty Edwards, former reporter and editor at *The Bristol Cable* (UK), adds that linking climate issues to broader themes such as fuel poverty, housing inequality, or public health can help audiences connect with stories on a human level.
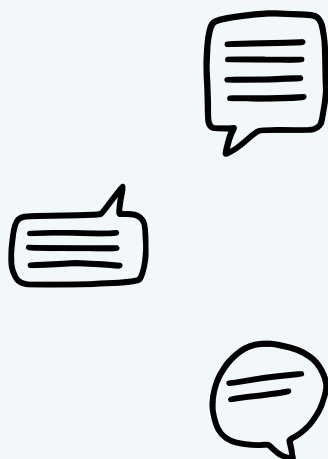
Matty Edwards
Former reporter and editor at *The Bristol Cable*

"Journalism about the climate crisis can be overwhelming or depressing, so it's important not to bombard your audience with scientific information or data.

CONTACT US

Whether you have questions, want a solutions journalism training or want to collaborate, our team is dedicated to supporting you. Reach out to us at **transitions@tol.org** to explore solutions journalism, share ideas, and make an impact together.

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