

Executive summary

Why report on progress in statistics?

The World's Women 2005: Progress in Statistics focuses on the state of statistics for addressing gender concerns. It reviews the current availability of national data and assesses progress in data reporting from 1975 to 2003, based on the information that national statistical authorities report to the international statistical system.¹ The statistics reviewed include those related to population, health, education and work. Also reviewed in the report is the current state of statistics in some of the relatively newer areas, namely violence against women; poverty; power and decision-making; and human rights.

The focus on official national statistics, as differentiated from internationally prepared estimates, reveals the extent to which Governments are able to produce statistics to address various gender concerns. By so doing, the report provides Governments with the means to assess progress, identify gaps and design strategies to improve the national collection and dissemination of gender statistics needed for policy formulation and programme planning and evaluation.

It is hoped that such assessment of national capacity to report on various topics can assist national statistics offices to obtain the increased budgetary and human resources needed for sustainable improvements in statistics. The assessment can reveal the realistic level of statistical capacity to produce sex-disaggregated Millennium Development Goal indicators at the country level. This would help pinpoint the areas where technical support is most crucial. Gender specialists can also use the report as an advocacy tool for the improvement of gender statistics.

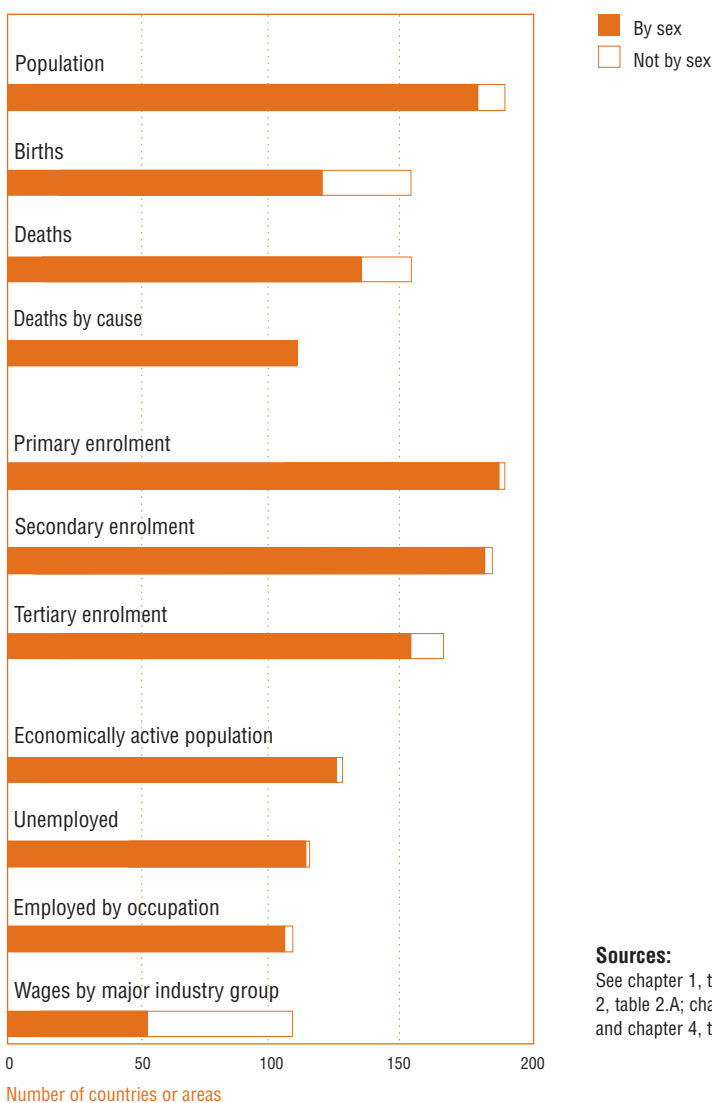
The current situation 1995-2003

The capacity of countries to report sex-disaggregated official national statistics during the period 1995–2003 has been mixed. This is illustrated by the reporting of 204 countries or areas on some basic topics. Chart A shows the number of countries that have reported data on those topics for at least one year during the period 1995–2003. It also shows the

number that reported the data by sex. As the chart shows, population and enrolment are widely reported, with more than 180 countries reporting population and primary and secondary enrolment. Statistics on births, deaths and economic activity are not as widely reported, with between 100 and 160 countries reporting the data. The large number of countries unable to provide data by sex on wages, births and deaths is a cause for concern.

Chart A

Number of countries or areas that reported data on selected topics at least once during the period 1995–2003



Sources:

See chapter 1, table 1.A; chapter 2, table 2.A; chapter 3, table 3A; and chapter 4, table 4.A.

Reporting of data varies greatly by geographic region. Europe has the highest reporting and Africa the lowest. Other regions fall between the two extremes. Similarly, the more developed regions report the most data and the least developed countries the least.

The situation in Africa is such that well over half of the countries provided sex-disaggregated data on population and on primary, secondary and tertiary enrolment at least once between 1995 and 2003. However, less than a third were able to provide data on births, deaths and the economic characteristics of the population by sex. Additional details for Africa and the other regions are provided in summary tables available at the end of each chapter. Annex tables A1 to A4 present detailed national data on the same topics.

A review of three decades 1975-1984, 1985-1994 and 1995-2003

A global review of three decades of reporting by Governments shows fairly limited progress in the reporting of official national statistics worldwide. Assessment of progress for the most recent period is, however, inconclusive owing to delays in national reporting by statistical systems. Countries often take several years or longer to report their most recent statistics. The review finds that to a great extent countries that reported data thirty years ago continue to do so today. Similarly, many countries that did not report thirty years ago still do not report. However, a

number of countries move from reporting in one period to not reporting in the next, and vice versa. On balance, the result is illustrated in chart B below, which shows the reporting of total population, economically active population and number of deaths, by sex and age.

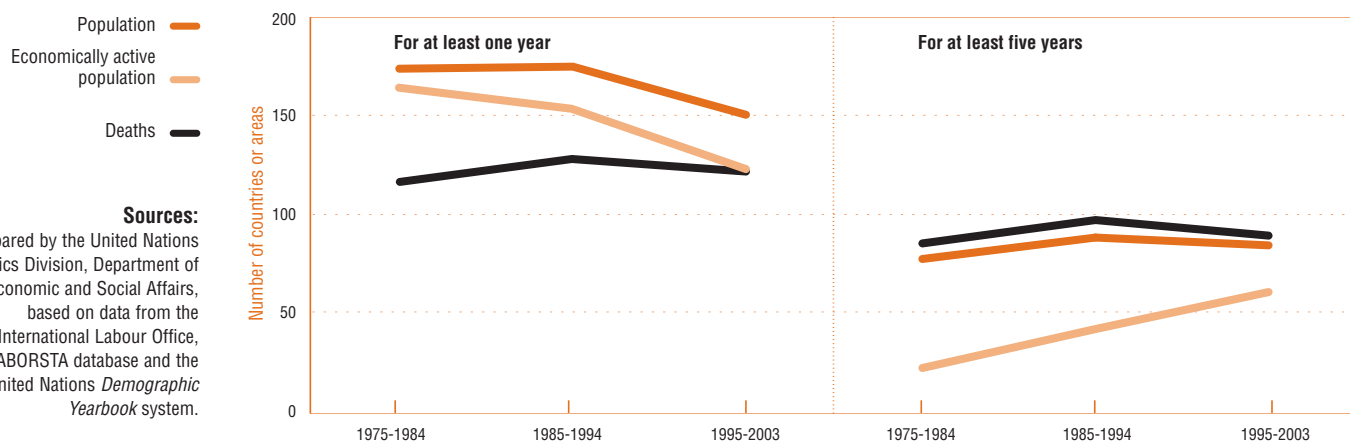
Comparing the two graphs in chart B, it is evident that fewer countries are able to report annual data frequently (i.e. for at least 5 years in a 10-year period²) by sex and age. Two types of gaps are evident from the graphs: first, the gap between reporting at least once and frequent reporting, represented by those countries that report data for less than five years in a period; second, the gap representing those countries that did not report at all.

Frequent reporting of annual data on the economically active population by sex and age has increased over the three periods. However, reporting of the economically active population has not yet reached the levels of reporting that are available for total population or for number of deaths.

The report also noted that a number of countries have initiated the collection of data on new topics important to the study of gender. More countries now have some data on violence against women, the participation of women and men in the informal sector and time use of women and men. However, data collection on those issues remains largely ad hoc and has not been incorporated into the regular statistical work programme of the national statistics offices. For developing countries, it is often dependent on external resources or, in some cases, the support of national women's machineries.

Chart B

Number of countries or areas that reported sex- and age-disaggregated statistics for at least one year and for at least five years, for three periods



Sources:

Prepared by the United Nations Statistics Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, based on data from the International Labour Office, LABORSTA database and the United Nations *Demographic Yearbook* system.

The limited progress in gender statistics and the differences in availability of such data across regions and across topics is a reflection of three factors:

- Inadequate statistical capacity
- Lack of gender mainstreaming
- Inadequate concepts and methods

Actions and proposed strategies

To improve gender statistics, it is therefore essential that the following actions be taken:

- Strengthen national statistical systems
- Mainstream gender in all aspects of production of statistics
- Develop and improve concepts and methods where inadequate

Strategies proposed for each action are listed below.

Action: strengthen national statistical systems

In order to develop and improve gender statistics at the national level, the capacity to produce reliable and timely basic statistics must be present. For many countries in the less developed regions, this is not the case. The situation calls for strengthening the national statistical systems, starting with the national statistics office.

Strategy 1. Secure sustained commitment at the highest level to strengthen the national statistical system

Governments should strive to the extent possible to support the programmes listed below, adopting a coordinated approach to produce a core set of socio-economic statistics required for policy formulation and planning. The priorities would vary according to national circumstances.

- Implement at least one population and housing census every 10 years and disseminate the results widely and in a timely manner;
- Establish, strengthen and maintain civil registration and vital statistics systems, strengthen other administrative recording systems and make statistics easily accessible to policy makers and other users;

- Ensure the sustainability of an integrated national survey programme that produces regular and timely statistics to guide policy and that allows population surveys addressing new research topics to be conducted as the need arises.

Strategy 2. Maximize the use of official statistics

National statistics offices and line ministries should widely disseminate and promote the use of the statistics that they produce. Users and producers of statistics should strive to consider all available sources of national data and use them to complement each other, as appropriate.

Strategy 3. Build capacity among producers of statistics in data presentation

Producers of statistics need to be more proactive in making the value of gender statistics visible to Governments, the public and other stakeholders. Innovative and more user-friendly ways of presenting and disseminating data need to be developed for Government and civil society. Such measures would help widen the use of the data and in the process create a demand for statistics that would strengthen the claim of the statistics office on the national budget.

Strategy 4. Develop human resources at all levels in national statistics offices

The success of a national statistics office depends not only on commitments at the highest level but also on the commitment and skills of women and men in the organization. Continuous staff training and skill upgrading is crucial to this success. Women and men should be given the same opportunities for training and advancement. In national statistics offices where women are underrepresented at decision-making levels, increasing their representation should also be an explicit goal.

Action: mainstream gender in all aspects of the production of statistics

Mainstreaming a gender perspective into national statistics systems has to be systematic; that is, implemented in all aspects of the production of statistics, from the development of concepts and methods for collecting data through the presentation of results. This endeavour requires political will at all levels, not only in national statistics offices but also in statistical services of other government agencies and in all institutions that provide administrative data.

Strategy 5. Specify the development of gender statistics within the legal framework of official statistics

Of crucial importance to improving the availability of gender statistics are the specification of formal requirements for sex disaggregation and the incorporation of a gender perspective within national statistical legislation that regulates the production and dissemination of official statistics. To expand the range of information available for gender analysis, those requirements need to be established not only for statistics already officially collected by the national statistics office but also for other sources of data, particularly administrative data being collected and disseminated by other government agencies and organizations in the public and private sectors.

Strategy 6. Support and strengthen gender statistics units

National statistics offices can benefit from setting up a gender statistics unit within their organizations. Such a unit can play a catalytic role in initiating and monitoring the process of mainstreaming a gender perspective into national statistical systems, especially at the early stages. Through their contacts with national machineries for women and non-governmental organizations, gender statistics units facilitate communication between the producers and end users of gender statistics. The units provide information to users and help them understand the uses of existing statistics. At the same time, they can increase the awareness among statisticians of the need to produce and disseminate statistics that address gender concerns and to develop gender statistics in new areas such as violence against women, the informal sector and unpaid work.

Strategy 7. Foster dialogue between statistical offices and interested stakeholders, including women's groups

Dialogue between national statistics offices and interested stakeholders can enable women's groups and gender advocates to understand, gain access to and use gender statistics more effectively. At the same time, the dialogue can help to increase the capacity of statisticians to identify and understand gender issues and to present data in formats that better address the needs of users.

Strategy 8. Train producers of statistics to incorporate a gender perspective into their work

One way to achieve gender-mainstreamed statistics is through the provision of regular training courses on gender statistics for general statisticians, either within tertiary training institutions or in national statistics offices. The training should be extended to field personnel and other staff members involved in the production of statistics.

Strategy 9. Tap existing sources of data and enhance their usefulness for producing gender statistics

Administrative data represent a potential source of gender statistics. Using administrative data to produce needed statistics is a cost-effective approach since the data are already routinely collected by organizations as part of regular administrative processes. With the introduction of appropriate changes in data collection, the results may be used for addressing gender issues. For example, police and court records can be used to understand the criminal justice system's response to domestic violence, but this is possible only if information on the victim's sex and relationship to offender is collected in the primary record.

Strategy 10. Make official national statistics a required component of international reporting mechanisms

The periodic country reports on the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and of the Beijing Platform for Action provide opportunities to promote the use of gender statistics. Utilization of statistics in those reports has been limited to date. Consideration should be given to establishing formal requirements for the inclusion of official national statistics on gender issues in a standardized format in those reports.

Action: develop and improve concepts and methods

Strategy 11. Promote collaboration between international and regional organizations and agencies, national statistics offices and academic and research institutions

International and regional organizations and agencies, national statistics offices and academic and research institutions need to work together to mainstream gender in the development and revision of concepts, definitions and methods of collecting data on topics where methods are inadequate. The collaboration extends to all conceptual and methodological issues, including the design of survey questionnaires or modules within questionnaires, the revision of international classifications and standards and the development of analytical methods and appropriate indicators, among others.

Concluding remarks

At the national level, increasing the coverage of statistics on gender issues and ensuring that concepts and methods incorporate a gender perspective is particularly challenging in view of the human and financial resource constraints faced by most national statistical systems. Resource constraints are particularly severe in the least developed countries, where the most pressing need is to strengthen national statistical systems to produce the most basic statistics in a timely manner.

In the long term, to improve the lives of women and men, statistical systems and budgets at the national as well as international level must bring about the sustained and institutionalized change needed to ensure the availability of quality gender statistics.

Notes

- 1 In the present report, the term “international statistical system” refers to the statistical databases of the United Nations Statistics Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs; the Bureau of Statistics of the International Labour Office; the UNESCO Institute for Statistics; and the World Health Organization.
- 2 Only 9 years in the most recent period (1995-2003) since data for 2004 were not yet available at the time of preparation of the present report.

