

## Chapter 1

# Population, households and families

**“... gender inequities have significant influences on, and are in turn influenced by, demographic parameters such as population growth, structure and distribution.”**

Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development

Information on population, households and families contributes to a better understanding of gender inequities in many aspects of life. The size and composition of a population can reveal gender differences in migration, births, deaths and related processes. Information on marriages and divorces sheds light on the formation and dissolution of families. Data on households and families can improve understanding of the opportunities and resources available to women and men at different stages in life. Detailed statistics on population, households and families are, therefore, essential for addressing some of the gender concerns voiced at international conferences and summits.

The present chapter reviews the reporting by Governments of statistics on the following four topics: population; births; marriage and divorce; and households.

## Current state of statistics 1995-2003

### Population

The size and sex-age composition (numbers of females and males in various age groups) of a population and how they change over time have important implications for the situation of women and men. They determine to a great extent the current needs of the population and needs that are likely to arise in the future. Information on population by sex and age is also essential for the calculation of rates, ratios, proportions, percentages and other measures used to facilitate comparisons over time and across countries or among subnational groups, including comparisons between women and men.

Population censuses are the primary source of information on the size and composition of the population. Most countries conduct at least one population census every ten years. For the census decade 1995-2004, however, 26 countries or areas out of the

204 included in the present review did not conduct a population census (box 1.1).

To aid policymaking and planning, as well as to provide the population base for calculating annual rates and measures, it is essential that a country estimate periodically its population size. Between censuses, national statistical offices prepare estimates of their country's population, usually disaggregated by sex and age (box 1.2). Ideally, population estimates are produced on an annual basis for use in planning and policy formulation.

#### Box 1.1

##### Census taking worldwide

It is recommended that countries conduct at least one population census every ten years.<sup>a</sup> In the most recent census decade (1995-2004), the vast majority of countries or areas in the world—178 out of 204—conducted a population census. Of the 26 that did not conduct one, most are in Africa, where 16 out of 55 countries or areas did not conduct a census.

	All countries or areas	Conducted a census	Did not conduct a census
World	204	178	26
Africa	55	39	16
North America	27	26	1
South America	13	11	2
Asia	50	44	6
Europe	42	41	1
Oceania	17	17	0

<sup>a</sup> *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses, rev. 1* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.98.XVII.8), para 1.9.

Between 1995 and 2003 the vast majority of countries—189 out of 204—reported total population at least once. For population data to be most useful in addressing gender concerns, it needs to be

Detailed statistics on population, households and families are essential for addressing gender concerns

For the census decade 1995-2004, 26 countries or areas did not conduct a population census

## Box 1.2

**National population estimates**

To produce a population estimate, information or benchmark population data for a specified date is needed. The data are taken from a census, a population register, compulsory registration, or a large-scale national population survey. Additional information is then used to adjust the benchmark population data and arrive at a current estimate. Some of the more common adjustment methods that countries use include the following:

- **Adjustment by continuous registers.** This is possible in countries that have comprehensive civil or population registration systems. Such systems serve as a basis for producing national population estimates or for evaluating estimates produced using other methods;
- **Adjustment based on the calculated balance of births, deaths and migration.** This method involves adding births and immigrants to and subtracting deaths and out-migrants from the last population count or the latest previous estimate;

- **Adjustment by assumed rate of population increase.** This method is used by some countries that have no reliable information on population change. In this case, the base population may be from a census, a partial registration system or an estimate from a sample survey. To produce a current population estimate, the base population is updated using an assumed rate of population increase.

Types of estimates that national statistical offices prepare include the total population of a country or area and particular groups of the population in the area, classified by sex, age, marital status, employment status, educational attainment, ethnicity, and so on. The most common estimates are of total population disaggregated by sex and age. They are usually produced at the national level and for major administrative subdivisions. An estimate may be evaluated by comparing it with another estimate produced by a different method and, at times, by using different information.

Considerable differences exist among geographic regions and development groups in the reporting of total population by sex and age

further disaggregated by sex and by sex and age. Compared to the number of countries reporting total population, a smaller number reported the information by sex and by sex and age at least once. Indeed, chart 1.1 shows that the number of countries reporting statistics on population at least once decreases as more detailed information is called for. Of the 204 countries or areas, 179 reported total population by

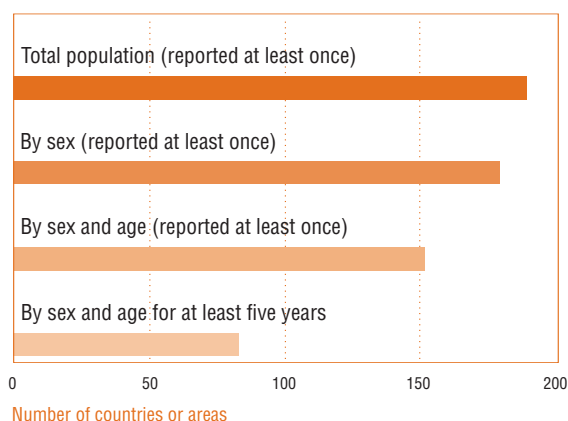
sex at least once and 151 provided the data further disaggregated by age.

Considerable differences exist among geographic regions and development groups in the reporting of total population disaggregated by sex and age at least once. Among the six regions, Africa and Oceania have the smallest relative number of countries or areas reporting such data: 23 of the 55 countries or areas in Africa and 9 of the 17 in Oceania. In terms of development groups, the lowest reporting is among the least developed countries where 17 out of the 50 countries provided total population by sex and age at least once (see table 1.A).

When considering the frequency of reporting, there is a significant drop in the number of countries providing total population by sex and age frequently (at least five out of nine years) compared to the number providing the data at least once. Of the 204 countries or areas reviewed, 83 reported total population by sex and age frequently, representing 66 per cent of the world population (chart 1.1 and table 1.B).

Differences between regions and development groups are also apparent in the case of frequent reporting of total population by sex and age. Again, the geographic regions with the smallest relative

Chart 1.1

**Number of countries or areas that reported population data between 1995 and 2003**

Source:  
Table 1.A

number of countries reporting the information frequently are Africa and Oceania. In Africa, 8 of the 55 countries or areas provided total population by sex and age frequently. The corresponding number in Oceania is 4 out of 17 countries. In terms of development groups, frequent reporting of total population by sex and age is lowest among the least developed countries: just 5 of the 50 countries provided the information for at least five years (see table 1.A).

## Births

One of the key determinants of population change is fertility—the number of births that occur to an individual or in a population. Information on fertility is needed for projecting the rate of population growth or decline. In addition, knowing the number of births taking place within a country and some of their key characteristics such as the sex and place of birth is crucial for informed national policy-making and planning.

For example, an area of concern in some countries is the practice of prenatal sex selection and female infanticide, owing to a strong preference for sons. Prenatal sex selection and female infanticide<sup>1</sup> can lead to a sex ratio at birth that strongly favours males over females. Data on the number of births

by sex can point to those discriminatory practices against girls.

Likewise, statistics on the number of births by age of the mother can be used to monitor changes in the ages at which women tend to have children. Early childbearing is a concern highlighted in the Beijing Platform for Action, which notes that pregnancy at very young ages increases the risk of maternal death and of complications during pregnancy and delivery<sup>2</sup>—a problem also faced by women giving birth towards the end of their reproductive years. Furthermore, early childbearing can severely curtail the educational and employment opportunities of women thereby limiting improvements in their educational, economic and social status.<sup>3</sup>

The main source of information on births is the civil registration system of a country. Countries that have a civil registration system derive information on births from vital statistics based on the registration system, even if the civil registration system is known to be deficient (see box 1.3). Countries may also estimate the total number of births from censuses or surveys.

Of the 204 countries or areas included in the review, 111 reported births from a civil registration system said to cover at least 90 per cent of the coun-

Just 5 of the 50 least developed countries provided data on population by sex and age for at least five years

Examining the number of births by sex can point to discriminatory practices against girls

### Box 1.3

#### Civil registration and vital statistics

Statistics on births, deaths and marriages are collectively referred to as **vital statistics**. In most countries, they are compiled from birth certificates, death certificates or marriage certificates that are issued by civil authorities when individuals report births and deaths or apply for a marriage license. The recording of these events is called civil registration. **Civil registration** is defined as the continuous, permanent, compulsory and universal recording of occurrence and characteristics of vital events, most notably births, deaths and marriages.

Governments have a vested interest in the proper functioning of the civil registration system: documents issued by civil registrars are legal tenders that entitle the bearer to a number of services such as school enrolment, medical care, family benefit programmes, social protection, pensions and inheritances, among others.

An effective civil registration system provides a continuous and important source of information on fertility, mortality and marriage. For example, the civil

registration system, in issuing a birth certificate, may require information on the characteristics of (a) the mother: age, marital status, nationality, place of birth, place of usual residence, number of previous births, date of last birth, date of marriage, occupation; (b) the father: age, marital status, nationality, place of birth, place of usual residence, occupation; and (c) the child: sex, place and date of birth, birth order. All of the preceding information is transferred to official statistics, which removes individual identifiers (name, personal identification number) and aggregates them into a set of vital statistics. For vital statistics to be most effective as policy tools, there needs to be a well-functioning civil registration system that is universal (i.e., with coverage of at least 90 per cent of all events) and a vital statistics system that produces and disseminates statistical information about births, deaths and marriages in a timely manner.

#### Source:

*Principles and Recommendations for a Vital Statistics System, Rev. 2* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.01.XVII.10), paras. 301 and 423.

In many countries, limited coverage can result in a large proportion of births not being counted

At 19 per cent, Asia has the lowest percentage of the regional population living in a country that reported births by sex

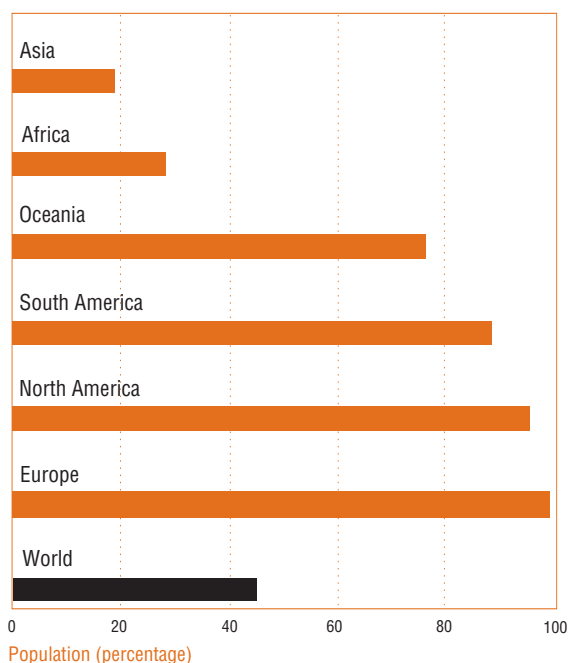
try's total births (see table 1.A). The issue of coverage is crucial to the quality of the information and can vary widely across countries. Some birth registration systems may be limited to births only in urban areas or to those taking place in hospitals. In many countries, limited coverage can result in a large proportion of births not being counted (see box 1.4).

Out of 204 countries or areas, 153 reported the total number of births at least once and 124 reported the information frequently. As in the case with reporting of population statistics, a smaller number of countries reported the more detailed statistics on births compared with the number reporting total births. Out of the 204 countries or areas, 120 reported the number of births by sex and 113 the number of births by age of mother at least once. The pattern of fewer countries reporting detailed birth statistics is observed across all geographic regions and development groups (see table 1.A).

The national reporting of births by sex at least once varies across geographic regions and development groups. Europe, North America and South America have the highest relative number of countries reporting total births by sex at least once whereas Africa and Oceania have the smallest relative num-

Chart 1.2

**Percentage of the population in countries or areas that reported births by sex of child at least once between 1995 and 2003, by region**



Source:  
Table 1.B

#### Box 1.4

##### Setting up a civil registration system: a major commitment

Setting up and maintaining a civil registration system requires a major commitment by the government, if the system is to be continuous and universal. For many countries, the process is incremental. Colombia, for example, initiated a civil registration system in January 1998, after years spent in its development. However, the system has yet to achieve 90 per cent coverage for births and deaths. In Accra, the capital of Ghana, births and deaths are registered when they take place in major hospitals, but not when these events take place elsewhere. At present, less than 30 per cent of births are registered in the country.

ber reporting with 14 out of 55 in Africa and 6 out of 17 in Oceania (see table 1.A). In Asia, 30 out of the 50 countries reported such information. However, among those not reporting are China, India and Indonesia—the three most populous countries in the continent. As a result, at 19 per cent, Asia has the lowest percentage of the regional population living in a country that reported births by sex at least once (chart 1.2).

Among development groups, whereas 45 of the 47 countries in the more developed regions reported births by sex at least once, just 6 of the 50 least developed countries did so. In the less developed regions excluding the least developed countries, 69 of the 107 countries reported the information (see table 1.A).

The pattern of reporting births by age of mother at least once across geographic regions and development groups is similar to that of births by sex (see table 1.A).

#### Marriage and divorce

Marriage and divorce are vital events that have important implications for the situation of women and men, for the organization of society, and for population change. As key events in the formation and dissolution of families, marriage and divorce strongly influence many aspects of the lives of women and men including their access to resources and opportunities and their living arrangements. Detailed statistics on marriage and divorce are, therefore, crucial for revealing disparities between women and men in many areas as well as for planning and for the allocation of programmes and services, including those

related to housing and a wide variety of family benefits.

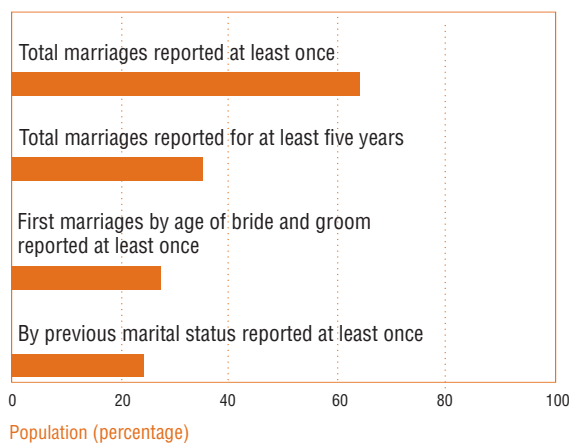
For example, information on first marriages by age of bride and groom is important for monitoring changes in the ages at which women and men first marry and in the age gap between spouses. Early marriage, in particular, is a stated concern of the Beijing Platform for Action.<sup>4</sup> Information on marriages by previous marital status is likewise important for revealing gender differences in remarriage.

Different sources of information are required for statistics to capture the diversity of marriage and divorce practices within and across countries and regions.<sup>5</sup> The results presented below refer to statistics on registered marriages and divorces produced by national vital statistics systems from civil registers of marriages and divorces (see box 1.5). In some cases, information on registered divorces may also be obtained from court records.

At the global level, 134 out of 204 countries or areas reported the total number of marriages at least once and 107 reported such information frequently (table 1.A). A much smaller number of countries reported statistics on marriage disaggregated by characteristics of the bride and groom. For example, 85 countries or areas reported the number of first marriages by age of the bride and groom and 84, the total

Chart 1.3

**Percentage of the population in countries or areas that reported information on marriages between 1995 and 2003**



Source: Table 1.B

number of marriages by previous marital status of the bride and groom. The percentage of the world population in countries that reported such marriage statistics is shown in chart 1.3.

Fewer countries or areas reported total divorces compared to marriages. Of the 204 countries or areas, 119 reported the number of divorces at least once and 94 reported such information frequently (see table 1.A). A smaller number of countries reported divorce statistics further disaggregated by other characteristics—64 reported at least once the total number of divorces by number of dependent children and 78, the total number of divorces by length of marriage. As a result, 23 per cent of the world population is in countries that reported, at least once, those detailed divorce statistics.

Wide differences exist in the reporting of marriage and divorce statistics among geographic regions (see table 1.A). In terms of marriage, all of the countries in Europe, and nearly all of the countries in North America and South America reported total marriages at least once. In Asia, 36 of the 50 countries reported such information at least once. Africa and Oceania have the smallest relative number of countries reporting total marriages: 12 out of 55 in Africa and 9 out of 17 in Oceania. Although about half of the countries in Oceania did not report total marriages at least once, 80 per cent of the continent's population lives in a country reporting such statistics (table 1.B). This is because among those reporting are Australia and New Zealand which together account for 74 per cent of the continent's population.

23 per cent of the world population is in countries that reported detailed divorce statistics

All countries in Europe and nearly all countries in North and South America reported total marriages

Box 1.5

**Definition of marriage and divorce for the production of vital statistics**

The recommended statistical definitions for the production of vital statistics on marriage and divorce are as follows:

**Marriage** is the act, ceremony or process by which the legal relationship of husband and wife is constituted. The legality of the union may be established by civil, religious or other means as recognized by the laws of each country.

**Divorce** is the final legal dissolution of a marriage, that is, that separation of husband and wife that confers on the parties the right to remarriage under civil, religious and/or other provisions, according to the laws of each country.

Source:

*Principles and Recommendations for a Vital Statistics System, Rev. 2* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.01.XVII.10), para. 57.

In terms of divorce, the regional variation in reporting follows a similar pattern as that observed for the reporting of marriage statistics, although the levels of reporting are lower (table 1.A). Chart 1.4 shows the percentage of the regional population in countries reporting divorce statistics. In all regions, fewer countries reported divorces by number of dependent children and by length of marriage as compared to the number reporting total divorces (table 1.A).

Among the least developed countries, the reporting of marriage and divorce statistics is rare. Only six and four countries in this group reported, respectively, the total number of marriages and divorces. None of the 50 least developed countries

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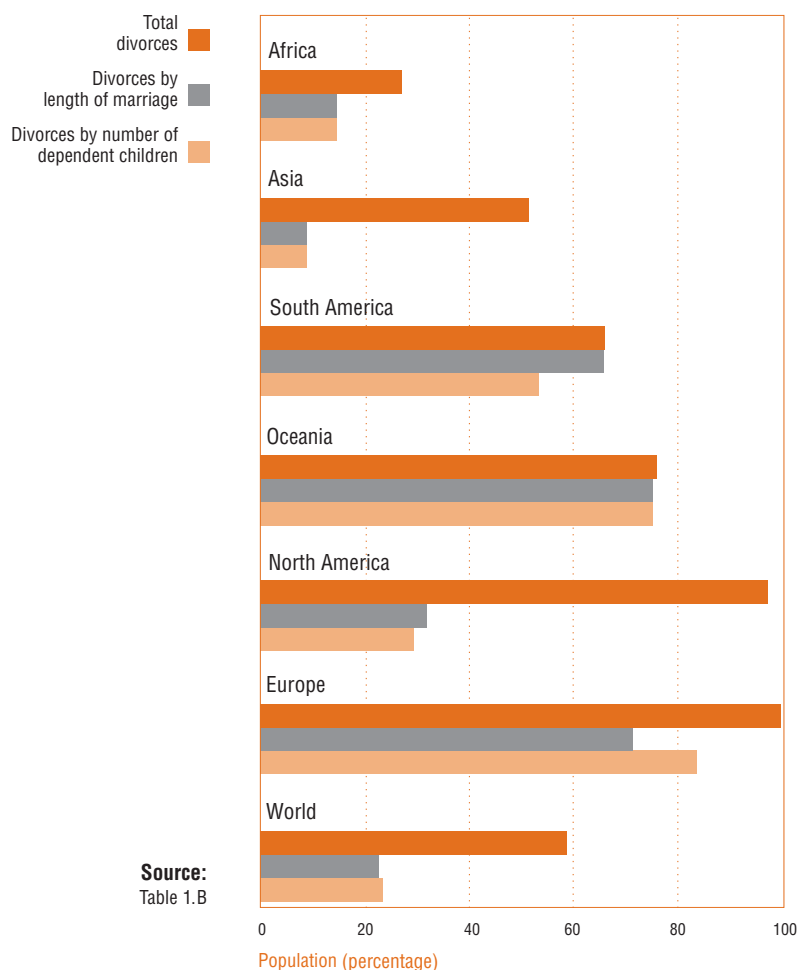
reported statistics on marriage or divorce beyond total numbers (see table 1.A).

### Households

Statistics on households are required for planning the supply, distribution and allocation of a wide variety of programmes, products and services, including such basic necessities as food and housing. When information such as the sex and age of the household head (see box 1.6 for definition) and the size of the household is available, household statistics can also be used to study gender differences in headship. A rise in female-headed households is a stated concern of the Beijing Platform for Action owing to the association between female-maintained households and poverty.<sup>6</sup>

Chart 1.4

Percentage of the population in countries or areas that reported total divorces, divorces by length of marriage and divorces by number of dependent children at least once between 1995 and 2003



Box 1.6

#### Definitions: household and head of household

For data collection purposes, there are two primary definitions of **household**. The most commonly used definition is that based on the housekeeping concept which classifies households as either (a) a one-person household, that is, a person who makes provision for his/her own food or other essentials for living without combining with any other person to form part of a multi-person household, or (b) a multi-person household, that is, a group of two or more persons who make common provision for food or other essentials for living. According to this definition, the persons in the group may pool their incomes and have a common budget to a greater or lesser extent; they may be related or unrelated persons or a combination of both. Alternatively, based on the house-dwelling concept, a household is defined as consisting of all persons living together in a housing unit.

For establishing relationships among household members, a common practice is to first identify the household head or a reference person. The **head of household** is defined as that person in the household who is acknowledged as such by the other members. The **reference person** is chosen solely for the purpose of establishing relationships, with no implication of headship. At present, there is no common definition of reference person. However, it is recommended that the term be used in situations where spouses are considered equal in household authority and responsibility.

#### Source:

*Population and Housing Censuses, Rev.1* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.98.XVII.8), paras. 2.61-2.70

For data collection purposes, the concept of “household” is more often used than that of the “family”, and the two do not always overlap. Household information largely comes from population and housing censuses. This information is often complemented by information from household surveys.

Reporting of statistics on households from population censuses since 1995 has been slow. Thus far only 59 countries or areas, representing 43 per cent of the world population, have reported the total number of households from a census. Household data disaggregated by sex and age of the head of household was reported by an even smaller number of countries—42, representing 20 per cent of the world population. Statistics further disaggregated by size of household were reported by 39 countries or areas, representing 19 per cent of the world population (table 1.A and chart 1.5).

In terms of geographic regions, Europe has the highest relative number of countries reporting household statistics followed by Asia; whereas Oceania has the lowest relative number with just one country reporting household statistics from the census since 1995 (table 1.A). North and South America are the regions with the highest percentage of the population living in countries that reported household statistics (chart 1.5). This is primarily because the most populous countries in those regions are among those that reported the information (Canada and the United States in North America, and Brazil in South America).

## Progress in statistics

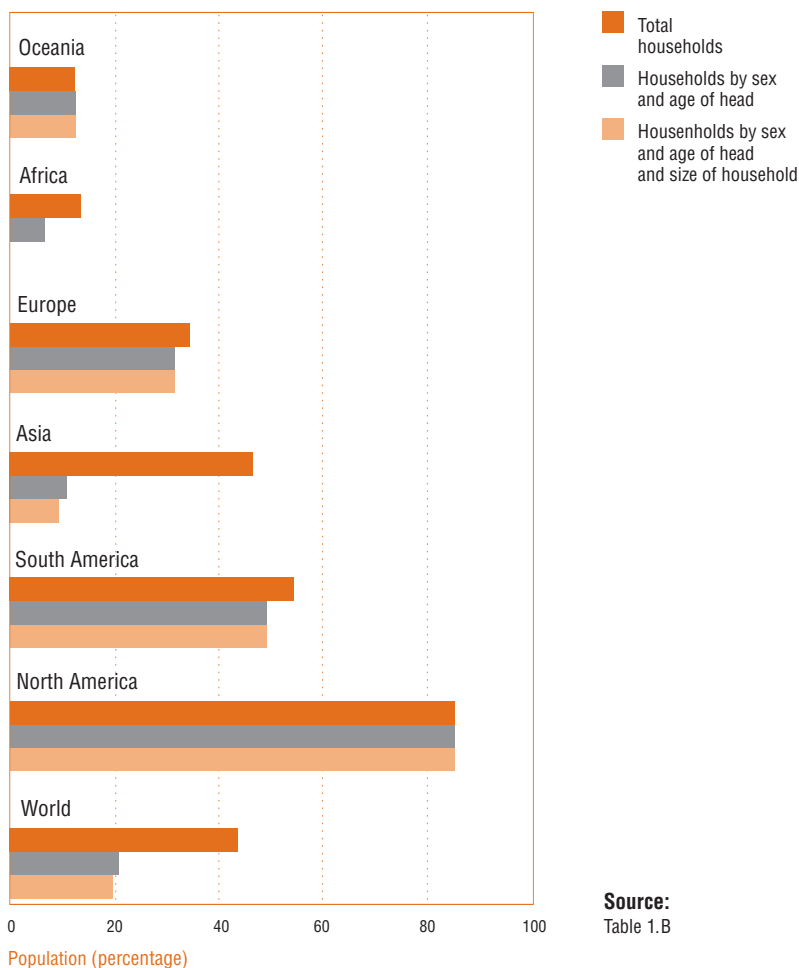
### 1975-2003

#### Population

Reporting of population statistics by sex and age appears to have remained fairly stable between 1975 and 2003. Chart 1.6 shows that a similar number of countries reported total population by sex and age at least once in the first two periods: 175 in 1975-1984 and 176 in 1985-1994. Compared to the first two periods, a smaller number of countries or areas reported such data at least once in the most recent period (1995-2003). However, this is likely the result of the following two factors and, therefore, may not reflect a real decline in reporting. First, the most recent period is shorter by one year compared to the first two periods. Second, data for the more recent years may not have been reported by 2003 due to delays in data processing and reporting.

Chart 1.5

Percentage of the population in countries or areas that reported selected household statistics at least once between 1995 and 2003, by region



Source: Table 1.B

Amidst the overall stability in reporting, improvements are observed in the frequency of reporting across periods. Between the periods 1975-1984 and 1985-1994, the number of countries or areas reporting total population by sex and age frequently increased from 76 to 87. A smaller number of countries or areas—83—reported the information frequently in the most recent period. This is likely due to the factors described above and may not reflect a real decline in frequent reporting over time (chart 1.6).

Indeed, a closer look reveals that between the periods 1985-1994 and 1995-2003, 19 countries or areas progressed from reporting infrequently (1-4 years in the 10-year period) to reporting frequently (at least 5 years).<sup>7</sup> An additional 3 coun-

Reporting of statistics on households from of population censuses has been slow

Reporting of population statistics by sex and age appears to have remained fairly stable between 1975 and 2003

Chart 1.6

**Distribution of countries or areas by frequency of reporting population by sex and age, for three periods**

Frequency of reporting	1975 – 1984		1985 – 1994		1995 – 2003	
	Number of countries or areas	Population (%)	Number of countries or areas	Population (%)	Number of countries or areas	Population (%)
<b>All countries or areas</b>	<b>204</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>204</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>204</b>	<b>100</b>
At least 5 years	76	48	87	51	83	66
1-4 years	99	48	89	45	68	24
Not reported	29	4	28	4	53	10

**Source:**

Prepared by the United Nations Statistics Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, based on data from the *Demographic Yearbook* system (November 2004).

tries (Cambodia, Grenada and Mongolia) progressed from not reporting in the 1985-1994 period to reporting data for at least five years in the most recent period. On the other hand, five countries (Andorra, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Burundi, Chad and Eritrea) that reported frequently in the period 1985-1994 did not report once in the most recent period.

**Births**

National reporting of statistics on births was fairly consistent in the three periods considered. In addition, there are signs of improvement over time in the reporting of total births and of births by sex at least once (chart 1.7). As in the case of population statistics, a shorter most recent period and delays in reporting are likely the reasons behind the decrease in the number of countries reporting total births and births by sex at least once in the most recent period compared to the second period.

Chart 1.7

**Number of countries or areas reporting births at least once and for at least five years, for three periods**

	1975 - 1984	1985 - 1994	1995 - 2003
<b>All countries or areas</b>	<b>204</b>	<b>204</b>	<b>204</b>
Total, at least once	150	160	153
By sex, at least once	128	135	120
Total, for at least five years	135	131	124
By sex, for at least five years	99	111	95

**Source:**

Prepared by the United Nations Statistics Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, based on data from the United Nations *Demographic Yearbook* system (November 2004).

The trends in frequent reporting of births statistics are mixed. There was a slight decline in the number of countries or areas reporting the total number of births for at least five years between the first and second periods. At the same time, there was an increase in the number of countries reporting births by sex (chart 1.7).

It is important to note that the majority of countries that reported statistics on births frequently did so consistently across all three periods. Of the 204 countries or areas, 118 consistently reported total births for at least five years in each of the three periods. In the case of births by sex, 70 countries consistently reported the information frequently in each of the three periods. At the same time, out of the 204 countries or areas, 29 have never reported total births and 53 have never reported births by sex since 1975 (chart 1.8).

Chart 1.8

**Number of countries or areas that reported frequently and that never reported births in all three periods considered**

	All countries or areas	Frequency of reporting	
		Frequent	Never
Total births	204	118	29
By sex	204	70	53

**Source:**

Prepared by the United Nations Statistics Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, based on data from the United Nations *Demographic Yearbook* system (November 2004).

National reporting of statistics on births was fairly consistent in the three periods considered

The majority of countries that reported statistics on births frequently did so consistently across all three periods



## Marriage and divorce

Globally, the reporting of marriage and divorce statistics has changed only slightly since 1975 (chart 1.9). After a peak in reporting in the early 1980s, there has been a slight but steady decline in the number of countries reporting marriage and divorce statistics each year. The steeper decline observed from 1999 onward in chart 1.9 is partially the result of delays in reporting which can range between two and five or more years from the time of data registration.

Since 1975, the gap between the number of countries reporting total marriages each year and the number reporting the more detailed statistics on marriages has remained roughly the same. Each year, less than half of the countries that report total marriages report marriages by previous marital status of bride and groom or first marriages by age of bride and groom.

Likewise, there continues to be a gap in the number of countries each year reporting total marriages and the number reporting total divorces. That gap, however, appears to have become smaller in the more recent years.

## Households

In terms of household information, the global trend in the last three decades has been one of overall

decline in reporting. Between the periods 1975-1984 and 1985-1994, the number of countries or areas reporting at least once total households by sex and age of head from censuses declined from 66 to 53. For the most recent period, the number of countries or areas reporting such data at least once further declined to 42. It is important to note, however, that the time lag in reporting household data is generally longer than for other census data. Household data may not be disseminated for several years after a census is conducted. Countries that conducted their census late in the period would not have had the opportunity to disseminate household data by the end of 2004.

## Challenges

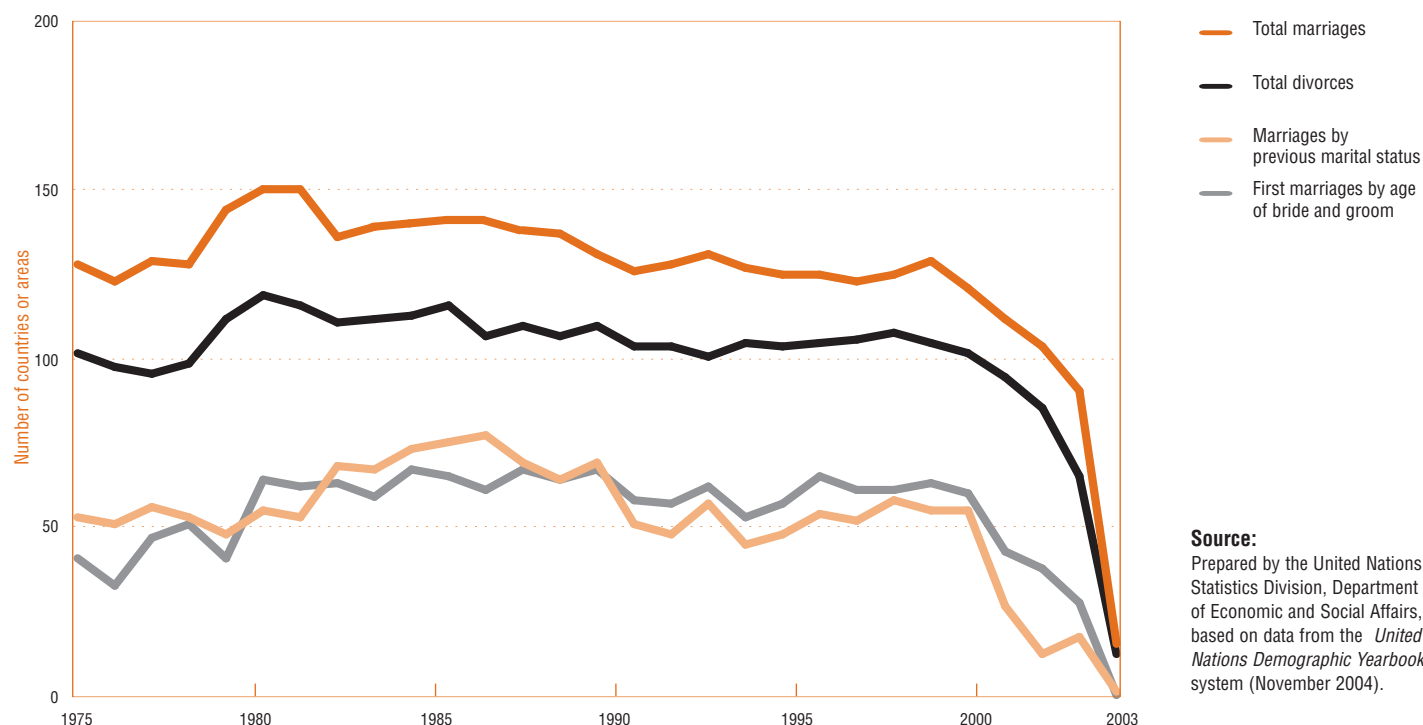
For many countries, developing the capacity to produce basic demographic statistics—and consequently gender statistics—on a regular and timely basis remains a major challenge. At the minimum, this would require the implementation of a population and housing census every 10 years and the setting up and maintenance of a well-functioning civil registration system. Both programmes require extensive resources and long-term commitment from the highest levels of government, which may not be available in the least developed countries.

The reporting of marriage and divorce statistics has changed only slightly since 1975

For many countries, developing the capacity to produce basic demographic statistics remains a major challenge

Chart 1.9

### Number of countries or areas that reported statistics on marriages and divorces, from 1975 through 2003



**Source:** Prepared by the United Nations Statistics Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, based on data from the *United Nations Demographic Yearbook* system (November 2004).

A challenge for gender specialists, is to help maximize the value of censuses for gender analysis

Maintaining a civil registration system is a considerable challenge for less developed countries

A population and housing census is one of the most important statistical activities undertaken by Governments. The census can be a rich source of gender statistics—if the concepts, definitions and methods used in the collection and analysis of data are gender-sensitive. A challenge for gender specialists, therefore, is to help maximize the value of censuses for gender analysis by ensuring that a gender perspective is mainstreamed into all stages of the census. The planning of the 2010 round of population censuses provides opportunities for gender specialists and women's groups to assert their information needs and advocate for the use of concepts, definitions and methods that incorporate a gender perspective.

Maintaining a civil registration system that allows the timely and regular production of statistics on births and deaths is a considerable challenge for less developed countries. An effective civil registration and vital statistics system is very costly and its development is a long-term process that resource-poor countries generally find very difficult to sustain. In many of those countries, civil registration systems miss large segments of the population. In some cases, registration is limited to persons residing in urban areas. A practical way for governments seeking to improve the coverage of civil registration systems is to proceed incrementally.

As a component of population change, migration is perhaps even more difficult to measure than births and deaths. With globalization, international migration has grown in importance throughout the world. Concurrent to that, there has been increasing interest in many countries to improve data on international migration. While international guidelines on the collection of data on international migration exist,<sup>8</sup> many concepts and methods need to be further improved and/or elaborated. The fact that women constitute half of international migrants<sup>9</sup> and the differences in personal and migration characteristics between women and men dictate that data collection on migration and migrants be planned with a gender perspective.



Table 1.A  
Number of countries or areas that reported data on selected demographic characteristics, 1995 – 2003

	Geographic region							Development group		
	World	Africa	North America	South America	Asia	Europe	Oceania	More developed regions	Less developed regions <sup>a</sup>	Least developed countries
<b>All countries or areas</b>	<b>204</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>107</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>Population</b>										
Total, at least once	189	43	27	13	47	42	17	47	103	39
By sex, at least once	179	35	27	13	47	41	16	46	100	33
By sex and age, at least once	151	23	26	11	43	39	9	44	90	17
By sex and age, for at least five years	83	8	12	6	21	32	4	37	41	5
<b>Births</b>										
Total, at least once	153	22	25	11	39	42	14	47	91	15
From civil registration system <sup>b</sup>	111	9	19	6	26	42	9	47	62	2
Total, for at least five years	124	13	22	10	32	39	8	44	76	4
By sex, at least once	120	14	21	9	30	40	6	45	69	6
By age of mother, at least once	113	8	22	10	27	38	8	43	68	2
<b>Marriages</b>										
Total, at least once	134	12	25	10	36	42	9	47	81	6
Total, for at least five years	107	7	20	8	28	39	5	44	63	0
First marriages by age of bride and groom, at least once	85	5	12	6	21	38	3	42	43	0
By previous marital status, at least once	84	4	15	6	19	36	4	40	44	0
<b>Divorces</b>										
Total, at least once	119	11	25	7	32	39	5	44	71	4
Total, for at least five years	94	5	18	6	25	36	4	40	54	0
By number of dependent children, at least once	64	3	8	2	17	32	2	36	28	0
By length of marriage, at least once	78	4	12	6	20	33	3	37	41	0
<b>Households</b>										
Total, for at least one year	59	5	5	3	22	23	1	27	27	5
By sex and age of head, at least once	42	3	5	1	11	21	1	25	15	2
By sex and age of head and size of household, at least once	39	1	5	1	10	21	1	25	14	0

**Source:**

Prepared by the United Nations Statistics Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, based on data from the United Nations *Demographic Yearbook* system (November 2004).

a Excluding the least developed countries.

b Reported births at least once from a civil registration system with 90 per cent or better coverage of births.

**Table 1.B**  
**Percentage of the world and regional populations in countries or areas that reported data on selected demographic characteristics, 1995 – 2003**

	World	Geographic region						Development group		
		Africa	North America	South America	Asia	Europe	Oceania	More developed regions	Less developed regions <sup>a</sup>	Least developed countries
<b>All countries or areas</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Population</b>										
Total, at least once	98	87	100	100	99	100	100	100	99	85
By sex, at least once	97	80	100	100	99	100	100	100	99	79
By sex and age, at least once	90	59	100	98	93	99	79	99	95	38
By sex and age, for at least five years	66	18	73	68	74	76	75	85	69	16
<b>Births</b>										
Total, at least once	68	43	97	98	60	100	98	100	63	41
From civil registration system <sup>b</sup>	30	18	74	23	13	100	79	100	15	0.1
Total, for at least five years	60	26	95	96	52	99	77	99	58	3
By sex, at least once	40	28	96	88	19	99	76	99	29	6
By age of mother, at least once	39	20	97	96	18	98	76	99	28	0
<b>Marriages</b>										
Total, at least once	64	31	97	86	58	100	80	100	59	30
Total, for at least five years	35	14	95	76	15	99	75	99	23	0
First marriages by age of bride and groom, at least once	27	15	34	59	11	100	75	76	18	0
By previous marital status, at least once	24	15	15	66	11	78	75	63	16	0
<b>Divorces</b>										
Total, at least once	59	27	97	66	51	100	76	100	55	11
Total, for at least five years	27	9	36	61	12	98	75	75	18	0
By number of dependent children, at least once	23	14	29	53	9	84	74	66	14	0
By length of marriage, at least once	23	15	32	66	9	71	75	59	16	0
<b>Households</b>										
Total, for at least one year	43	12	85	51	46	34	12	58	45	7
By sex and age of head, at least once	20	6	85	49	10	31	12	56	12	6
By sex and age of head and size of household, at least once	19	0	85	49	9	31	12	56	12	0

**Source:**

Prepared by the United Nations Statistics Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, based on data from the United Nations *Demographic Yearbook* system (November 2004).

a Excluding the least developed countries.

b Reported births at least once from a civil registration system with 90 per cent or better coverage of births.

## Notes

- 1 The birth of a female infant subjected to infanticide is often not registered and, therefore, not included in official records.
- 2 *Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4-15 September 1995* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.96.IV.13), chap. I, resolution 1, annex II, para. 268.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 *Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4-15 September 1995* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.96.IV.13), chap. I, resolution 1, annex II, para. 263.
- 5 Marriage and divorce are defined in terms of laws and customs, making it difficult to arrive at universally applicable statistical definitions. In some countries, for example, marriage is governed by civil law, which may or may not be supplemented with religious rites; in other countries, unions by mutual consent, without ceremonial or legal rites, constitute formal and legally binding contracts. Likewise, the laws and regulations relating to divorce range from total prohibition to the granting of divorce in response to a simple statement or desire or intention.
- 6 *Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4-15 September 1995* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.96.IV.13), chap. I, resolution 1, annex II, para. 22.
- 7 The 19 countries or areas are: China, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Estonia, Guatemala, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Lesotho, Lithuania, Macao Special Administrative Region of China, Malawi, Republic of Moldova, Morocco, Netherlands Antilles, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Slovakia, Tonga, Turkey and Uruguay.
- 8 See *Recommendations on Statistics of International Migration, Revision 1* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.98.XVII.14).
- 9 *World Survey on the Role of Women in Development: Women and International Migration* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.04.IV.4).