2017
STATISTICS
DIVISION
IN BRIEF

BETTER DATA. BETTER LIVES.
The General Assembly,

Recalling recent resolutions of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council highlighting the fundamental importance of official statistics for the national and global development agenda,

Bearing in mind the critical role of high quality official statistical information in analysis and informed policy decision making in support of sustainable development, peace and security, as well as for mutual knowledge and trade among the States and peoples of an increasingly connected world, demanding openness and transparency,

Bearing in mind also that the essential trust of the public in the integrity of official statistical systems and confidence in statistics depend to a large extent on respect for the fundamental values and principles that are the basis of any society seeking to understand itself and respect the rights of its members, and in this context that professional independence and accountability of statistical agencies are crucial,

Stressing that, in order to be effective, the fundamental values and principles that govern statistical work have to be guaranteed by legal and institutional frameworks and be respected at all political levels and by all stakeholders in national statistical systems,


Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics

Principle 1. Official statistics provide an indispensable element in the information system of a democratic society, serving the Government, the economy and the public with data about the economic, demographic, social and environmental situation. To this end, official statistics that meet the test of practical utility are to be compiled and made available on an impartial basis by official statistical agencies to honour citizens’ entitlement to public information.

Principle 2. To retain trust in official statistics, the statistical agencies need to decide according to strictly professional considerations, including scientific principles and professional ethics, on the methods and procedures for the collection, processing, storage and presentation of statistical data.

Principle 3. To facilitate a correct interpretation of the data, the statistical agencies are to present information according to scientific standards on the sources, methods and procedures of the statistics.

Principle 4. The statistical agencies are entitled to comment on erroneous interpretation and misuse of statistics.

Principle 5. Data for statistical purposes may be drawn from all types of sources, be they statistical surveys or administrative records. Statistical agencies are to choose the source with regard to quality, timeliness, costs and the burden on respondents.

Principle 6. Individual data collected by statistical agencies for statistical compilation, whether they refer to natural or legal persons, are to be strictly confidential and used exclusively for statistical purposes.

Principle 7. The laws, regulations and measures under which the statistical systems operate are to be made public.

Principle 8. Coordination among statistical agencies within countries is essential to achieve consistency and efficiency in the statistical system.

Principle 9. The use by statistical agencies in each country of international concepts, classifications and methods promotes the consistency and efficiency of statistical systems at all official levels.

Principle 10. Bilateral and multilateral cooperation in statistics contributes to the improvement of systems of official statistics in all countries.

73rd plenary meeting
29 January 2014
Message from the Director

I am sure you agree with me that 2016 was another crucial year for official statistics. We published the first progress reports on the Sustainable Development Goals and held the inaugural World Data Forum in South Africa. Last year also saw the Statistical Commission, at its forty-seventh session in March 2016, “agree, as a practical starting point, with the proposed global indicator framework for the goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.” To this end, my Division continues to support the development of the indicator framework and its implementation through the recently launched Cape Town Global Action Plan for Sustainable Development Data and generally through the work of the Inter-agency and Expert Group on SDGs and the High-level Group for Partnership, Coordination and Capacity-Building for statistics for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

This brochure presents these and other highlights of our work from the past year as well as some of the people behind it.

I thank all our partners for their contribution to this work and for continuing the theme of better data for better lives. I hope you will enjoy reading this year’s edition of the brochure.

Stefan Schweinfest
Director
United Nations Statistics Division
A Brief History

The general function of the UN Statistical Office (now the Statistics Division) of the United Nations Secretariat were sketched out at the Nuclear Session of the UN Statistical Commission in 1946 and have remained relatively stable to the present time: technical work with the Commission on the development and standardization of statistical methods; compilation and dissemination of international statistics; technical cooperation with countries to strengthen their national statistical systems, coordination of international statistical programmes and activities; and the support of analytical applications in other offices in the Secretariat. Milestones from the past seventy years include the “First directory of international statistics” (1951), the first “Inter-Agency Meeting on Statistical Activities”, held in 1966 in Geneva (now the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities), the formation of the Inter-secretariat Working Group on National Accounts (ISWGNA) and the successful conclusion of the work of the Inter-agency and Expert Group on the Millennium Development Goal Indicators (IAEG-MDG) in 2015.

Additionally, the Statistics Division services the work on geospatial information of two technical intergovernmental bodies: the Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management (UN-GGIM) and the Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNEGN). UN-GGIM is the apex intergovernmental mechanism for making joint decisions and setting directions for the production and use of geospatial information within national, regional and global policy frameworks. UNEG is responsible for encouraging the standardization of geographical names and promoting the national and international benefits to be derived from standardization.

In its very early sessions the Statistical Commission stressed that the work of the Statistical Office of the Secretariat should be based on the highest standards of professionalism and technical proficiency. It stressed that “It is particularly important that the statistical unit of the Secretariat be staffed with personnel of the highest order of competence.” Today, the Statistics Division staff comprises 125 staff from 45 different countries. Seventy-three of these staff are in the professional category.
2016 Highlights
The World Data Forum

The first UN World Data Forum was hosted by Statistics South Africa from 15 to 18 January 2017, with the support of the Statistics Division and under the guidance of the Statistical Commission and its High-level Group for Partnership, Coordination and Capacity-Building for Statistics for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The programme included more than 80 sessions and 300 speakers. Over 1,400 participants from more than 100 countries attended the Forum representing national statistical offices, international organizations, civil society groups, private sector and academia, as well as political leaders and government officials, and sustainable development experts and advocates. The event was a unique opportunity for major producers and users of data and statistics to collaborate in launching new initiatives and innovative solutions that will deliver better data on all aspects of sustainable development. One of the main outcomes of the event was the launch of the Cape Town Global Action Plan for Sustainable Development Data, which will be formally adopted by the Statistical Commission at its forty-eighth session.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Indicator Framework

Succeeding the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was adopted at a High-level Summit in September 2015 and includes 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 targets. At its forty-seventh session in March 2016, the Statistical Commission “agreed, as a practical starting point, with the proposed global indicator framework for the goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.”

The global indicator framework is a list of more than 200 global indicators. It forms the basis for the review of progress towards achieving the SDGs at the global level. These global indicators will be supplemented by regional and national indicators to be developed by Member States, and thematic indicators to be developed in various areas by the relevant agencies.

The Inter-Agency and Expert Group on SDG indicators (IAEG-SDGs), established by the Statistical Commission and comprised of Member States developed the global indicator framework through an open and transparent process involving all stakeholders. The Statistics Division devoted significant resources to substantively support the work of IAEG-SDGs to agree on an indicator framework and to prepare for its implementation.

At its forty-eighth session, 7-10 March 2017, the Statistical Commission will have before it the report of the IAEG-SDGs presenting an update on the global indicator framework of the 2030 Agenda for follow-up and review. The IAEG-SDGs continues to carry out its work in an open, transparent and inclusive process involving all stakeholders and will further improve and implement the global indicator framework.
Secretary-General’s progress reports on the SDGs

The Secretary-General’s progress report on the SDGs, “Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals 2016”, as mandated in the 2030 Agenda was provided to the High-level Political Forum. In addition, the “Sustainable Development Goals Report 2016” was launched in July 2016 by the Secretary General. These two reports are the first official global monitoring of the 2030 Agenda and will serve as a key annual benchmark throughout the 2030 Agenda’s 15 year implementation period.

The Statistics Division led the preparation of these reports compiling statistical data and narratives on progress as provided by the UN system and other international agency partners. A supplementary statistical annex containing global and regional aggregates as well as a database of all the global, regional and national data related to the indicators was released in conjunction with the report. All these outputs are available at the Sustainable Development Goals indicator website: [http://unstats.un.org/sdgs/](http://unstats.un.org/sdgs/).

Transformative Agenda for Official Statistics

The Statistics Division presented to the Statistical Commission a new initiative to promote a Transformative Agenda for Official Statistics to help transform and modernize national statistical systems with respect to technical production processes as well as managerial and institutional arrangements. Seven regional and sub-regional conferences were held between November 2015 and October 2016 in the format of leadership dialogues between Chief Statisticians and senior managers of the national statistical offices with the intention to build on and verify the recommendations provided by the Global Conference held in January 2015 in New York.

Each of the conferences concluded with a set of regional actions and recommendations for transforming and modernizing national statistical systems organized by five thematic areas: coordination, communication and advocacy, integrated statistical systems, innovation and modernization and capacity building and resource mobilization. It is expected that the statistical committees of the regional commissions in collaboration with regional agencies will adopt the outcomes of the regional conferences and endorse the regional road maps and related actions for the transformation of official statistics. These regional road maps and related actions are supportive of the implementation of the Cape Town Global Action Plan for Sustainable Development Data.
UN-GGIM Global Geodetic Reference Frame Resolution

The Statistics Division continues to serve the UN Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management (UN-GGIM). In July 2016, the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) adopted the resolution ‘Strengthening Institutional Arrangements on Geospatial Information Management’ (E/RES/2016/27), based on its request in 2011 for a comprehensive 5-year review of the work and operations of the Committee of Experts.

The resolution recognized the considerable achievements of the Committee of Experts and decided to broaden and strengthen its mandate as the relevant body on geospatial information, particularly with regard to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, and fully integrate the Committee of Experts in its annual conference calendar.

International Statistical Classifications

The development of international standard classifications has always been an integral part of the Statistics Division’s work programme. International classifications provide standardized concepts, serve as models for the development of national, multinational and regional classifications and form the basis for internationally comparable data. The Expert Group on International Statistical Classifications, with the Statistics Division functioning as secretariat, provides global leadership in this area of statistics. The Statistics Division offers support and advice in the design of new international classifications and in their implementation, application and interpretation. The Expert Group and the Statistics Division are currently involved in the revision processes of a number of international classifications, such as COICOP and ICATUS.
The statistical community has recognized the potential offered by Big Data sources to produce official statistics, including the monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals. To take advantage of various Big Data sources, statisticians need to adequately address issues related to the choice of methodology, quality standards, use of new technology, legislation, policy frameworks for data privacy protection and security and for information management and finance. In 2014, the Statistical Commission created the UN Global Working Group (GWG) on Big Data for official statistics, which organized the third International Conference on Big Data for Official Statistics in Dublin, Ireland 30 August - 1 September 2016. At this meeting, the GWG Management Committee also initiated the exploration of the business case for a global platform of data, services and applications as a public good for the official statistical community and the users of official statistics.

The GWG work programme is led by various task teams in the areas of: training, skills and capacity building; linking Big Data and the Sustainable Development Goals; advocacy and communication; access and partnership; and cross-cutting issues, such as classifications and frameworks; and the exploration of specific Big Data sources for official statistics, namely mobile phone data, social media data and satellite imagery. The exploration of the business case for the global platform is undertaken by a newly created GWG Committee on the Global Platform. The report of the GWG tabled at the forty-eighth session of the Statistical Commission in 2017 is available at: https://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/48th-session/documents/2017-7-BigData-E.pdf

Under its recently relaunched disability statistics programme, the Statistics Division, in collaboration with regional commissions and other relevant regional organizations, the World Health Organization and the Washington Group on Disability Statistics, has organized a series of regional meetings on Disability Measurement and Statistics in support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 2020 World Population and Housing Census Programme. The outcomes of these meetings will serve as key inputs for the revision of the UN Guidelines and Principles for the Development of Disability Statistics, through an expert group meeting scheduled to be held in 2017.
Environmental Economic Accounting

The Statistics Division is supporting the implementation of the System of Environmental Economic Accounting (SEEA) in a number of countries to meet the targets in the SEEA implementation strategy, which has a vision that 100 countries will implement the SEEA Central Framework and 50 countries will implement the SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting. The Division is directly supporting countries through a project to formalize national plans on the implementation of the SEEA and to compile pilot accounts. The Statistics Division is also the lead implementing agency for a new project on Natural Capital Accounting and Valuation of Ecosystem Services funded by the European Union that is being implemented jointly with UN Environment and the Convention on Biological Diversity and five partner countries: China, Brazil, India, Mexico and South Africa. The Division has also upgraded its delivery of SEEA training courses with the launch of blended distance learning courses on the SEEA Central Framework using modern capacity building platforms. The efficiency and reach of these types of courses was proven by its expedient replication in three regions. Building on this success, the distance and blended learning programme will be extended by delivering in 2017 new courses on the SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting, SEEA Energy and SEEA Water. Methodological progress has been achieved through the release of SEEA subsystems, the SEEA Energy and the SEEA Agriculture Forestry and Fisheries (SEEA AFF as mandated by the Statistical Commission and endorsement by the Committee of Experts on Environmental-Economic Accounting as internationally agreed methodological documents in support of the SEEA Central Framework). Progress has also been made in the finalization of SEEA technical notes for a number of modules such as water, energy, air emissions, land, material flow accounts and environmental protection expenditures that summarize the data requirements and other operational considerations for the implementation of these accounts.

Environmental Statistics

The work on the implementation of the revised Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics (FDES 2013) focuses on the application of the Environment Statistics Self-Assessment Tool (ESSAT) in countries and the development of chapters for the manual on the basic set of environment statistics. The Statistics Division developed a repository of environmentally-related censuses and surveys and an inventory of environmental data collection, reporting and dissemination. The Statistics Division embarked on the area of climate change statistics and indicators in collaboration with UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE). In 2016, the Statistical Commission requested the Statistics Division to develop a global set of climate change statistics and indicators, based on the work of UNECE, which would be applicable to countries at various stages of development. The Statistics Division will develop this global set of climate change statistics and indicators initially through pilot testing with selected countries. The Statistics Division will also continue to strengthen environment statistics in countries through capacity building efforts. With regard to data collection, the Statistics Division has launched the eighth round of environmental data collection through a joint questionnaire with the UN Environment Programme on Environment Statistics where several variables can contribute to the monitoring of selected Sustainable Development Goals indicators on waste and water.
Energy Statistics

In the area of energy statistics, the Statistics Division launched the International Recommendations for Energy Statistics (IRES). This concludes a process that involved a large number of experts and international and regional agencies involved in various aspects of energy statistics, providing for the first time internationally agreed definitions that will greatly improve data comparability. The Statistics Division also completed the work on the Energy Statistics Compilers Manual (ESCM), which is available online and provides practical guidance to data producers on establishing an IRES-compliant energy statistics programme, drawing heavily on country examples to illustrate options for data collection and processing.

Evidence and Data for Gender Equity

Under its Global Gender Statistics Programme, the Statistics Division has continued to implement the Evidence and Data for Gender Equality (EDGE) project and has developed a set of statistical guidelines to measure assets ownership from a gender perspective, based on the outcomes of pilot surveys conducted by various developing countries. The draft guidelines will be discussed at the forty-eighth session of the Statistical Commission and inputs received will guide their finalization in 2017.

National Accounts

The System of National Accounts (SNA) is the international statistical standard for measuring the economic activity of a country. The importance of the national accounts was recognized by the Statistical Commission in its first session in 1947 when it recommended the Statistics Division to publish regularly the most recent available data on national accounts for as many countries as possible.

The Statistics Division contributes to the international coordination, development and implementation of the SNA. It undertakes methodological research on issues in collaboration with the Intersecretariat Working Group on National Accounts (ISWGNA) to periodically update the SNA. The Statistics Division also supports the Expert Group on International Trade and Globalization in the preparation of the Handbook on Accounting of Global Value Chains: A System of Extended National Accounts and Integrated Business Statistics.

Moreover, it drafts and updates normative standards, guidelines, training materials and compilation guidance on national accounts and economic statistics for the implementation programme of the SNA and supporting economic statistics. The Statistics Division delivers a statistical capacity building programme for the implementation of the SNA and supporting statistics through a series of regional and interregional workshops and seminars in collaboration with the regional commissions and regional agencies and through a limited number of individual country technical assistance missions. The Statistics Division also collects and disseminates annual national accounts statistics from countries and provides substantive service to the Committee on Contributions of the Fifth Committee of the United Nations on technical aspects of the elements of scale methodology for assessing the contributions to the United Nations by Member States.
Time use statistics

The Statistics Division has finalized the International Classification of Activities for Time Use Statistics (ICATUS 2016) and will bring it to the forty-eighth session of the Statistical Commission for its endorsement. ICATUS is a classification of all the activities on which a person may spend time during a 24 hour period in a day. After years of consultations, discussions and negotiations (the first meeting on ICATUS was organized in 1997), a simplified yet comprehensive and exhaustive list of activities were agreed by national and international experts and proposed as ICATUS 2016, a global ‘umbrella’ classification that can be expanded or contracted by countries to reflect their own national context and data needs.

World Population Census, 2020 Round

Population and housing censuses are the primary sources of data needed to formulate, implement and monitor the effectiveness of policies and programmes for inclusive socioeconomic development and environmental sustainability. At its thirty-fifth meeting on 10 June 2015, the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) adopted resolution 2015/10 on the 2020 World Population and Housing Census Programme, submitted by the Statistical Commission. The objective of the census programme is to ensure that at least one population and housing census is conducted in every country in the world, in the period 2015 to 2024 and that the resulting census statistics are made available to all users.

In its efforts to support national statistical authorities to implement censuses in the 2020 Round, the Statistical Commission adopted the Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses, Revision 3, at its forty-sixth session in March 2015. This volume will be accompanied by a series of handbooks and manuals that will elaborate on contemporary practices and solutions for census-taking. The resolution also supports the development of accompanying technical materials on population and housing censuses and capacity building activities by the Statistics Division.
Our Team
2017 Statistics Division at a Glance

Office of the Director

Stefan Schweinfest
Director

Zoltan Nagy
Chief, Office and Technology Management

Gabriel Gamez
Inter-regional Advisor

Youlia Antonova
Chief, Capacity Development

Office of the Director (2016)
Economic Statistics Branch

Ivo Havinga
Chief

Economics Statistics Branch (2016).
Demographic and Social Statistics Branch

Keiko Osaki Tomita
Chief

Meryem Demirci
Inter-regional Advisor

Demographic and Social Statistics Statistics Branch (2016).
Trade Statistics Branch

Ronald Jansen
Chief

Trade Statistics Branch (2016).
Environment and Energy Statistics Branch

Ralf Becker
Chief, Industrial and Energy Statistics Section

Reena Shah
Chief, Environment Statistics Section

Statistical Services Branch

Francesca Perucci  
Chief

Raj Gautam Mitra  
Inter-regional Advisor

Statistical Services Branch (2016).
Global Geospatial Information Management

Greg Scott
Inter-regional Advisor

Global Geospatial Information Management team (2016).
Contact Information

Website: http://unstats.un.org/unsd/default.htm
Fax: +1 212 963 9851
E-mail: statistics@un.org
Twitter: @UNStats

UNdata
Website: http://data.un.org/
Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/groups/128384224664/
Twitter: @undata

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