



# The World's Women 2005 Progress in Statistics



United Nations

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## An Unfinished Job: Tracking Vital Statistics Disaggregated by Sex

For basic vital statistics — such as the number of births and deaths in a country — to be most useful they must be disaggregated by sex. Yet there has been very little increase in the number of countries frequently collecting and reporting the number of births by sex and deaths by sex and age in their population over the last thirty years. In fact many countries still fail to do so, according to a report released today from the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

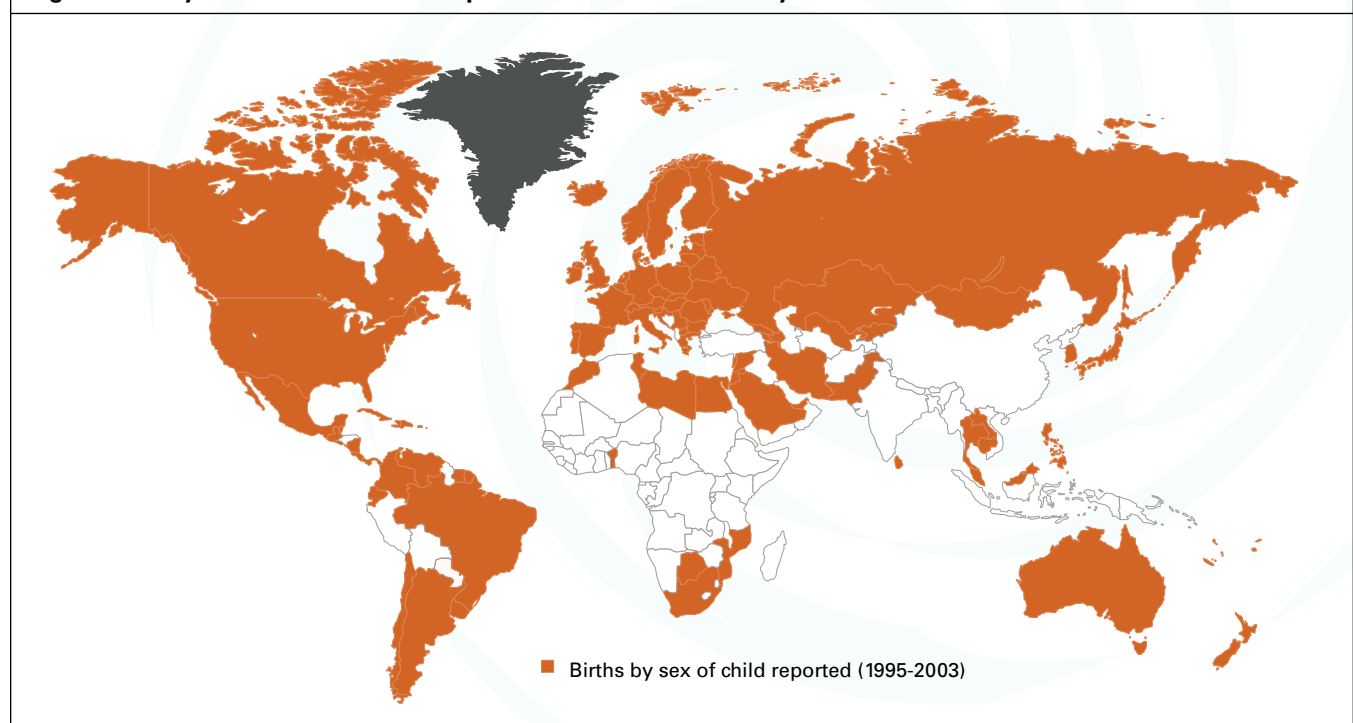
Sex-disaggregated statistics on births and deaths are crucial to understanding the situation of women and men and the inequalities between them.

In order to shed light on issues such as sex discrimination in access to healthcare, problems of higher rates of prenatal sex selection or of early childbearing, countries must collect and disseminate statistics on births by sex and deaths by sex and age, according to the report, titled *The World's Women 2005: Progress in Statistics\**.

In most countries, these statistics on vital events are compiled from birth certificates or death certificates that are issued by civil authorities — a civil registration system. Statistics collected from civil registration systems are supported by sample surveys and information from surveillance sites.

For many countries, developing the capacity to produce vital statistics through a civil registration system on a regular and timely basis remains a major challenge. Such a system requires extensive resources and long-term commitment from the highest levels of government. The report suggests that a practical way for governments seeking to improve the coverage of civil registration systems is to proceed incrementally.

**Figure 1: Many countries still do not report the number of births by sex of child.**



### Responsibility to report

In addition to the collection of official statistics, national statistical capacity also refers to the ability of governments to *report* such statistics once collected. National statistical offices have a responsibility to make official statistics available on an impartial basis, according to the Statistical Commission's Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics\*\*.

According to the report, which looks at statistics collected by 204 countries, Africa and Oceania have the smallest relative number of countries reporting births by sex. In Africa, 14 out of 55 countries reported births by sex and 6 out of 17 in Oceania.

Asia has the lowest percentage of the regional population residing in a country that reports births by sex — only 19 per cent. Reporting of deaths by sex is similarly low in Asia, with only slightly more than half of the region's population residing in a country or area that reported deaths by sex in the period 1995-2003. Availability and analysis of this data can highlight issues such as differences in female and male infant mortality rates.

In Africa, around three quarters of the population is in a country or area that did not report the number of births by sex of infant and two-thirds is in a country that did not report deaths by sex. Similar results are shown for the reporting of deaths by sex and age.

*For media queries, please contact:*

Renata Sivacolundhu  
Development Section  
t: +1 212 963 2932  
email: [mediainfo@un.org](mailto:mediainfo@un.org)

\* *World's Women 2005: Progress in Statistics* (ST/ESA/STAT/SER.K/17), United Nations Publication, Sales No. E.05.XVII.7, ISBN 92-1-161482-1 For more information see: <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/indwm/wwpub.htm>

*The World's Women* report is prepared by the Statistics Division of the UN Department for Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) at regular five-year intervals starting in 1991. The three previous issues compiled and analyzed data on women's status world wide. Previous issues noted a lack of available official statistics disaggregated by sex. Therefore *The World's Women 2005* uniquely reviews and analyses the current availability of data and assesses progress made in the provision of national statistics, as opposed to internationally prepared estimates, relevant to gender concerns during the past 30 years. The first Annex table reports on the availability of national statistics of key gender concerns. The second Annex table provides updated figures for many of the indicators presented in *The World's Women 2000: Trends and Statistics*, plus some additional relevant indicators of the status of women and men.

\*\* Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics, Economic and Social Council, 1994, Supplement No. 9 (E/1994/29).

**Chart 1.2 Percentage of the population in countries or areas that reported births by sex of child to the UN Statistical System at least once between 1995 and 2003, by region**

