



Impacts of and responses to the pandemic on environment statistics

Opening Session: COVID-19 pandemic and environment statistics

Seventh Meeting of the Expert Group on Environment Statistics
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Introduction



- As the global COVID-19 pandemic has abruptly affected every aspect of our lives and livelihoods, alike climate change but in a gradual manner, the **need for timely and official statistics has become increasingly evident**.
- Such data needs range from understanding the spread of the contagion and most vulnerable groups, quantifying lost jobs, affected supply chains and other losses, to **assessing environmental impacts**, both positive and negative.
- UNSD has stepped up its efforts, in collaboration with key UN partners, to support NSOs in managing the information needs for COVID-19 pandemic.
- The UN Secretary General, on Earth Day (22 April 2020), **proposed six climate-related actions to shape the recovery**. In his words “the climate emergency, just like the COVID-19 pandemic, does not respect national boundaries”.



COVID-19 and environment statistics



Given the increased need to monitor the environment, not only due to the pandemic, although interestingly enough, there are a lot of direct and indirect impacts on the environment, the **importance of reliable and timely nationally produced environmental data and statistics is gaining urgency.**

Key environment statistics to monitor on regular basis amidst the pandemic include:

- Air quality and air emissions (including GHGs);
- Waste management (including medical and plastics waste);
- Water and sanitation;
- Transmission of vector-, water- and air-borne disease;
- Impacts on natural capital including forests, and other habitats and their biodiversity.



Impacts: examples



Air pollution and air quality

- International and large-area assessments of environmental impacts such as improved air quality and temporarily decreased GHG emissions were first communicated by the European Space Agency for China and Europe and by NASA and NOAA for the United States and elsewhere.
- Latest scientific literature also provided evidence on improved air quality in major cities since the onset of the pandemic, including Beijing, Delhi and Sao Paulo.
- However, assertion of quick increase of air pollution following reopening was also communicated, for example in China in April and May.
- Yet, according to UNEP, the 'Record global carbon dioxide concentrations despite COVID-19 crisis' were reached in April 2020.



Impacts: examples (cont.)



Biodiversity

- Environmental impacts of the pandemic were also communicated on biodiversity with some positive observations, including bans on wildlife trade and consumption, reduced pressure from traveling/tourism etc., For example, the “Galapagos Sees Record Increase in Penguin Population During the Coronavirus Pandemic”.

Waste

- Among the most sizeable negative impacts of the pandemic are the fast increase of medical and plastics waste generation in many countries.

Wastewater

- Wastewater testing captures the rise and fall of novel coronavirus cases in a mid-sized metropolitan region.



FDES 2013



Given the increased need to monitor the environment, the importance of reliable and timely nationally produced environment statistics is gaining urgency.

The Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics ([FDES 2013](#)) was endorsed by the Statistical Commission at its 44th session ([2013](#)) as the framework for strengthening environment statistics programmes in countries. The FDES:

- guides countries in the development of environment statistics programmes
- strengthen national capacities to produce environment statistics regularly
- contribute to monitoring of national Sustainable Development Goals
- can be used by international and regional institutions support strengthening capacity in countries to develop environment statistics
- enhances comparability and availability of environment statistics using a common framework

Countries are increasingly applying the FDES 2013 as the structure for their national [compendia](#) on environment statistics and climate change statistics.



Countries applying the FDES to environment statistics and climate change statistics compendia



All compendia available at: <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/envstats/fdescompendia.cshtml>



What has been happening in environment statistics during the global COVID-19 pandemic?

- Countries and international organizations continue to strive to achieve progress in the monitoring of the environment and climate change. This can be seen from, for example,
 - The CARICOM Secretariat published its first report on climate change statistics.
 - Grenada and Montserrat produced, and Namibia and The Gambia producing their first ever environment statistics compendia.
 - Suriname organized national workshop and producing 9th env. statistics compendium.
 - Tanzania publishing its first National Climate Change Statistics Report
 - The Netherlands publishing quarterly GHG emissions illustrating a sharp decline during the pandemic.
 - In addition, the NSO of Cabo Verde translated the Environment Statistics Self-Assessment Tool (ESSAT) Introduction and Part I: Institutional Dimension of Environment Statistics, into Portuguese.
- The FDES translations were finalized into Spanish (ECLAC/INEGI) and Arabic (ESCWA/PCBS) and available on UNSD's website: <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/envstats/fdes.cshtml>
- The Russian translation, carried out by ROSSTAT, was uploaded onto the website. [Portuguese, translated by ECLAC-Brazil/IBGE was already uploaded earlier.]



What is UNSD doing in environment statistics?

UNSD has been active during the COVID-19 pandemic by:

- assisting countries remotely, as well as continuing to work with international/regional organizations in the areas of climate change statistics and environment statistics.
- conducting the 2020 data collection round in November through the UNSD/UNEP Questionnaire on Environment Statistics.
- collaborating with key international partner agencies (OECD, Eurostat and FAO), has been promoting dialogue to harmonize definitions and terminologies on water. More recently, UN-HABITAT and WHO have joined in these discussions which have now expanded to include wastewater issues.
- organizing the 7th meeting of the EGES.
- continuing work on the Global Set of Climate Change Statistics and Indicators.



Where we are and what next?

- There are positive and negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the environment.
- Environmental changes sometimes take a long time, e.g., climate change, so the user may only see the impacts in the long term.
- The importance of reliable and timely nationally produced environment statistics is increasing.
- There is a time lag in environment statistics in that data are not available so quickly and regularly, unlike other fields of statistics.
- Countries, regional and international organizations all have a crucial role to play and should collaborate even more closely.
- Need to continue to develop and improve environment statistics and climate change statistics.
- Work in these areas has proven possible during this pandemic so everyone must persevere for hope for a better and cleaner environment.



Thank you for your attention!

For more information please contact the Environment Statistics Section
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Website: <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/envstats/>

Climate Change Statistics Website

<https://unstats.un.org/unsd/envstats/climatechange.cshml>

