

United Nations Statistics Division  
Department of Economic and Social Affairs



# 2016 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,

*Endorses* the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics set out below, as adopted by the Statistical Commission in 19942 and reaffirmed in 2013, and endorsed by the Economic and Social Council in its resolution 2013/21 of 24 July 2013.

### 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 2015 was a crucial year for official statistics. We published landmark reports such as the final Millennium Development Goal Report and the 6th edition of the “The World’s Women: Trends and statistics”. Last year also saw the adoption of the new 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which tasked the Statistical Commission to develop and agree on an indicator framework by March 2016. To this end, my Division has been supporting the work of the new Inter-agency and Expert Group on SDGs over the past months. The year 2015 also marked the beginning of the 2020 round of population and housing censuses that will end 2024.

Last but not least: on 20 October last year, we celebrated the second ever World Statistics Day under a theme that summarizes so well what we strive for every day in our work:

“Better data. Better lives.”

This brochure presents these and other highlights of our work from the past year and in a new chapter some of the people behind it.

I thank all our partners for their contribution to making our objective a reality: better data for better lives. I hope you will enjoy reading this issue of the brochure.

Stefan Schweinfest  
Director  
United Nations Statistics Division



## A Brief History

The general function of the UN Statistical Office (now Statistics Division) of the Secretariat were sketched out already at the Nuclear Session of the UN Statistical Commission in 1946 and have remained relative 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 almost 70 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-MG) in 2015.

Additionally, UNSD provides secretariat services and overall guidance on geospatial information for two technical intergovernmental bodies: the Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management (UN-GGIM) and the Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN). 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. UNGEGN is responsible for encouraging the standardization of

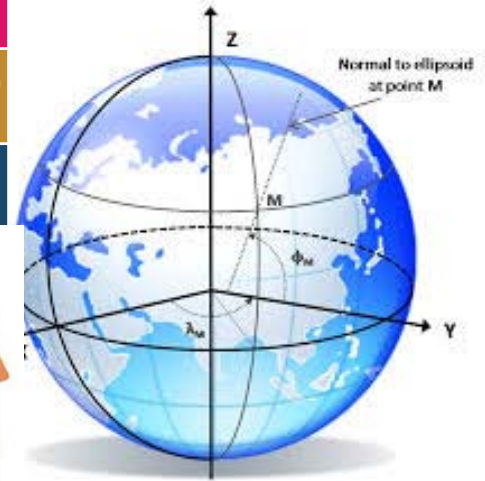
geographical names and promoting the national and international benefits to be derived from standardization.

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, UNSD staff comprises 125 staff from 45 different countries. Seventy-three of these staff fall in the professional category.



Millennium Development Goals: 2015 Progress Check

Goal and Target	North	Sub-Saharan Africa	Eastern Africa	South-Eastern Asia	South Asia	Western Africa	Oceania	Latin America and the Caribbean
<b>GOAL 1   Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger</b>								
1.1 Reduce extreme poverty (people living on less than \$1.25 a day)	High	Very high	High	High	High	High	High	High
1.2 Reduce hunger (undernourished people)	High	Very high	High	High	High	High	High	High
1.3 Double agricultural productivity (smallholder farmers and fishers)	High	High	High	High	High	High	High	High
<b>GOAL 2   Achieve universal primary education</b>								
2.1 Universal primary enrollment	High	Medium	High	High	High	High	High	High
<b>GOAL 3   Promote gender equality and empower women</b>								
3.1 Equal girls' enrollment (primary and secondary)	High	High	High	High	High	High	High	High



# 2015 Highlights



This section highlights our work during the past year including the final Millennium Development Goals Report; the work on the Sustainable Development Indicator Framework; the World Population and Housing Census Round 2020;

our work in support of adoption of the Global Geodetic Reference Frame; big data for official statistics, the second World Statistics Day and the launch of the World's Women 2015 publication.

## The Final Millennium Development Goals Report

The final Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) Report was launched on 6 July 2015 by the Secretary-General. It documents the 15-year effort to achieve the aspirational goals set out in the Millennium Declaration based on the latest data on global and regional trends. The MDGs and the MDG report brought global attention to some of the most pressing development challenges of our time and helped to galvanize development efforts and the implementation of successful targeted interventions. The MDGs have produced the most successful anti-poverty movement in history, and dramatic improvements in many other areas of development. The report informed about those successes, and also pointed out where gaps remained.



The MDG report and data for the MDG indicators provided the evidence needed for effective policy action across Member States. It led to improved

statistical methodologies and information systems, and drew attention to the need for strengthening statistical capacity at both national and international levels.

The first MDG report was launched in 2005 and was the result of a collaborative effort of the United Nations Inter-Agency and Expert Group on MDG Indicators (IAEG-MDGs), consisting of international agencies, regional organizations and national statistical offices, coordinated by UNSD, its Secretariat. UNSD not only publishes the MDG report annually but since 2002 has also contributed the assessment of MDG trends to the annual report of the Secretary General to the General Assembly on progress towards the MDGs. In addition, UNSD has produced progress charts and maintains the database, all of which are available online at <http://mdgs.un.org>.

The MDGs concluded at the end of 2015 and world leaders adopted a successor agenda, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals. The MDG report and the MDG indicators provide a successful blue-print and spring board for the monitoring of this new agenda at the global level.



## The New Sustainable Development Indicator Framework



Successing 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. Member States tasked the Statistical Commission and its newly formed Inter-agency and Expert Group on SDG indicators (IAEG-SDGs) to develop and agree on a global indicator framework by March 2016, to be adopted thereafter by the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly, in line with existing mandates.

The IAEG-SDGs was established by the Statistical Commission at its 46<sup>th</sup> session in 2015 and consists of 28 representatives of national statistical offices and includes, as observers, representatives of regional commissions and regional and international agencies to provide technical advice and support as needed. The Statistics Division serves as Secretariat for the group.

Since its establishment, the IAEG-SDGs has worked intensively and collaboratively to develop an indicator framework to monitor the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The group held two physical meetings: the first in June 2015 in New York and the second in Bangkok in October 2015, and organised multiple open consultations where all stakeholders

were able to provide inputs on how best to measure progress towards the SDGs.

The 47th session of the United Nations Statistical Commission, 8-11 March 2016, will have before it the report of the IAEG-SDGs presenting a proposal of global indicators for the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda developed in consultation with all stakeholders. The proposal presents a list of more than 200 global indicators to monitor progress on the SDGs.

The global SDG indicators will form 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 by thematic indicators to be developed in various areas by the relevant agencies.

During 2016, the IAEG-SDGs will work on the implementation of the global indicator framework, including the creation of a global reporting mechanism. The IAEG-SDGs will meet at the end of March and in the fall and will continue to work in an open and transparent manner. Additional information is available at the sustainable development goal indicator website: <http://unstats.un.org/sdgs/>

## 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, especially in the context of the 2030 development agenda. Such censuses generate valuable statistics and indicators for assessing the situation of various special

population groups such as women, children, youth, the elderly, persons with disabilities, migrants, refugees and stateless persons.

At its 35th meeting on 10 June 2015, ECOSOC adopted resolution 2015/10 on the 2020 World Population and Housing Census Programme, submitted by the United Nations 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 – 2024 and that the resulting census statistics are made

available to all users. In its efforts to support national statistical authorities to implement the 2020 Round, based on global international standards and guidance, the United Nations Statistical Commission

adopted the Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses, Revision 3, at its 46th session in March 2015. This volume will be accompanied by a series of handbooks and manuals that will elaborate on the contemporary practices and solutions for census-taking.

The resolution declaring 2015-2024 the census decade for population and housing censuses, and the development of accompanying technical volumes for censuses in the 2020 round are fundamental and historical programme elements of the Statistical Commission.

## UN-GGIM Global Geodetic Reference Frame Resolution



A significant accomplishment by the Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management (UN-GGIM) has been the formulation and endorsement of a resolution on 'A Global Geodetic Reference Frame for Sustainable Development' in a landmark decision by the General Assembly on 26 February 2015 (A/RES/69/266). The resolution calls for greater multilateral cooperation on geodesy, including the open sharing of relevant geospatial data, further capacity-building in developing countries and the creation of international standards and conventions. The resolution outlines the value of ground-based observations and remote satellite sensing when tracking changes in populations, ice caps, oceans and the atmosphere over time. These geospatial measurements can support sustainable

development policymaking, climate change monitoring and natural disaster management.

### MEMBER STATES WELCOMED THE RESOLUTION

**USA** *"The societal benefits to having a global reference frame are limitless. Many will become more evident when enhanced geospatial information can be used to tackle some of the world's most complex scientific challenges such as sea level change and global climate change."* Dr. Neil D. Weston, Deputy Director, National Geodetic Survey, NOAA, USA

**NEW ZEALAND** *"New Zealand has recently seen the impact of earthquakes, as an island nation located across the Pacific/Australian plate boundary. The adoption and use of the Global Geodetic Reference Frame will contribute to the fundamental spatial infrastructure needed for hazard mitigation in the event of a natural disaster."* Graeme Blick, Land Information New Zealand Chief Geodesist

**BRAZIL** *"Brazil welcomes the UN resolution on a Global Geodetic Reference Frame, as it supports composing the very basic layer of any Spatial Data Infrastructure. Geodesy most of the time being not visible to citizens, plays an important and crucial role in the country infrastructure,"* Dr. Luiz Paulo Fortes at IBGE, Brazil





## Big Data for Official Statistics

The statistical community has recognized the potential offered by Big Data sources to improve, supplement or complement official statistics, specifically also for the monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals. To take advantage of various Big Data sources, statisticians need to adequately address issues pertaining to methodology, quality, technology, legislation, privacy, management and finance. In 2014, the Statistical Commission created the UN Global Working Group (GWG) on Big Data for official statistics (see <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/bigdata/>) which met for the second time in Abu Dhabi in October 2015.

The programme of work of the GWG includes the following areas: 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; the exploration of specific Big Data sources for official statistics, namely mobile phone data, social media data and satellite imagery. The report of the GWG tabled at the forty-seventh session of the Statistical Commission is available at:

<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/47th-session/documents/2016-6-Big-data-for-official-statistics-E.pdf>

In 2015, the theme of the second Global Conference in Abu Dhabi was “moving from examples to guidance”. The conference showed advances of Big Data projects using mobile phone data, social media data and satellite data for a variety of statistical applications. Progress was further shown on topics of capacity building, data access and partnerships, quality and methodology, and on how to communicate better the value of Big Data. For more information on the conference, please see: <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/trade/events/2015/abudhabi/default.asp>

The use of Big Data fits well within the agenda of modernizing statistical production and involves significant cultural change for many National Statistical Offices (NSOs). It should be emphasized that the use of Big Data by NSOs has to be understood as part of a gradual process of change. For example, administrative data were initially seen as unfit for statistical purposes, nowadays statisticians are almost required to exhaust the possibility for available administrative data before being allowed to introduce a new survey. The same may happen over time with the use of certain Big Data sources in statistical production.





## World Statistics Day

The celebrations around the second World Statistics Day, observed on 20 October 2015, were a major highlight for UNSD last year. The strong representation and participation from Member States, international organizations and other stakeholders made World Statistics Day a success. This global event increased the visibility of the work and achievements of the statistical community worldwide. It also contributed to greater understanding by the general public of the fundamental importance of statistical data in creating better lives.

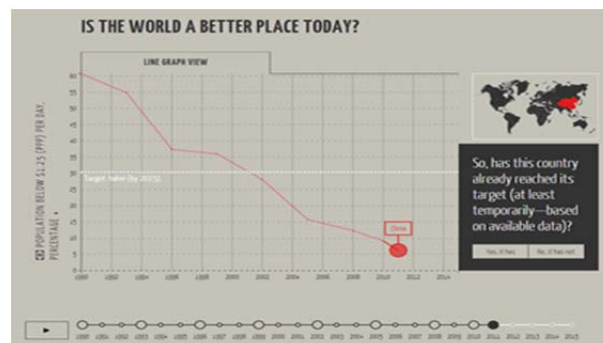


In order to support countries with preparations for their own World Statistics Day celebrations, UNSD worked with partners around the globe to ensure that many resources were made available online through <https://worldstatisticsday.org/>.

Under the theme, **“Better data. Better lives.”** and with the “smiling statistician” logo<sup>1</sup> available in more than 50 languages, statistical offices, universities, international organizations, the private sector and individuals in more than 100 countries around the world joined UNSD in celebrating the second World Statistics Day. The activities marking the day ranged from seminars to panel discussions, special lectures, creative competitions, songs, float parades, poster exhibitions, radio and television talks, advertisements, and receptions.

UNSD hosted a “Data Visualization Challenge” with the UN Office of Information and Communications Technology. This competition had the objective to create an infographic or dynamic visualization that

answered a question relevant to development policy and incorporated the latest data from the 2015 Millennium Development Goals Report. Among the finalists, the submission by Jeremy Boy from France/New Zealand, entitled “Is the World a Better



Data Visualization Challenge winning solution

Place Today?” was awarded first place. The data visualizations created by Mr. Boy and other finalists are available online at: [worldstatisticsday.org/data-visualisation-challenge](http://worldstatisticsday.org/data-visualisation-challenge).



Another event hosted by UNSD was the preparation of a time capsule. Staff members placed World Statistics Day 2015 memorabilia into the time capsule, along with personal letters, data products, group photos, flagship reports and other materials that reflected the work of the Division. The time capsule is to be opened on World Statistics Day 2030 at which time the new sustainable development goals are expected to be achieved. World Statistics Day was first celebrated on 20 October 2010 and is now to be celebrated every five years, thus the next celebration will be in 2020.

<sup>1</sup> The United Nations Graphic Design Unit won the Graphic Design USA American Inhouse Design Awards 2015 for the World Statistics Day logo “the smiling statistician”.



## World's Women 2015 Publication: Trends and Statistics

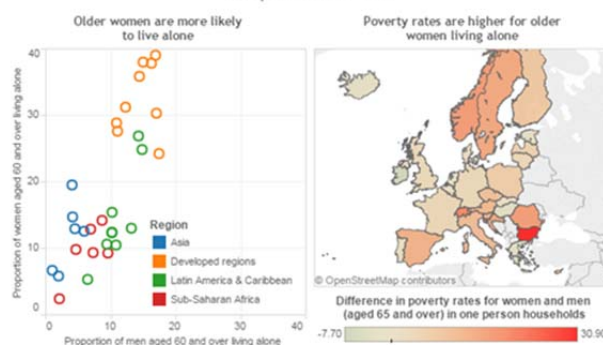
This sixth edition of *The World's Women: Trends and Statistics*, produced every five years by the Social Statistics Section, provides the latest statistics and analysis on the status of women and men at global and regional levels and reviews the progress towards gender equality over the last 20 years. The eight chapters of the report cover several broad policy areas identified in the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action, the framework that sets the international agenda for improving the status of women. These areas include population and families, health, education, work, power and decision-making, violence against women, environment and poverty. The publication is available at [unstats.un.org/unsd/gender/worldswomen.html](http://unstats.un.org/unsd/gender/worldswomen.html).



The publication shows that progress towards the goal of gender equality has been made in the last two decades in most areas of concern, although at a low and uneven pace. Through a life cycle approach in each of the eight policy areas covered, the publication highlights the challenges and specific needs experienced by women and men during their different stages of life - from childhood and the formative years, through the working and reproductive stage, to older ages. The statistics and analysis presented are based on a comprehensive and large set of available data from international and national statistical agencies. The publication was launched on 20 October 2015 and received great media attention. Overall, more than 70 news agencies around the world dedicated articles to the publication. Topics highlighted in the media included progress on gender equality made in the past 20 years, the link between the publication and monitoring the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), violence against women as a global challenge and the need for better statistics to measure gender equality.

For the first time since the first edition in 1990, *The World's Women 2015* also provides an assessment of gaps in gender statistics for each of the eight policy concerns covered. It highlights progress in the availability of data, new and emerging methodological developments—such as in measuring asset ownership and entrepreneurship from a gender perspective, and areas demanding further attention from the international community. The publication points out that statistical methods and gender statistics are still lagging behind in many subject areas including: decision-making positions in local government and in the private sector; poverty based on individual-level data; the quality of education and lifelong learning; the gender pay gap; social protection measures, including pensions and unemployment benefits; universal health coverage; and the impact of natural disasters.

Older women are more likely to be poor than older men, particularly when living in one-person households



It is expected that the publication will serve as a model for national stakeholders to identify and address gender issues and related data gaps in their country. Furthermore, given that producing relevant, accurate and timely gender statistics remains a challenge for many countries, initiatives to develop statistical standards and national capacity, particularly on integrating a gender dimension into official statistics, should be undertaken as a priority. UNSD remains committed to assist countries in their efforts to strengthen their national capacity in the production and use of gender statistics.



# Our Team





### Office of the Director



Stefan Schweinfest  
Director



Zoltan Nagy  
Chief, Office and Technology  
Management



Youlia Antonova  
Chief, Capacity Development





## Economic Statistics Branch



Ivo Havinga  
Chief



Gabriel Gamez  
Inter-regional Advisor





## Demographic and Social Statistics Branch



Keiko Osaki Tomita  
Chief



Meryem Demirci  
Inter-regional Advisor







Ronald Jansen  
Chief

## Trade Statistics Branch





## Environment and Energy Statistics Branch



Reena Shah  
Chief, Environment Statistics  
Section



Ralf Becker  
Chief, Industrial and Energy  
Statistics Section





Francesca Perucci  
Chief

## Statistical Services Branch





Greg Scott  
Inter-regional Advisor

## Global Geospatial Information Management





## Contact Information

Website: <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/default.htm>

Fax: +1 212 963 9851

E-mail: [statistics@un.org](mailto:statistics@un.org)

Twitter: @UNStats

### UNdata

**Website:** <http://data.un.org/>

**Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/groups/128384224664/>

**Twitter:** @undata

Classifications	<a href="mailto:chl@un.org">chl@un.org</a>
Demographic and social statistics	<a href="mailto:demostat@un.org">demostat@un.org</a>
Energy statistics	<a href="mailto:energy_stat@un.org">energy_stat@un.org</a>
Environment statistics	<a href="mailto:envstats@un.org">envstats@un.org</a>
General statistics inquiries	<a href="mailto:statistics@un.org">statistics@un.org</a>
Industry statistics	<a href="mailto:industry@un.org">industry@un.org</a>
International Merchandise Trade Statistics	<a href="mailto:comtrade@un.org">comtrade@un.org</a>
Monthly Bulletin of Statistics	<a href="mailto:mbs@un.org">mbs@un.org</a>
Publications (print and electronic)	<a href="mailto:statistics@un.org">statistics@un.org</a>
Statistics of International Trade in Services	<a href="mailto:tradeserv@un.org">tradeserv@un.org</a>
System of National Accounts (SNA) and Economic statistics	<a href="mailto:sna@un.org">sna@un.org</a>



[unstats.un.org](http://unstats.un.org)

email: [statistics@un.org](mailto:statistics@un.org)  
twitter: @UNStats

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