

Why a virtual UN World Data Forum?

The purpose of the United Nations World Data Forum (UNWDF) is to intensify cooperation on data for sustainable development between various professional groups in Governments, academia and professional bodies, the geospatial community, international agencies, donor and philanthropic bodies, the private sector, civil society and the media. Following the restrictions put in place in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, a virtual Forum will be held from 19 to 21 October 2020 to satisfy demand for the latest data solutions and thinking to support the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and for the monitoring and recovery from the pandemic.

Data matters during COVID-19

In health...

- The world is currently counting more than 33 million confirmed cases of the COVID-19 virus and over 1 million deaths since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.¹
- Only 60 per cent of people have a basic hand-washing facility with soap and water at home. In Least Developed Countries, the share is 28 per cent. This means that an estimated 3 billion people worldwide still lack the ability to safely wash their hands at home.²

In the economy...

- Global growth is projected to fall by almost 5 per cent³, foreign direct investment by 40 per cent and remittances to low- and middle-income countries by 20 per cent during 2020.⁴
- The first quarter of 2020 saw a loss equivalent to 155 million full-time jobs in the global economy, a number that increased to 495 million jobs in the second quarter, with lower- and middle-income countries hardest hit.⁵

In human lives...

- The pandemic is pushing an additional 71 to 100 million people into extreme poverty⁶
- School closures are likely to increase gender gaps in education. More than 11 million girls – from pre-primary school to tertiary education age – are at risk of not returning to school in 2020.
- Even before the pandemic, women did three times more unpaid domestic and care work than men; since the pandemic, however, data from rapid gender assessment surveys indicate that women in some regions are shouldering the extra burden of an increased workload, particularly in terms of childcare and household chores.

¹ WHO Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Dashboard

² SDG indicator 6.2.1 (Table b)

³ IMF's World Economic Outlook Update, June 2020

⁴ UNCTAD's World Investment Report 2020

⁵ ILO Monitor: COVID-19 and the world of work. Sixth edition

⁶ World Bank's Projected poverty impacts of COVID-19 (coronavirus)

But behind these numbers there is an issue...

Despite an increasing awareness of the importance of data for evidence-based policymaking and development, data gaps remain significant in all countries, particularly in the ones with fewer resources.

Not enough investment

- As of August 2020, data and statistical development projects accounted for only 0.40% (USD 163 million) of all reported funding to COVID-19.⁷
- Only 13 per cent of countries have a dedicated gender statistics budget.

Incomplete coverage

- Over the period 2014-2018, only 62 per cent of countries across the World maintained mortality records that are at least three-quarters complete.⁸
- There is a shortage of accurate and comparable data on the number of children with disabilities in almost all countries.

Timeliness of collection and processing

- The latest data point available for poverty-related indicators (Sustainable Development Goal 1) for most countries is 2016 or earlier. A similar situation is found for indicators on gender equality (Goal 5), sustainable cities (Goal 11) and peace, justice, and strong institutions (Goal 16).
- The COVID-19 pandemic posed big challenges to household surveys in countries. According to a survey conducted in May 2020, 96 per cent of national statistical offices partially or fully stopped face-to-face data collection at the height of the pandemic.⁹

Lack of data

- Seventy-seven out of 155 countries monitored do not have adequate poverty data, although there have been clear improvements in the last decade.
- The lack of sound disaggregated data for many vulnerable groups, such as persons with disabilities, older persons, indigenous peoples, and migrants, exacerbates their vulnerabilities by masking the extent of deprivation and disparities.
- Around 150 censuses are expected to be conducted in 2020-2021 alone, a historical record. Yet, to address the urgent issues brought by the pandemic, some countries have diverted their census funding to national emergency funding.¹⁰

⁷ PARIS21 Partner Report on Support to Statistics 2020

⁸ SDG indicator 17.19.2 (Table b.2)

⁹ United Nations Statistics Division, COVID-19 widens gulf of global data inequality, while national statistical offices step up to meet new data demands, 5 June 2020, <https://covid-19-response.unstatshub.org/statistical-programmes/covid19-nso-survey/>

¹⁰ PARIS21 Partner Report on Support to Statistics 2020



What Do We Expect from the virtual UN World Data Forum?

As shown by these examples, improvements in data are needed to inform policy decisions from the local to the global levels, to raise awareness among the public and the media and to track progress on the Sustainable Development Goals and build a more sustainable future resilient to shocks such as the COVID-19 pandemic. At the virtual UN World Data Forum, several outcomes are expected, including:

- Launch of the Global Data Community's response to COVID-19 – *Data for a changing World*;
- Increased support for data use during COVID-19 and the recovery;
- Progress on initiatives and solutions to harness the power of data for the public good and to get back on track to implement the 2030 Agenda to leave no one behind;
- Growing consensus on strategies to address trust in data, privacy and governance.

Background information

The UNWDF was previously hosted from 15 to 18 January 2017 in Cape Town, South Africa by Statistics South Africa, and 22 to 24 October 2018 in Dubai, United Arab Emirates by the Federal Competitiveness and Statistics Authority, resulting in the Cape Town Global Action Plan for Sustainable Development Data and the Dubai Declaration. The next physical meeting is postponed to 3 to 6 October 2021, and will take place in Bern, Switzerland, hosted by the Swiss Confederation.

For more details and examples of data initiatives by the United Nations and World Data Forum partner organizations, visit:

data.devinit.org	data.unicef.org	databank.worldbank.org	datapopalliance.org
unstats.un.org/sdgs	www.gapminder.org	www.paris21.org	unstats.un.org/bigdata

For more information about the World Data Forum, visit: UNDataForum.org
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