

World Statistics Day (20.10.2010)

Message from Hendrik van der Pol Director of the UNESCO Institute for Statistics

Today, the United Nations celebrates the first World Statistics Day in honour and recognition of the integrity and professionalism of statisticians working across the globe. These experts provide the data that governments, international organizations, researchers, journalists and ordinary citizens have come to trust and rely on.

In this digital age, the demand for statistics has never been greater. The Internet has opened the floodgates to the free flow of statistical information and sparked a social revolution in the ways we access and use data. Yet pundits already warn of the potential for a 'data deluge' leading to an overload of information.

Ultimately, I believe that the digital environment will heighten the public's recognition and use of high-quality data. But what dictates quality? Precise, reliable, timely and policy-relevant statistics. It entails cross-nationally comparable data that enable governments to set realistic development goals and monitor progress towards these targets while learning from the experience of others. In short, there is a growing need for reliable data to guide these decisions. People – in the seats of governments and the privacy of their homes – will increasingly depend on data they *trust*.

The statistical community has gained this trust by employing the highest professional and ethical standards. Today, we honour the efforts of statisticians around the world, who constantly seek to improve the quality of the data that permeate our lives and help to enrich our communities.

This tireless dedication laid the foundations for the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), which was established in 1999. The Institute strives to foster a culture of evidence-based policy – both nationally and internationally – through the collection and use of high-quality data in education, science and technology, culture and communication.

The Institute has made considerable progress since its creation. It is the official data source for the education-related targets of the Millennium Development Goals and Education for All. UIS statistics on education, literacy and science data are featured prominently in leading publications and databases, such as the EFA Global Monitoring Report, the World Development Indicators and the Human Development Report.

These achievements would not have been possible without the commitment of statisticians working in more than 200 countries and territories. National statisticians do not simply respond to UIS surveys – they are vital partners of the Institute. These experts provide valuable insight to develop new standards and indicators. They help to adapt UIS survey instruments and methodologies to better reflect the priorities and contexts of countries at all stages of development.

For these statisticians, data quality goes beyond the prevention of error. They strive to provide a rich array of statistical information for effective policy-making. On behalf of the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, it is a privilege to work with such a dedicated community of experts.