

Honouring Statisticians Globally

We hear and use statistics every day... GDP, CPI and Life Expectancy are just a few common examples. People are often surprised by the range of statistics that they see in the media or in publications, but what they may not realize is that the very availability of high quality statistics at national, regional and global levels represent a major accomplishment of official statistics.

Official statistics are produced by the National Statistical Office and other government statistical units. Together, the National Statistical System in each of the 192 UN Member States forms the cornerstone of the global system of official statistics. All countries produce a similar range of official statistics that inform the government and the general public about changes in their economy, society or their environment. Organizations at the regional and international levels rely on this official data to produce comparable statistics depicting various situations on a broad range of issues.

The United Nations General Assembly and Statistical Commission have dedicated 20 October, or 20-10-2010, as World Statistics Day, to celebrate the many achievements of official statistics. World Statistics Day also underlines the three core values of official statistics: Service, Professionalism, and Integrity. Let's clarify what each of these mean.

Service refers to the fact that official statistics are a service to the nation and the world. This is demonstrated by the thousands of statistical reports published by the 192 Member States and international organizations. An example of this is the 2010 World's Women report, published every five years by the United Nations. In 1995, at the time of the World Conference on Women in Beijing, only 10 per cent of parliamentarians worldwide were women. The latest report, World's Women 2010, shows that this number has increased considerably and that the proportion of women in parliaments around the world now stands at 17 per cent.

The World's Women 2010 report also shows that in 2009, there were only 23 countries where women comprised at least 30 per cent of parliamentarians. Of this number, 18 were countries that implemented a gender quota. Impartial information like this is essential for governments, advocates and the general public — especially those wishing to further promote gender equality worldwide.

Professionalism, the second core value, is the pride that statisticians take in producing unbiased official statistics — crucial for building and retaining confidence in the data. The public relies on statisticians for objective, accurate information that meets current policy needs in a rapidly changing world. For instance, statisticians globally have been computing and publishing data on renewable energy for decades. We now know that the amount of electricity produced in the world from wind, solar and geothermal sources has more than doubled between 2000 and 2005.

Reviewing data from the past can often shine a light on possibilities for the future. Sound policy development requires quality data compiled under rigorous standards. Every year some 140 Chief Statisticians representing UN Member States meet in New York for one

week during the United Nations Statistical Commission. Working side-by-side adopting international methodological standards and guidelines, together they shape the future path of global statistics.

The third core value, **integrity**, is a fundamental component of official statistics. Procedures that adhere to strict scientific principles and professional ethics help establish credibility, respect and trust. For example, governments rely on census data to develop and evaluate policies regarding education, housing, healthcare and other economic and social programmes. The data gathered not only play a critical role in development planning and decision-making, but also in monitoring population trends and programmes.

I am working on the census programme. As population and housing censuses are principal sources of data for socio-economic planning, the United Nations recommends that every country conduct at least one census every ten years. The UN Statistics Division prepares international guidelines and provides technical assistance. This helps countries to do successful censuses.

We will continue to need high quality, reliable, and timely statistics to meet future challenges.

Let us celebrate the unique role that official statistics plays in our every day life and in public debate worldwide.



<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/wsd/>