



INVESTING
IN
DATA
AND
STATISTICS
FOR
THE
SDGs

Svalbard Satellite Station (SvalSat), Ny Ålesund, Norway
- Photo Credit: UN Photo/Rick Bajornas

At the SDG Summit in September 2019, the Secretary-General launched a Decade of Action, calling on all sectors of society to dramatically increase the pace and scale of global, local, and individual implementation efforts. These efforts require high-quality, comparable and disaggregated data to be successful.

UN DESA...

- Followed up on the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration through its participation in the United Nations Network on Migration and the International Forum on Migration Statistics.
- Played an instrumental role in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic by launching a global online survey to monitor the impact of the coronavirus crisis on statistical agencies, as well as to identify new data needs.
- Produced the 2020 Sustainable Development Goals Report, in partnership with the UN system, highlighting progress and gaps in global efforts to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the on-going impact of COVID-19 on efforts to achieve the goals.
- Provided capacity-building support to countries to strengthen their systems to respond to the SDG data needs, enhance coordination of their national statistical systems, and improve users' engagement and data dissemination and communication.
- Identified solutions to address the need for more timely, disaggregated data by working with countries and building multi-stakeholder partnerships.

Investing in data and statistics for the SDGs

Now more than ever, high-quality, trustworthy data from strong national statistical systems are needed to inform evidence-based decision-making and measure the progress towards achieving sustainable development. The current pandemic has brought the importance of timely, trustworthy data and statistics to the forefront, and UN DESA has stepped up to support countries in their response. Throughout the year, UN DESA continued to support countries in every corner of the world to bolster their statistical capacities.



Supporting quality data and statistics for monitoring the SDGs

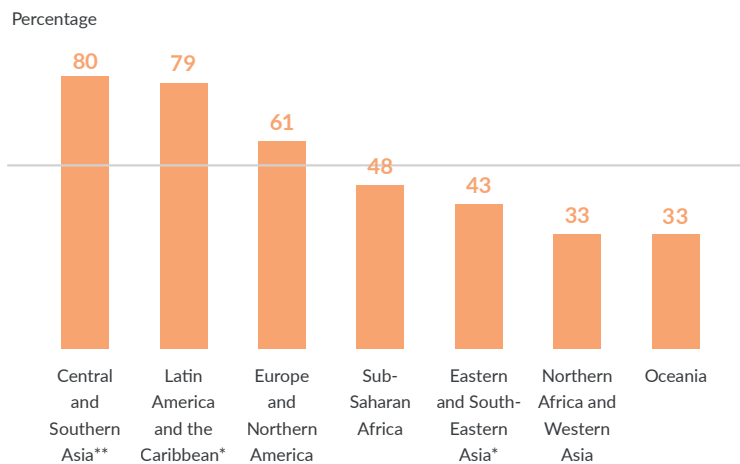
UN DESA is the custodian and central coordinator of the global SDG indicator framework and monitoring process. Data from UN DESA underpin the calculation of almost one-third of the indicators approved for use in the global monitoring of the SDGs. The Department also supports the Inter-agency and Expert Group on SDG indicators which developed the global SDG indicator framework, the essential element in monitoring progress towards the SDGs. In March 2020, at the 51st Session of the Statistical Commission, Member States adopted a revised indicator framework, which gives a further boost to the SDG monitoring efforts, helping to ensure that no one is left behind. The centre piece of the SDG indicator framework and monitoring process is the annual publication of the **Sustainable Development Goals Report** and **SDG Progress Chart**. Prepared by UN DESA, in collaboration with over 200 experts from around 40 agencies, funds and programmes, the 2020 report underscores the urgency to accelerate efforts towards achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the times of the COVID-19 pandemic.

UN DESA also works to build and strengthen national capacities to estimate and analyse population levels and trends and other demographic indicators, for use in formulating and implementing national policies and programmes related to population and development. In June 2019, the Department published the latest revision of the biennial **World Population Prospects**, with estimates and projections of demographic

trends for 235 countries and areas of the world. The **World Population Prospects - Highlights** report offers a roadmap indicating where to target action and interventions for sustainable development, emphasizing that many of the fastest growing populations are in the poorest countries, where population growth brings additional challenges in the effort to eradicate poverty, achieve greater equality, combat hunger and malnutrition and strengthen the coverage and quality of health and education systems to ensure that no one is left behind.

UN DESA also developed the methodology for global monitoring of SDG indicator 10.7.2, which assesses country-level migration policies, and released the data on the indicator in late 2019. That year, 54 per cent of countries with available data reported having a wide range of policy measures to facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people.

PERCENTAGE OF GOVERNMENTS REPORTING POLICIES THAT MEET OR FULLY MEET THE CRITERIA FOR SDG INDICATOR 10.7.2 BY REGION, 2019



Source: United Nations and International Organization for Migration (2019). SDG indicator 10.7.2: Global and regional aggregates. Available at: www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/theme/sdg/index_10_7_2.asp.

COVID-19 rapid response and data hubs

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020, further heightened the need for timely and accurate real-time data for guiding decision making amidst a global emergency. UN DESA launched a global network of UN COVID-19 Data Hubs and a COVID-19 resources portal for national statistical offices. This rapid response has been of welcome



“The data provided by the [UN DESA] Population Division, starting with the World Population Prospects, are now the de facto standard for measures of world population and fertility and mortality rates. These data are indispensable for those working hard to monitor the SDG indicators.”

~Statement from Japan at the Commission for Population and Development 2019



IN FOCUS

UN DESA’s **World Fertility and Family Planning 2020: Highlights**, analyses the data sets used for monitoring progress on SDG indicator 3.7.1. It presents trends in contraceptive use and fertility, as well as insights into the relationship between contraceptive use and fertility at the global, regional and national levels for women of reproductive age. The data indicates that there is an inverse relationship between contraceptive use and the fertility level, which can be observed in cross-national data for both 1990 and 2020.

assistance to Member States. UN DESA is supporting national statistical offices, in collaboration with partners from the private sector and civil society, in joining a federated network of national COVID-19 data hubs. The initiative enables the sharing and use of high-quality, geo-referenced data from multiple sources to monitor the spread of COVID-19, helping to inform policies to mitigate the pandemic and lessen the impact of the disease on people's lives.

In addition, UN DESA is hosting a collaborative website for the global statistical community to share guidance, actions, tools, and best practices to ensure the operational continuity of data programmes by national statistical offices. The [hub](#) also helps to address issues of open and timely access to critical data needed by governments and all sectors of society to respond to the global COVID-19 crisis.

The Department also worked with the World Bank's Development Data Group and, in coordination with the five UN regional commissions, launched a global online survey to monitor the nature, scale, and scope of the impact of the coronavirus crisis on statistical agencies, as well as to identify new data needs. The survey was designed to inform the global statistical community on how to better respond to the immediate needs of countries facing the most urgent challenges and plan a coordinated effort to navigate through the crisis and its impact over the next few months. The key findings include:

- The COVID-19 pandemic is worsening global data inequalities.
- The global statistical community and donors must urgently provide technical assistance and financial resources to the national statistical offices most in need of support.
- The pandemic has highlighted the importance of the digital revolution.

Monitoring the economic measures for sustainable development

UN DESA, working in partnership with countries and international agencies, is supporting the development of new economic measures for sustainable development. This research in new economic measures is part of the revision of international macroeconomic, classifications and related statistical standards by 2025, under the governance of the Statistical Commission. The Department is drafting guidance notes on the role of multinational enterprises in the global value chain and accounts for the digital economy, distribution of income, consumption and wealth, environment, education, health, labour, and unpaid household work. Furthermore, research has been initiated on the broader measurement framework for the System of National Accounts (SNA), which integrates these new accounts for the purpose of providing statistical guidance on the broader measures of progress related to human and natural capital in addition to physical capital.

Providing data and evidence for safe, orderly, and regular migration

In addition to its work on migration-related SDG indicators, UN DESA is part of an eight-member Executive Committee charged with making decisions on behalf of the United Nations Network on Migration, which seeks to ensure effective, timely and coordinated system-wide support to Member States in their follow-up of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration adopted in 2018. The UN Migration Network contributed to the Secretary-General's policy brief on COVID-19 and people on the move, which argued that migrants, especially those in precarious situations, are hard hit by the pandemic due to border closures, falling remittances and rising xenophobia, racism and stigmatization. In particular, UN DESA is leading the revision of recommendations on statistics of international migration including statistical concepts, definitions and methods to support countries'

efforts to respond to new migration data requirements for the implementation of the Global Compact on Migration.

UN DESA also collaborated with IOM and OECD in organizing the second International Forum on Migration Statistics, held in Cairo, Egypt, in January 2020. More than 700 participants from 99 countries made the Forum the largest event on migration statistics and migration data ever. The Forum sought to mobilize expertise from a wide range of disciplines, including statistics, economics, demography, sociology, geospatial science, and information technology, to improve the collection and analysis of migration data worldwide.

Partnering with Member States to develop national statistical capacities

UN DESA works together with international and national organizations to strengthen data and statistical capacity of countries to meet the data demand for the implementation of the SDGs. This work is guided by intergovernmental agreements, including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. To support this work, UN DESA also produced handbooks and guidelines on methodological issues, organized regional and in-country workshops, and conducted field missions.

Led by UN DESA, the Development Account 10th Tranche on Statistics and Data brings together 10 entities from across the UN Secretariat to share their technical capacities and strengths and to support developing countries in building their capacity to accurately and reliably monitor their progress towards achieving the sustainable development goals for evidence-based policymaking. By the end of 2019, the Programme had already delivered more than 460 specific outputs targeting 130 developing countries in all regions of the world. Implementing agencies are the five UN Regional Commissions, UN-Habitat, UNCTAD, UN Environment, UNODC and UN DESA. Additional development partners

include the World Bank, UNFPA, UNDP, UNICEF and the European Union.

UN DESA has also been working to support countries in Africa and Asia to improve the availability and level of disaggregation of data on national SDG indicators, and to establish national SDG data and metadata platforms for their dissemination. This project has also supported improved cooperation and coordination in the production and use of SDG data and statistics for policy and decision-making at the national level and improved international comparability and dissemination of nationally produced SDG indicator data. Most of the project countries have standardized their SDG data and shared them with UN DESA, using the global SDMX standard. Most have in place SDG user engagement strategies and have started implementing activities, and around half have already published their national SDG platforms.

Ensuring that everyone counts

In 2020, UN DESA statistical capacity development activities have also had a special focus on assessing and supporting the implementation of the 2020 Round of the World Population and Housing Census Programme, as the world approaches the mid-point of the round of censuses that started in 2015 and will run until 2024. This assessment has become even more critical in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has negatively impacted the capacity of many countries to conduct a population and housing census, or otherwise produce small area census statistics, at least once in the period 2015-2024.

Providing methodological guidance

To support Member States in producing internationally comparable, high-quality data and statistics for sustainable development, UN DESA also provide methodological guidance for the development and implementation of internationally agreed statistical standards, methods, classifications and definitions.



Caribbean Thematic Conference (25 - 27 November 2019, Christ Church, Barbados) Photo Credit: Barbados Statistical Services



Asian Thematic Conference (12-14 February, Manila, Philippines) Photo Credit: The Philippines Statistics Authority



Participants in an SDG metadata workshop in Uganda. Photo Credit: UN DESA



Ms. Nazira Kerimalieva of the National Statistical System in Kyrgyzstan shares her views during a user engagement workshop Photo Credit: UN DESA

UN DESA released the **United Nations National Quality Assurance Frameworks Manual for Official Statistics** and developed a self-assessment checklist, both of which formed the basis of multiple regional workshops to support and bolster quality assurance activities in many countries and regions. The Manual addresses especially the quality assurance for new data sources and for SDG indicator data and statistics and contains the international recommendations for quality assurance for official statistics.

Endorsed by the UN Statistical Commission in March 2020, UN DESA developed a conceptual framework to modernize time-use surveys, including a Minimum Harmonized Instrument for the collection of time-use data, which provides methodological guidance on the collection of time-use data to inform and monitor policies on unpaid work, non-market production, well-being and gender equality. The Instrument provides countries with an option to collect time-use data at a lower cost with increased frequency.

The United Nations Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management (UN-GGIM) adopted the Global Statistical Geospatial Framework (GSGF) to address the need for a globally consistent mechanism for enabling the integration of statistical and geospatial information. The Statistical Commission endorsed the framework in its 2020 session. The first global framework to be adopted by both intergovernmental bodies on statistics and geospatial information, the GSGF provides guidance on how to integrate data from both statistical and geospatial communities.

Driving data innovation

UN DESA is collaborating with local, national and global partners from intergovernmental organizations, academia, civil society and the private sector, in order to leverage

innovative sources, technologies and methods for production and dissemination of better, more timely and disaggregated data for sustainable development. These efforts, focused on mainstreaming of data innovations into official statistical production processes, are helping countries leverage the full potential of geospatial information, big data and other non-traditional data sources, in order to improve the timeliness, coverage, and quality of SDG data through collaboration, partnerships and capacity development.

The UN Global Platform, a cloud-based collaborative environment on data innovation for the global statistical community, enables the sharing of new global data solutions sources, methods and technology. In 2020, during the pandemic, satellite imagery and machine learning were used on this platform to develop estimation methods for crop statistics in Senegal, while training the Senegalese staff at the same time; and state-of-the-art .Stat Suite technology was implemented for cloud-based hosting and dissemination of Cambodia's national statistics. UN DESA established Memorandums of Understanding with regional hubs of the UN Global Platform in China, Rwanda, and the United Arab Emirates, which will provide training opportunities and help accelerate data innovation at the regional level.

UN DESA also worked with partners to launch the Data4Now initiative, in September 2019. Data4Now aims to make innovative methods and data solutions easily accessible to countries to support progress towards the SDGs, including for monitoring progress. It mobilizes and establishes partnerships between country statistical systems and the private sector, international organizations, and donors. Through multi-stakeholder partnerships the initiative aims to mainstream innovations in data production and analysis easily accessible to support progress towards the SDGs.

