



When everyone is counted, everyone counts

Since ancient times, governments around the world have counted their populations. By counting everyone, communities can determine the needs of their people; where to build homes, schools, hospitals and where to invest in food supply, jobs and transportation. In this way, societies can progress. During the 2020 round of censuses, the majority of countries carry out their census. This year, censuses are scheduled to be carried out in 68 countries and territories. UN DESA and the UN Statistical Commission stand ready to support, making sure that the data collected, is data we can trust.

Data and statistics are essential at all levels to understand the world we live in. Official statistics collected via national statistical offices in every corner of the world help us keep track of our progress in meeting the promise of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agreed upon by all UN Member States in 2015.

“We all know that timely, relevant and disaggregated data is central to achieving the SDGs,” Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed said recently when the Data for Now initiative was launched to ensure that quality and timely data is available to achieve the goals.

To measure our advancements, the global statistical community has agreed upon on a set of indicators. On 3-6 March, over 120 statisticians from across the world will gather for the 51st session of the UN Statistical Commission at UN Headquarters in New York, where they will review and agree on the revisions to the global indicator framework to further support and boost these SDG monitoring efforts.

“The 2030 Agenda has vast data needs. Ensuring that no one is left behind requires data at an unprecedented level of granularity,” UN DESA’s Under-Secretary-General Liu Zhenmin said when he addressed the statistical community last year. He then also stressed the need for enhanced financing and for strengthening the existing statistical capacity around the world to meet the new demands.

As in previous years, the Statistical Commission will cover a wide range of issues; from the traditional censuses and surveys to discussions on big data and earth observation data. It will look closer at better coordination of the UN statistical system, the future of economic statistics, and a framework for statistical geospatial integration. This year's event will review civil registration, vital statistics and identity management. Health and gender statistics are two other important areas where new approaches are being undertaken.

The Commission also oversees two major events taking place later in the year: World Statistics Day, to be celebrated on 20 October and the [Third UN World Data Forum](#) to be held in Bern, Switzerland, from 18 to 21 October this year, which presents a unique opportunity for major producers and users of data and statistics to collaborate in launching new initiatives and innovative solutions that will deliver better data on all aspects of sustainable development.

On the sidelines of the Commission, UN headquarters will be buzzing with some 70 side events on a variety of relevant data topics. In keeping with the tradition of past years, UN DESA's Statistics Division is organizing a High Level Forum on Official Statistics on 2 March with a focus on [Data stewardship – a solution for official statistics' predicament?](#)

All these events, along with the hard work and efforts of the large group of statisticians that the UN Statistical Commission represents, boil down to one thing: to make sure we gather data we can trust, for people and planet. Because when everyone is counted, everyone counts.

For more information: [51st session of the UN Statistical Commission](#)

HIGHLIGHTS



Have we got enough food to feed the world?

Out of the roughly 7.7 billion people living on Earth today, more than one in ten does not have enough food to eat. And according to [UN DESA's World Population Prospects](#), our planet may be home to five billion people more by the time this century is over. Can we produce enough food for everyone?

That is one of the questions that the [UN Commission on Population and Development](#) will try to answer at its 53rd session, from 30 March to 3 April in New York. Delegates from the world over will debate how to feed the growing population healthfully, equitably and sustainably to ensure a healthy future for both people and planet.

Intuitively, we could argue that by simply increasing food production to match population growth we are able to end hunger. A look at the data will quickly dispel this misconception. The fact is that we are already producing more than enough food for everyone. Between 1960 and 2015, agricultural production tripled in size, growing much faster than the global population.

And yet, 820 million people still go hungry, not being able to afford a sufficient quantity and variety of foods. What is more, rising incomes and urbanization are contributing

towards foods that are calorie-rich, but nutrient-poor. Unhealthy diets are now responsible for more adult deaths and disability worldwide than tobacco use.

Significantly increasing food production also carries the risk of wrecking our planet. Food production already occupies 50 per cent of the Earth's habitable land, accounts for 70 per cent of freshwater consumption and produces around a quarter of global greenhouse gas emissions. The pressures that agriculture exerts on the Earth's ecosystems – from fueling climate change, to driving biodiversity loss, water scarcity and pollution – is already limiting our ability to produce more food.

What about the other side of the equation? Slowing down population growth, combined with more responsible patterns of consumption and production, would certainly ease pressure on ecosystems, reduce emissions of greenhouse gases and allow the world more time to identify new technologies for fighting climate change and improving food production. But for all the progress we have made in reducing the global pace of population growth, it is still projected to continue growing until the year 2100.

Does this mean we are destined to a hungry future? Not if we manage to sustainably transform our food and agricultural systems at all levels and in all countries. The good news is that many of the efforts to reduce malnutrition and promote healthy diets would also greatly benefit the environment, on which agriculture depends.

For example, reducing red meat consumption in high-income countries would cut greenhouse gas emissions and make room for a modest increase in meat consumption in low-income countries, while also promoting healthier diets in both settings.

The fight against climate change and the droughts, floods and crop failures that it causes will be crucial to keeping humanity fed for years to come. Achieving sustainable food systems will also require reducing food loss, particularly through better storage facilities in disadvantaged areas, and by reducing food waste in high-income countries. Today, around one third of all the food we produce is wasted or lost, including nearly half of all fruit and vegetables.

These are just some of the issues that the delegates to the Commission on Population and Development will discuss this month. For more information about the Commission and its 53rd session, go to: [UN Commission on Population and Development](#)

Photo: ©IFAD/GMB Akash



Turning the tide to safeguard ocean life

Humans depend on nature—including the ocean—for all of our needs: from the air we breathe to the food we eat and the energy we use. However, unsustainable human activities and overexploitation of the species and natural resources that make up the habitats and ecosystems of all wildlife are imperiling the world's biodiversity.

Ensuring healthy marine life is a major goal of the 2020 United Nations Ocean Conference, to be held in Lisbon,

Portugal, from 2 to 6 June. One of the eight interactive dialogues to be addressed by countries and other ocean stakeholders in Lisbon is dedicated to managing, protecting, conserving and restoring marine and coastal ecosystems.

And, since the vast majority of the ocean remains unmapped, unobserved and unexplored, with many species out there still to be discovered, the Conference will seek to generate more investment and better infrastructure for supporting ocean science.

Protecting marine life will be front and centre in what has been dubbed the “super year” for biodiversity. Kicking off with the World Wildlife Day on 3 March, the year will be an opportunity to mobilize concrete action to protect the Earth's nature at key events such as the UN Ocean Conference, the UN Biodiversity Conference in Kunming, China, and the UN Climate Change Conference in Glasgow, UK.

“Let us remind ourselves of our duty to preserve and sustainably use the vast variety of life on the planet,” said UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres in his message for World Wildlife Day. “Let us push for a more caring, thoughtful and sustainable relationship with nature. A world of thriving biodiversity provides the foundation we need to achieve our Sustainable Development Goals of a world of dignity and opportunity for all people on a healthy planet.”

There's no better time to act, as the two biodiversity-related targets of the Sustainable Development Goal 14 on Life Below Water hit their deadline this year. SDG Target 14.2 states that by 2020, we must sustainably manage and protect marine and coastal ecosystems to avoid significant adverse impacts, including by strengthening their resilience and restoring them in order to achieve healthy and productive ocean. SDG Target 14.5 says that the world must conserve at least 10 per cent of coastal and marine areas by 2020, consistent with national and international law.

Good progress has already been made on Target 14.5 on marine protected areas (MPAs), according to the latest Secretary-General's latest report on Goal 14 progress. As of December 2019, MPAs cover almost 8 per cent of the world's ocean. If concerted efforts to implement national commitments continue, target 14.5 is likely to be achieved by 2020, although their current, uneven geographical distribution limits their effectiveness, connectivity and representativeness.

Furthermore, the UN DESA SDG Report states more than 24 million square kilometers, or over 17 per cent of waters under national jurisdiction were covered by protected areas, a significant increase from 12 per cent in 2015 and more than double the extent covered in 2010.

Much more needs to be done, however, to achieve Target 14.2. The state of marine and coastal ecosystems has continued to deteriorate, due to overexploitation of plants and animals, ocean warming, climate change and poor management. Climate action focusing on ocean ecosystems presents an opportunity for mitigation and adaptation action to build resilience and generate benefits for people and nature.

Ivonne Higuero, Secretary-General of the Convention on International Trade of Endangered Species of Fauna and Flora (CITES) recently called for transformative changes, as we find ourselves at a critical turning point both for our species and for the entire biosphere. "Now more than ever we must come together in a joint effort to sustain all life on Earth", she said.

GET INVOLVED



Are you #GenerationEquality?

Imagine a world where all people have equal rights and opportunities. Women and girls are not afraid of walking home late at night, and men and boys are not trapped in oppressive masculinities. In this world, gender equality is the norm. Men and women get paid equally for work of equal value and share the care work at home.

This is Generation Equality.

UN Women's Generation Equality campaign marks the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the most visionary agenda for women's rights and empowerment everywhere.

The Generation Equality campaign is bringing together people of every gender, age, ethnicity, race, religion and country, to drive actions that will create the gender-equal world we all deserve.

Together, we can end gender-based violence; we are calling for economic justice and rights for all; bodily autonomy, sexual and reproductive health and rights; and feminist action for climate justice. We want technology and innovation for gender equality, and feminist leadership.

Small actions can have big impacts in making this vision a reality. On International Women's Day, join #GenerationEquality and become part of the movement.



Forests – a lifeline for people and planet

We all rely on forests. They generate the oxygen we breathe, provide water to quench our thirst and livelihoods to some 1.6 billion people worldwide. They play a critical role for a healthy climate, and ultimately, for our survival. Yet, they continue to be under threat. Ahead of this year's International Day of Forests, we spoke with Mita Sen in the UN Forum on Forests in UN DESA, about the state of our world's forests and what must be done to protect them.

Why are forests so important for our life here on Earth?

“It is difficult to picture life on Earth without forests and trees. Forests sustain our lives in so many ways, from the air we breathe and the water we drink to the food we eat and the wood and paper products that we use every day.

Over 1.6 billion people depend on forests for timber, food, fuel, jobs, and shelter, but all of us depend on forests in one way or the other. Forests provide critical ecosystem services that affect our climate, rainfall patterns, and watersheds, at the same time they are also home to 80 percent of all land-based biodiversity. According to some estimates, the economic value of ecosystem services provided by the world's forests could be worth as much as US\$16.2 trillion annually.”

What is the state of the world's forests?

“The good news is that over the past 25 years, the annual rate of net global deforestation has slowed by more than 50 percent. This is due to governments and stakeholders working to sustainably manage forests, along with investing in restoration and afforestation of degraded forests and land.

The bad news is that despite these efforts, forests continue to be under threat. Annually, over 7 million hectares of natural forests are still lost, mostly through conversion to other land uses – such as large-scale commercial agriculture and other economic activities. Forests are being negatively impacted by land degradation, ecosystem fragmentation, invasive pests, diseases, and frequent forest fires – many of which are exacerbated by the effects of climate change.”

What action is needed to further protect them, and how can people help the world's forests?

“In terms of action at the UN level, the UN Strategic Plan for Forests 2030 provides a blueprint for action, through a set of six Global Forest Goals and 26 associated targets to be achieved by 2030, which are voluntary and universal. The vision is for a future world in which all types of forests and trees outside forests are sustainably managed. The only way we will get there is if we increase and promote sustainable management of forests, while at the same time working collectively to halt deforestation and forest degradation.

At the UN we work by bringing together governments and all stakeholders – to foster sharing knowledge and collective and coordinated action. But people everywhere can help, the first step is to make informed green choices in your daily lives – this could include purchasing products sourced from sustainably managed forests, buying local, or supporting your community’s green spaces. Any action you can take that reduces your carbon footprint, ultimately helps forests.”

This year’s celebration of the International Day of Forests focuses on forests and biodiversity. What more can you tell us about the Day?

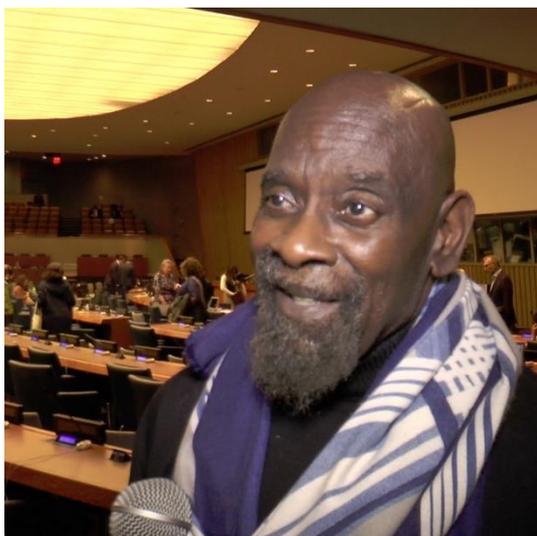
“The International Day of Forests is observed annually on 21 March, and this year’s theme focuses on promoting awareness of the interconnections between forests and the biodiversity that they support. The 2019 landmark report from the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services sounded the alarm that the health of our ecosystems is declining at unprecedented rates and the rate of species extinctions is accelerating. If we wish to take action to turn the tide, sustaining forests are a critical part of the equation.

This year, we at UN DESA’s UN Forum on Forests Secretariat will organize a special event on 20 March at UNHQ in New York, in celebration of the International Day. The event will be held in the ECOSOC Chamber, from 10 am to 1 pm, and will feature senior UN and government officials, technical experts and school children, all sharing their perspectives on how we can contribute to sustaining forests and biodiversity. The event will be live webcast on UN Web TV.

For more information: [International Day of Forests](#)

Photo courtesy of IISD/ENB

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT



First-ever UN resolution on homelessness

On 19th February, the gavel fell on the 58th session of the UN Commission for Social Development, which agreed the text of the historical first United Nations resolution on homelessness. A serious violation of human dignity, homelessness has become a global problem. It is affecting people of all ages from all walks of life, in both developed and developing countries.

Globally, 1.6 billion people worldwide live in inadequate housing conditions, with about 15 million forcefully evicted every year, according to UN-Habitat, which has noted an alarming rise in homelessness in the last 10 years. Young people are the age group with the highest risk of becoming homeless.

The UN Commission's resolution recognizes that people are often pushed into homelessness by a range of diverse social and economic drivers.

"It could happen to anyone. It's not always drugs, alcohol. It's not always something external. Life happens. And life can happen to a whole lot of us. It did during the great financial crisis, and it could very well happen again", said Chris Gardner, who had described his experience of homelessness in his bestselling book, "The Pursuit of Happiness".

"We, as a great human society, we are diminished, we lose the gift of their creativity, the gift of their curiosity, the gift of their potential when it is marooned by all downstream consequences of homelessness", said Mary McAleese, Former President of Ireland.

"I will never forget my first experience with homelessness. I, unfortunately, was born into a family plagued by a chain of events which included domestic violence", added Chris Gardner. "My one regret about being here today is that the two most important people in the world to me couldn't be here today – I'm referring to my granddaughter and my goddaughter. One of them says that she wants to become the President of the United States and the other one says that she wants to become an astronaut and go to the moon. And you know what I say to both of them every day? Let's go!!! **THAT'S THE POWER of ONE!**"

In its resolution of the UN Commission for Social Development calls for a response by all sectors within Governments and societies. The Commission recommended the resolution for adoption by the UN Economic and Social Council later this year.

The Commission also celebrated the 25th anniversary of the World Summit for Social Development and its Copenhagen Declaration. Stakeholders and experts from all over the world expressed strong support for the work of the Commission, noting that the outcome of the Copenhagen Summit remains relevant today and continues to guide social development in their countries.

For more information: Commission for Social Development, 58th session

MORE FROM UNDESA

Just keep fighting, you are not alone

SDG BLOG



Marta Vieira da Silva, football star
& Goodwill Ambassador for UN Women



By Marta Vieira da Silva, footballer, UN Women Goodwill Ambassador for women and girls in sports and UN Secretary-General's SDG Advocate

In 1995, I was a 9-year-old girl living in the village of Dois Riachos, in the Northeast of Brazil. At that early age, I was already fighting to have the same opportunities as boys. I wanted to be out there on the playing field and scoring goals, even if the footballs were made of all sorts of improvised materials. It was hard to fight for myself. I was the only girl in that scenario, and, unfortunately, I was hurt, both physically and emotionally by those boys, and later by coaches and even by my community while I was claiming my rights. That loneliness gave me courage to immediately react and have the necessary drive to move on.

What I didn't know then was that on the other side of the world, in Beijing, China, hundreds of women were also fighting for me. On September 15 of that year – the last day of the Fourth World Conference on Women – those women managed to finalize [The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action](#), the most visionary agenda for the human rights of women and girls, everywhere. It was adopted by the United Nations and endorsed by 189 countries, committed to work on 12 critical areas: poverty; education and training; health; violence; armed conflict; economy; power and decision-making; institutional mechanisms; human rights; media; environment; and the girl child.

Looking at myself and the status of women and girls in the world twenty-five years later, brings me mixed feelings. Take sports as an example. On the one hand, in recent years, we have seen an upsurge in audiences supporting women's sports. The latest Women's World Cup was the most popular ever, with crowds celebrating women's talent, strength, resilience and professionalism. Women's movements in different countries are fighting for and winning access to practise sports and attend matches. There are, definitely, more women and girls playing sports nowadays in comparison to 1995.

On the other hand, no country in the world can say it has achieved gender equality yet. Women and girls still have much fewer opportunities to play or to have a career in sports in comparison to men and boys. Even when we do get the opportunity, the facilities, equipment and even the uniforms tend to be of a much inferior quality. We are still fighting not to be harassed or sexually abused. We are still fighting for visibility in the media, free from gender stereotypes. We are still fighting to have the same opportunities for leadership and decision-making positions in sports organizations. We are still fighting for equal pay, because we play as hard as men's teams.

But things can change. They did for the girls in Rio de Janeiro and in Buenos Aires who took part in the "One Win Leads to Another" joint programme to empower girls through sports by UN Women and the International Olympic Committee. They told me that many of them used to struggle to guarantee their space in the community sports fields just like I did, twenty-five years ago. Advances for women and girls in sports and in every area of society have been far too slow and uncertain, and we can no longer tolerate that.

Something that's never changed in my life is my determination to keep fighting for what I believe in. I won't give up advocating for the rights of women and girls to be who they want to be. And I am not the only one. I am accompanied by women, men, girls and boys with a common vision: achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls by 2030, as [Goal 5 of the SDGs](#) says. We're aiming for a new "Generation Equality" no matter what our age, gender or background. Together, we're building an equal future.

What does that future look like? It's a world where we have equal rights to play, where we receive equal pay for equal jobs, regardless of our gender, where we share unpaid care and domestic work, where there is not one single case of sexual harassment or violence against women and girls, where health care services respond to our needs, and where women participate equally in politics and in decision-making in all areas of life.

If the sports ecosystem – governments, federations, leagues, clubs, teams, media, NGOs, international organizations, athletes, the private sector and others – take action to level the playing field for women and girls, sports can lead the way in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment across all of society. It can be one of the great drivers of gender equality, by teaching women and girls the values of teamwork, self-

reliance and resilience. It can provide girls with social connections and a refuge from violence in their homes and communities and help them to understand their bodies and build confidence and the ability to speak up.

It demands more than political will, though. It demands coordinated action, right now. I know that, together, we can make it. So, in 2030, which is the deadline the world set to have accomplished all the 17 SDGs, I want to be able to look back and see the transformations for all women and girls in the world. And I will look back at the eyes of that 9-year-old girl that I was and say confidently to her: “just keep fighting, you are not alone”.

**The views expressed in this blog are the author's and do not necessarily reflect the opinion of UN DESA.*

Photo: UN Women/Camille Miranda

What do we share in a sharing economy?



One of the most notable technology-driven developments in the past decade is the meteoric rise of the sharing economy. Sophisticated algorithms that allow efficient matching of supply and demand at unprecedented scale and speed enable the sharing economy platforms to alter consumption and production patterns of millions of people, with economic, social and environmental consequences.

Since providing its first trip in San Francisco in 2010, Uber's operation has expanded to over 700 cities around the world today, accumulating a total of 10 billion trips between 2010 and 2018. Airbnb went from serving only 20,000 guests in 2009 to, as of the first quarter of 2019, listing more rooms globally than some of the world's largest hotels – Marriott, Hilton, Wyndham and InterContinental Hotels Group – combined.

This head-spinning expansion of the sharing economy has given rise to both hope and anxiety. On one hand, the sharing economy creates tremendous economic opportunities. Its platforms are offering solutions to large-scale coordination problems that have marred the provision of transportation, housing, ambulances, agricultural machinery, and many other resources. By making better use of underutilized assets, these platforms have improved economic efficiency and consumer welfare – in the form of lower costs, expanded choices, and quicker, more flexible access to goods and services.

At the same time, there are increasing concerns that this new phenomenon will not live up to its “sharing” name and that the welfare gains it produces will not be distributed fairly. Several forces are at play in the sharing economy that – if left unchecked – could further worsen inequality in an already highly unequal world. These forces – including network effects, information asymmetry, structural inequality and deep-seated

discrimination – could distribute gains disproportionately to large firms and high-income and highly educated individuals.

The net impact of the sharing economy will depend on each country's development conditions and policies. The effect on developing countries could very well be different from that in developed countries. The sharing economy has the potential to provide the disadvantaged with better access to productive assets. In places with poor labour conditions, it can provide some gradual improvements. It can also expand employment opportunities for women where strict cultural norms prevent them from taking on gainful employment.

All these changes could make the sharing economy a force for good and for improving equality in developing countries. But its ultimate impact on equality will depend on regulations that enhance market competition, access to data, pricing and algorithm transparency, and tax cooperation, among others.

For a deep dive into the effects of the sharing economy on inequality, read the latest [UN DESA Frontier Technology Quarterly](#).

SDG 5 in numbers



The world is a better place for women today than it was in the past. Fewer girls are forced into early marriage; more women are serving in parliament and positions of leadership; and laws are being reformed to advance gender equality.

Despite these gains, discriminatory laws and social norms remain pervasive, along with harmful practices and other forms of violence against women and girls. Women continue to be underrepresented at all levels of political leadership. Across the globe, women and girls perform a disproportionate share of unpaid domestic work.

Moreover, they continue to face barriers with respect to their sexual and reproductive health and rights, including legal restrictions and lack of autonomy in decision-making. Among the most disadvantaged are women and girls who face the compounded effects of gender and other forms of discrimination.

Achieving gender equality will require bold and sustainable actions that address the structural impediments and root causes of discrimination against women. Equally important, it will require laws and policies that advance gender equality, backed by adequate resources, as well as stronger accountability for commitments made to women's rights.

Access more data and information on the indicators for SDG 5 in the SDG Progress Report 2019.

For the latest on persisting gender gaps in labour markets, working conditions, wages and many other business areas, read our World Economic Situation and Prospects Monthly Briefing.



UPCOMING EVENTS

3-6 March, New York	51st session of the Statistical Commission
21 March	World Down Syndrome Day
21 March	International Day of Forests 2020 – Forests and Biodiversity
30 March – 3 April, New York	53rd Session of the Commission on Population and Development (CPD53)
30 March – 3 April, New York	Committee of Experts on Public Administration, 19th session

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