

Strengthening the demographic evidence base for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

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Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will depend on the availability of reliable, accessible and timely evidence about demographic patterns and trends for all countries. The United Nations Secretary-General, in a report prepared for the Commission on Population and Development in April 2016, emphasized ten key findings on this topic and related points for action.

Ten key findings and points for action

1. **Demographic data are essential for development planning and for assessing progress toward the achievement of development goals.**

Reliable and timely data are needed on the size, growth, distribution and characteristics of populations, and on the three components of demographic change (births, deaths and migration).

2. **In many countries, systems of civil registration and vital statistics require urgent strengthening to improve the availability, timeliness and reliability of the data.**

Births and deaths recorded through a civil registration system provide the ideal data for computing vital statistics on levels of fertility and mortality in a population, and for tracking changes in population size and its distribution by age and sex. The analysis and interpretation of such information will be essential for assessing progress toward the SDGs. Registration of births and deaths also helps to ensure access to legal identity for all persons.

3. **Information gathered through a census is critical for sustainable development; all national governments should commit to taking a census at least once per decade.**

A census is a complex and massive exercise, involving the complete enumeration of the population while recording the basic characteristics of individuals and households. Advances in information and communication technologies can be leveraged to improve efficiency in the collection, processing and dissemination of census data.

4. **Well-maintained, centralized population registers are one of the best sources of data on population movements.**

Well-maintained, centralized population registers are an invaluable source of information on births, deaths and migration. Giving the paucity of data on international migration, population registers, where they exist, provide an invaluable source of statistical information on international migration, including both arrivals and departures.

5. National household survey programmes and the capacity of national statistical offices to conduct household surveys should be strengthened.

Household surveys will provide essential information for assessing progress toward the SDGs, including data disaggregated by key characteristics of individuals. Survey programmes should be integrated within national statistical systems to promote synergies with other data sources, and should adhere to international guidelines for the collection, documentation and dissemination of the data.

6. Disaggregated information for relevant population groups should be collected and made available on a regular basis.

At a minimum, demographic statistics should be classified by sex and single years of age, as well as by income, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, geographic location and other characteristics relevant in national contexts.

7. Open access to data facilitates decisions informed by evidence.

Data producers should adopt open-data policies allowing for the dissemination of micro-data from censuses, surveys and other sources, with adequate safeguards to ensure confidentiality and protect privacy. The expanded availability of micro-data will facilitate the production of disaggregated estimates and the assessment of progress being made toward the SDGs.

8. Governments should develop policies for the use of “big data”.

The quantity of data being produced in various contexts, often for commercial purposes, continues to increase. Big data can provide useful supplementary information on key aspects of sustainable development. The use of such data, however, requires policies to permit integration with traditional data, to protect personal privacy, to meet analytical challenges, and to help bridge the digital divide.

9. Governments should encourage the collection and dissemination of geographically referenced data, with maximum flexibility in the specification of the geographic units of analysis.

Geo-referencing of data records is increasingly common and will contribute to the review of progress toward the SDGs by facilitating disaggregation by location as well as integration of data from diverse sources.

10. Partnerships across the United Nations system and with other relevant institutions can improve the collection and use of data for the SDGs.

These partnerships will improve the consistency of methods and estimates, promote a wider dissemination of data, and help to strengthen national capacities for the production and use of high-quality demographic data.



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