



**BETTER DATA
BETTER LIVES**

Celebrating our 50TH Session

**5–8 March 2019
United Nations, New York**

The logo features a large blue '50' with a circular emblem containing the UN logo, 'Statistical Commission', and the text 'United Nations' and 'ECONOMY · ENVIRONMENT · POPULATION · SOCIETY · TRADE'.

How data improves our lives? Let us count the ways

When asked about data, our first thought will usually jump to the Internet, mobile phones, computers and to the endless possibilities these technologies bring about. But we rarely spare a thought for other kinds of data, which accompany us throughout our lives and which we often take for granted. So much so that they have almost become invisible. From life-saving healthcare, to education, poverty and gender equality, data underpins every aspect of a modern human existence.

Over seven decades and 50 sessions, the UN Statistical Commission has been guiding the world's data and statistical production. As the Commission holds its 50th session this month, we explore how data can improve, and sometimes even save the lives of people.

In public health, accurate data can literally mean the difference between life and death. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), 303,000 mothers die during childbirth every year and 2.7 million babies die during their first 28 days of life. We know how to prevent the majority of these maternal deaths and up to 75 per cent of newborn deaths. But we can only prevent them, if we know where, when and to whom they are happening. In short, better data has the power to save millions of lives.

When it comes to education, better data helps us understand that improving school enrolment is just half the battle. The other challenge is to ensure that every child attending a classroom actually develops the skills they need to thrive.

A 2017 study by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics found that 617 million children and adolescents – six out of every 10 – are not reaching minimum proficiency levels in reading and mathematics. What is even more worrying, roughly two thirds of the 617 million children who are not learning enough, are attending school.

The global learning crisis has been revealed thanks to better data and it is with better data that we should start fixing it. Today, 80 per cent of countries assess the quality of learning, but the results they produce cannot be compared. Better tools are needed to monitor and improve learning worldwide and ensure that no one is left behind.

Achieving better education and health are just two of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that the world has set itself for the year 2030. Measuring humanity's progress towards achieving these 17 Goals and 169 targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is a titanic task that includes compiling and analyzing data on 232 indicators for every country in the world. Such a feat can only be achieved with a substantial increase in funding and capacity-building for national statistical systems.

However, investing in statistical capacity is rarely high on the priority list, especially in least developed countries or countries in situation of conflict. Consequently, people in those countries face a higher risk of falling behind, as they often remain invisible to official statistics and policy analyses.

Tracking SDGs progress also requires innovation, such as the use of geospatial and big data analysis tools and tapping new data sources like satellite imagery and mobile data. These new sources, coupled with strengthened partnerships for better data, can complement the traditional data sources – such as that gathered in population censuses, household surveys and administrative registers – and ensure that quality data and statistics are at the center of development policies.

While certainly a tremendous challenge, the gigantic surge in demand for data started by the SDGs, has also helped us realize the gaps in our understanding of the world. The 2030 Agenda motivates countries around the world to begin or to improve monitoring everything from air and water quality to the prevalence of discrimination, to electricity access.

To deliver on the 2030 Agenda's central promise of leaving no one behind, we must first ensure everyone is counted and accounted for. That is why more and better data is fundamental for making our world a better place by 2030.

Leading up to the opening of the 50th Session of the UN Statistical Commission, UN DESA will organize a Seminar on the Future of Economic Statistics. It will be a unique opportunity to interact, exchange and learn from leading economists, statisticians and academics, including the Nobel laureate, Professor Joseph Stiglitz. Follow it live on webtv.un.org.

For more information:

50th Session of the UN Statistical Commission



Climate action and the SDGs: Interlinked and indivisible

Last year's landmark "Global Warming of 1.5°C" report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change stated that global warming is an urgent worldwide problem that requires an urgent response to prevent its worst effects. Fortunately, we have a plan in place: the 2030 Agenda and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals. The SDGs are our blueprint for building a better, more sustainable world that works for both people and the environment.

Implementation of the SDGs is accelerating. National governments around the world are making ambitious plans, developing new programmes and undertaking capacity development efforts to lift more people out of poverty and protect natural resources.

Similarly, countries are making progress on their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) to reduce carbon emissions as part of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. National Adaptation Plans and National Disaster Risk Reduction Strategies will also be critical in addressing climate change challenges.

However, as it is now, the processes for implementing the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement are progressing in parallel in most countries—and they need not be. SDG 13, after all, is dedicated to taking urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts. By strengthening synergies between the two agenda, we can foster win-win outcomes for climate action and the SDGs.

To better connect these two critical frameworks, UN DESA is partnering with the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and Denmark's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Energy, Utilities and Climate, to host a Global Conference on Strengthening Synergies between the Paris Agreement and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (informally, the Climate & SDGs Synergy Conference). The Conference, to be held from 1 to 3 April in Copenhagen, aims to align the climate and SDG processes, and stimulate action from stakeholders at the global, regional and local levels to maximise benefits.

"We expect that this global conference will deliver [...] a set of concrete recommendations for strengthening the interlinkages between climate action and the SDGs," said Liu Zhenmin, UN DESA's Under-Secretary-General, at an event announcing the Conference at the most recent COP in Katowice, Poland. "This conference will be aimed at promoting action," he added.

"Climate change and the SDGs are really one integral agenda," said Patricia Espinosa, UNFCCC Executive Secretary, also at the Katowice event. "In working together, UN DESA and we at UN Climate Change are setting an example of the way the different entities can join forces."

Conference participants will identify specific examples to illustrate the potential of synergistic and interlinked approaches towards realizing the objectives of the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement, including through analyses of NDCs, National Development Plans, National Adaptation Plans and National Risk Reduction Strategies.

They will also analyze implementation gaps and challenges and make a set of concrete recommendations for strengthening synergies, increasing ambition, advancing implementation action, maximizing co-benefits and stimulating multi-stakeholder partnerships. These will include directing means of implementation towards more collaborative action, as well as scaling up and enhancing the mobilization of resources that could benefit sustainable development at large including climate action, as well as ensuring effective use of resources and avoiding duplication.

Photo: IISD Reporting Services

You can learn more about the Climate and SDGs Synergy Conference [here](#).

HIGHLIGHTS



Can multilateralism survive? Examining the future of development policy

International cooperation is under threat along several dimensions: a mounting trade war, stalled global trade talks and the questioning of global institutions by some prominent countries. The media focus is mainly on what this means for wealthy countries, but what does it mean for the rest of the world?

Developing nations already seem to be suffering the consequences. Aid flows to least developed countries are stagnating. The promotion of private financing risks displacing public funds. The number of bilateral trade agreements is increasing, favouring the powerful rather than the worst-off. The defunding of certain multilateral agencies affects women more than men. Inequality within and between countries remains unacceptably high and is in many cases rising. Poorer countries will suffer most from a failure to meet the Paris Agreement climate targets.

What do these trends mean for development policy? Should we press for a return to the old order, or is a pragmatic response required? Does instability even herald opportunity, as the emerging and existing institutions of the global South come to the fore? How should governments in the global South respond? What are the roles of the UN, multilaterals and bilateral trading partners and donors?

A cast of distinguished panellists will try to provide some answers at an open session of the Committee for Development Policy (CDP) at UN Headquarters on 12 March from 3 – 4:45 pm.

The session will feature speakers **Winifred Byanyima**, Oxfam International's Executive Director and a women's rights leader and a global authority on economic inequality; **Ha-Joon Chang**, Director of the Centre of Development Studies at Cambridge University and author of 15 books including *Economics: The User's Guide*; **Kevin Gallagher**, Director of the Global Development Policy Center at Boston University and co-author of *The Clash of Globalizations: Essays on Trade and Development Policy*; and **Mariana Mazzucato**, Professor in the Economics of Innovation and Public Value at University

College London (UCL) and author of *The Value of Everything: Making and Taking in the Global Economy*.

The event will be moderated by **José Antonio Ocampo**, and streamed live via UN Web TV.

For more information: [2019 CDP Plenary: The Future of Development Policy in a Changing Multilateral Context](#)

GET INVOLVED



Step it up for planet 50/50

Despite progress, inequalities still prevail between women and men. Women are often paid less salary for the same job performed, hold fewer high-ranking positions in the workforce, and are less represented in parliaments around the world. And as girls grow up, they might face the grim reality of becoming child brides, and later, victims of domestic violence. If we want to achieve the global goals, we need to achieve gender equality. A planet 50/50, where boys and girls enjoy equal rights and opportunities

in life. And there are many ways to make a difference!

UN Women offer many such ways to step it up for gender equality and women's empowerment around the globe. To make a difference, join one of their current campaigns or professional networks.

Join a campaign! There are several campaigns that you can lend your support or voice to:

HeForShe – Running since 2014 with support from hundreds of thousands of men from around the world, this global and action-oriented movement invites men and women alike to stand together to create a bold, visible force for gender equality. So far, 1.7 million people have committed to gender equality through this movement. Make your commitment [here](#).

UNiTE to End Violence against Women – Around the globe today, 1 in 5 women and girls aged 15-49, have experienced physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner. Yet, 49 countries in the world lack laws to protect them from domestic violence. Take a stand and UNiTE to make sure we prevent and end all forms of violence against women and girls in all corners of the world.

Planet 50–50 by 2030: Step It Up for Gender Equality – This campaign strives towards a world where women and girls enjoy equal rights and opportunities. It asks governments to make national commitments to address the challenges that are holding women and girls back from reaching their full potential. So far, 93 countries have stepped it up for gender equality. Is your country among them? Find out [here](#). If not, advocate for your country to step it up and make a commitment!

Join a professional network! Whether you would like to boost women’s economic empowerment, or help advance their representation in politics, there are networks you can join to make this happen:

Empower Women – Is a global movement for women’s economic empowerment. It engages gender equality advocates and empowers women to achieve their full economic potential in more than 190 countries. This network equips both women and men with resources, opportunities and a global platform to become change-makers and leaders in their communities.

iKNOW Politics– This is an online workspace to help elected officials, candidates, political party leaders and members, researchers, students and other practitioners interested in advancing women in politics. Its goal is to increase the participation and effectiveness of women in political life.

Follow events at UN Headquarters in New York this month: International Women’s Day (8 March) and the 63rd session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (11-22 March). Both events will be streamed live via UN Web TV. To engage via social media, use the hashtags #WomensDay and #CSW63.

Photo: UN Women

EXPERT VOICES



Do you have to be counted to count? How strengthening gender data can empower women and girls

Most of us are aware of the gaps that separate women from men, when it comes to opportunities, earnings or access to education. But not everyone realizes that even the data that we use to measure these inequalities have gender gaps. As the UN Statistical Commission holds its 50th session, we ask Francesca Grum, Chief of the Social and Gender Statistics Section at UN DESA’s Statistics Division, how gender data gaps are formed and what can be done about them.

Are women and girls visible in the data we use to make decisions?

“Women and girls, and men and boys, are becoming more visible in official statistics thanks to the growing demand for reliable, inclusive, disaggregated and open gender data. New methods help us better capture gender issues through population censuses, administrative records and surveys. This provides researchers and policymakers with evidence for gender analyses and allows to create and promote better policies on women and girls’ advancement and gender equality.”

“For example, women spend on average about three times as many hours in unpaid domestic and care work as men. Analyses of time use data with a gender lens may lay the foundation for policies that would recognize the tremendous value of unpaid work, reconcile paid and unpaid work and foster the ability of women and girls to engage in other activities, such as education. UN DESA’s Statistics Division is working to modernize time use surveys to improve the collection and use of time use data.”

“Gender statistics not only make women and girls and men and boys more visible, but they also help bust myths and stereotypes drawn with unfair social norms and attitudes.”

Why do we have such a large gender data gap and what can we do to close it?

“Gender data gaps persist due to lack of national capacity in producing and using gender statistics. Insufficient coordination among data producers and the dearth of financial resources are also major problems. However, thanks to improved and new data collection methods that better capture gender issues and by progressively eliminating gender bias in the existing data collection tools, we are narrowing the gaps.”

“For instance, if we use the household as a unit for data analyses and dissemination, we assume that there is homogeneity among all household members. However, this traditional approach fails to highlight potential disparities among the members of a household, let’s say, when measuring asset ownership. The Evidence and Data for Gender Equality (EDGE) project, implemented by UN DESA and UN Women, developed the UN Guidelines for Producing Statistics on Asset Ownership from a Gender Perspective to measure asset ownership at the individual level by using self-responses instead of proxies. The data analyses resulting from these guidelines are expected to shed light on policy issues around empowerment of women and their well-being, reduction of poverty and vulnerability and women’s entrepreneurship.

“Furthermore, the updated international classification of status in employment (ISCE-18) is a positive development that will result in better gender data, as it covers all forms of work, paid and unpaid, and additional details about types of employment, including those where women predominate, such as contributing family members. The International Labour Organization data collection guidelines for ISCE-18 are expected to further minimize possible biases in the instruments used to collect employment statistics. This way, questions will be asked in a way that should not elicit structurally different responses from women and men.

For more information:

Statistical Commission, Fiftieth session



Leveraging social protection policies to address inequality

Around the world today, about 1.3 billion people face multidimensional poverty and some 3 billion live without decent employment. Moving towards an equal and inclusive society, requires calibrating fiscal, wage and social protection policies to address the underlying causes and interlinkages of inequality and social exclusion. Effective social protection policies can overturn the

vicious, unequal and exclusionary cycle that leave vulnerable groups behind.

These very topics were in focus when the Commission for Social Development (CSocD57) convened for its fifty-seventh session at UN Headquarters from 11 to 21 February.

“There is increased recognition that social protection floors contribute to preventing or alleviating poverty, vulnerability and social exclusion, while promoting inclusive growth,” said UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina J. Mohammed, as she addressed the opening of the Commission, which this year took place under the priority theme “Addressing inequalities and challenges to social inclusion through fiscal, wage and social protection policies.”

Opening the session, the Chair of the Commission’s Bureau Cheikh Niang remarked “with the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, combating inequality and social protection have moved to the center of the policy agenda in all countries.”

Delegates highlighted the importance of securing public expenditure, expanding access to quality services and providing decent work, while civil society organizations further stressed the need to mainstream age-, gender-, disability- and other diversity-sensitive measures in fiscal, wage and social protection policies.

The Commission hosted four high-level panel discussions, over 100 speakers during the general discussion, and almost 50 side events. This year, the emerging issues focused on “The empowerment of people affected by natural and manmade disasters to reduce inequality: addressing the differential impact on persons with disabilities, older persons and youth.”

The CSocD57 adopted three draft resolutions to forward to the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) by consensus and proposed the priority theme of the next session to be “Affordable housing and social protection system for all to address homelessness.”

Going forward, Valentin Rybakov, Vice President of the ECOSOC, called for a paradigm shift on sustainable development, urging to turn to the most vulnerable and marginalized groups who are “disconnected from accountable institutions and are not consulted by those in power.”

For more information: [57th Session of the Commission for Social Development \(CSocD57\)](#)

Empowering women to achieve the global goals



by Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, UN Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN Women

If you wonder why gender equality is so important, just try to think of any part of the world, or even any business, where it's possible to say that we've already achieved it. Whether you consider equal pay for women when they do the same job as a man; a balanced group of decision makers bringing their experience to bear on an issue in boardrooms or parliaments; or women's full engagement in peace processes; in every case there are gaps that are holding us back from achieving the 2030 Agenda vision of an end to poverty and a peaceful, sustainable world. Those gaps are the spaces where women – and girls – are missing.

These days we're also seeing mass gatherings of women and girls mobilizing to make their voices heard, in the global marches and online movements such as #MeToo, TimesUp, NiUnaMenos and #TotalShutdown that continue to grow around the world. Most recently, striking schoolchildren in several countries across Europe and elsewhere have been calling out for climate justice and action by policy makers. Their vibrant impatience is the hallmark of new generations of young activists whose engagement is a critical part of the road to 2030.

They are right to be impatient: progress has been made but it's still too slow. Despite advances in girls' enrolment in primary education, 15 million girls of primary-school age are not getting the chance to learn to read or write compared to about 10 million boys. Every year, 12 million girls marry before the age of 18. Violence against women and girls remains a global pandemic, with one in three women and girls experiencing physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetimes. Today, women hold 24 per cent of parliamentary seats globally – still only half way to parity – and the global gender pay gap stands at 23 per cent.

A good education can boost quality of life and open doors to decent work opportunities. It can give women and girls the life skills they need in order to know and claim their rights, to stand up against discrimination and violence, to become fully engaged citizens and to

make decisions about their health care, including their sexual and reproductive health. It also benefits children, families and societies more broadly through poverty reduction and enhanced economic growth.

We need men and women working side by side to dismantle the barriers to gender equality. One of the biggest problems is the unequal division of household work to care for the home and family members. Women spend on average 18 per cent of their day on this unpaid work, versus 7 per cent for men. In some countries that gap is much wider. Whether it is a young girl who is pulled out of school to fetch water or a woman who works full-time and then comes home to a “second shift”, when men step up and do their fair share, women are enabled to pursue paid employment, leadership and leisure activities.

Governments and private sector leaders can play a critical role in making these choices easier, by implementing policies that support paid parental leave, affordable child care and flexible work arrangements. We can also do a great deal to change mindsets through working with partners on changing the stereotypes of men and women that appear in advertising, marketing and many forms of media and entertainment. Something as simple as changing the numbers of women who are depicted in advertising as professionals, rather than only as carers, can make an important contribution to changing what we regard as normal – and to shape a more ambitious future.

Sport can also 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. This is particularly important during adolescence, when many girls abandon sport, whether under pressure to conform to traditionally “feminine” stereotypes, or because of early motherhood faced by young women like [Dayane Santos in Brazil](#), whose life was turned around by the ‘One Win Leads to Another’ programme. Similar pressures to conform to pre-set educational stereotypes can stifle girls’ engagement in the learning they need to equip them for the future.

We need to ensure that women and girls are learning the right skills for the changing world of work. Rapid technological and digital advances, including automation, robotics and artificial intelligence are leading to a loss of jobs, and raising the potential for heightened inequality, especially gender inequality. Collaborative initiatives like the African Girls Can CODE programme are combatting this challenges and building equality, through equipping participants like [15-year-old Eno Ekanem, from Abuja, Nigeria](#) with the digital literacy and personal development skills they need to pursue education and careers in ICT and coding.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development envisages for us a world where no one is left behind, where every woman, man, girl and boy is able to live up to their full potential. Eno and Dayane show us just how important equality is to bringing lasting change, and how those changes go hand in hand with improvements for us all.

Leaving no one behind on World Water Day



Despite the progress of recent decades, billions of people are still living without safe water – their households, schools, workplaces, farms and factories struggling to survive and thrive.

Just four years into the 2030 Agenda, the world is already off-track to meet SDG 6: to ensure water and sanitation for all by 2030. Demand is rising, pollution is worsening, funding is lacking and governance is often weak.

Already-marginalized groups are being disproportionately affected by this water crisis. Women, children, refugees, indigenous peoples, disabled people and many others are often overlooked, and sometimes face discrimination, as they try to access and manage the safe water they need.

'Leaving no one behind' is the theme of World Water Day on 22 March 2019 and the United Nations World Water Development Report launched on 19 March.

The campaign and report shine a light on the grounds for discrimination that deny so many people access to safe water and sanitation, such as gender, ethnicity, religion, disability, age, and economic and social status.

To 'leave no one behind', water services must meet the needs of marginalized groups and their voices must be heard in decision-making processes. Regulatory and legal frameworks must recognise the right to water for all people, and sufficient funding must be fairly and effectively targeted at those who need it most. These are all critical action points in the UN's Water Action Decade, which continues until March 2028.

'Water for all' is not only the right thing to do, it is essential to achieving the 2030 Agenda. We have to act urgently, leaving no one behind.

Key events:

World Water Day pivot event – launch of UN World Water Development Report

Venue: Palais des Nations, Geneva

Date: 19 March 2019

Time: 16:00-17:30

'Water in Armed Conflict' – panel discussion

Venue: International Peace Institute, 777 United Nations Plaza, New York City

Date: 22 March 2019

Time: 10:00-12:30

Gender equality and women's empowerment in numbers



Gender equality and women's empowerment is the key to achieving all the Sustainable Development Goals. Despite progress, gender inequality continues to hold women and girls back and deprive them of basic rights and opportunities.

1 in 5 ever-partnered women and girls were subjected to physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner



The practice of child marriage has been declining in the last decade, with the proportion of women who were married in childhood decreasing from one in four to approximately one in five. Child marriage is a violation of human rights that often leads to a lifetime of disadvantage and deprivation, especially for girls.

One in five girls and women (aged 15 to 49) who have ever been married or in union experience physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner in the last 12 months, based on data from 87 countries.

On average, women spend approximately three times as many hours in unpaid domestic and care work as men, and significantly more if they have children.



Women spend about **three times** as many hours in unpaid domestic and care work as men

Around 2017, one in three girls aged 15 to 19 had been subjected to female genital mutilation (FGM) in the 30 countries where the practice is concentrated, down from one in two around the year 2000. Some countries are making rapid progress. FGM is a human right violation affecting girls and women worldwide. It may lead to severe pain, excessive bleeding, infections (including HIV), infertility, complications during childbirth and even death.



Women in parliament- **23%** in 2018

Globally, the percentage of women in single or lower houses of national parliament increased from 19 per cent in 2010 to around 23 per cent in 2018. Slow progress indicates the need for stronger political will and more ambitious measures.

Women occupy less than one third of senior- and middle-management positions in majority of the 67 countries with data.

International Day highlights forests' role in education for sustainable development



Throughout human history, forests and trees have been connected to learning, wisdom and enlightenment. Forests and trees have served as outdoor classrooms, providing healthy learning-locations for outdoor-education and fostering environmental stewardship in children from an early age.

Forests are among the world's most productive renewable natural resources, providing sustainable paths to development as a key driver of economic growth while providing livelihoods for hundreds of millions of people, particularly in rural areas. Education is a key enabler for sustainable development, and for the sustainable management of forests. Learning about forests, and their sustainable management is not just good for the environment, it is the foundation for sustainable livelihood and communities.

In recognition of these important interlinkages between forests and education, the central theme of the 2019 International Day of Forests is "Forests and education." The International Day of Forests is observed annually on 21 March, provides a global platform to raise awareness of the importance of all types of forests and trees.

This year, UN DESA's United Nations Forum on Forests Secretariat will organize a special event in celebration of the International Day of Forests on 21 March at UNHQ in New York, which will highlight how forests and education are essential for creating a sustainable future for all. The event will be held in the ECOSOC Chamber, from 10 am to 1 pm, and will feature remarks by senior UN and government officials, a panel discussion and a general discussion by Member States and UN entities.

The International Day of Forests was established by the UN General Assembly in 2012. Activities held around the world range from scientific conferences and workshops, to art exhibits, tree-planting and community-level events. The theme of the International Day reflects the multi-faceted values of forests, highlighting how forests enrich our daily lives and support global sustainability.

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

UPCOMING EVENTS

5-8 March New York	Statistical Commission, Fiftieth session
11-15 March New York	Committee for Development Policy (CDP)
21 March	World Down Syndrome Day
21 March	International Day of Forests
22 March	World Water Day

FIND US ALSO ON:



© United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
[Unsubscribe](#) | [Subscribe](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Privacy Notice](#) | [Terms of Use](#) | [Copyright](#)