

**UN stresses importance of demographic data  
to achieve Sustainable Development Goals**

*Reliable, accessible and timely population data are essential for development planning and assessing progress toward the achievement of the new Sustainable Development Agenda, highlights the UN Commission on Population and Development which opens today*

**New York, 11 April**—Capturing and making good use of demographic data for sustainable development will be the focus of the 49th session of the United Nations Commission on Population and Development, opening today at UN Headquarters and held until 15 April.

The Commission takes place at a critical time following the heels of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) entering into force in January 2016, as these Goals will now guide the work of the UN system and the international community for the next 15 years.

Reliable information about the size, growth, distribution and characteristics of populations is crucial not only to guide the development policy supporting the implementation of the SDGs, but also to assess progress towards their achievement.

[The report of the UN Secretary-General on the theme of this year's Commission](#) notes that well-maintained, centralized population registers are, where they exist, one of the best sources of information on fertility, mortality and migration.

“We all understand that people can never be reduced to mere numbers. At the same time, statistics are essential for tracking progress. When people are not counted, they are excluded” said the UN Secretary-General in opening remarks to the Commission.

However, detailed administrative data are often lacking, including in developing countries, as pointed out by the report. Strengthening the human and institutional capacity for building and maintaining such data systems will require increased political will and commitment by the countries themselves, as well as enhanced support from donors and the international community, which will be part of the Commission's discussions.

**Capture of demographic data weak in many countries**

The Commission will address the need to strengthen civil registration systems, which are a key source of information for deriving vital statistics for population. National survey also require improvement in many countries in order to provide essential information required to measure progress towards meeting the SDGs.

“The SDGs are fundamentally focused on equality. Population data and analysis are critical to ending inequalities, helping people who are hard to reach, and ushering in a life of dignity for all” added the UN Chief.

Population censuses are another critical source of information for sustainable development, as pointed out by the UN report. Taking a census is a complex and massive exercise, involving the complete enumeration of a population while recording the basic characteristics of individuals and households. According to experts, this exercise should be conducted at least once per decade to ensure the availability of data that are sufficiently up-to-date for most purposes.



New information and communication technologies can be leveraged to increase efficiency and reduce the cost of data collection.

The Secretary-General's Report, which forms the substantive input to the Commission, highlights that these tools are crucial not only from a development perspective as a source of reliable demographic evidence, but also from a human rights angle as a mean to ensuring that all people have access to documents to prove their legal identity.

### **Disaggregated data vital for social inclusion**

The Report also finds that for all types of data and methods of collection, the ability to separate results by social group is essential to respond effectively to the call for social inclusion highlighted in the 2030 Agenda. As pointed out in the report of the Secretary-General, disaggregated data are essential for addressing the needs of vulnerable groups which are often overlooked when populations are considered as a whole. Ideally, demographic data and estimates should be disaggregated 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.

In addition, the Commission will discuss the need for more open access to existing data in order to facilitate policy making that is fully informed by evidence. The dissemination of micro-data, with adequate safeguards to protect privacy and ensure confidentiality, expands significantly the potential uses of the information.

### **Innovative opportunities offered by big data**

New innovations and opportunities will also be discussed by Member States during the Commission, among them the potential uses of "big data", which refers to large collections of data being produced in various contexts, often for commercial purposes.

As pointed out by the UN report, big data can provide useful information on key aspects of sustainable development. However, policies are needed to address analytical challenges, bridge the digital divide and protect personal privacy.

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Find out more about the [49th session of the Commission on Population and Development](#) and follow the plenary session via [UN Web TV](#).

For more information about the Sustainable Development Goals visit:  
<http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/>

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