STRENGTHENING GLOBAL DATA CAPACITIES...

...because informed decision-making requires quality data

In 2020-2021, UN DESA helped put data to the task of effective decision-making, supporting Member States to build their capacities for collecting official data, tapping existing data sources, and developing new ones.

UN DESA...

- Monitored progress and gaps in global efforts to achieve the SDGs, highlighting the on-going impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Supported Member States' efforts to compile and disseminate crucial, innovative, detailed, disaggregated, and geo-referenced data on the pandemic's impact on society, economy, and government.
- Coordinated development of the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting (SEEA)

Ecosystem Accounting (EA), the Handbook on Management and Organization of National Statistical Systems, and other methodological guidelines supporting National Statistical Systems.
- Developed opportunities for members of the international statistical community to connect, coordinate, collaborate, and strengthen capacities, even in the absence of in-person networking.

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Strengthening global data capacities

The COVID -19 pandemic heightened the need for real-time, disaggregated, and interrelated datasets, so that governments had the information they needed to respond effectively. UN DESA was there to guide them through.

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Monitoring progress towards the SDGs

UN DESA led preparation of the annual **Sustainable Development Goals Report**, as central coordinator of the global SDG indicator framework and monitoring process. The Sustainable Development Goals Report and other monitoring tools provide policy makers and stakeholders with the latest SDG data to identify areas for targeted policy interventions and enable informed decision making. The 2021 Report demonstrates how COVID-19 has disrupted development activities for the SDG implementation across the world and set back years of progress made on the Global Goals. The annual report is based on data from the global SDG indicator framework developed by the Inter-agency and Expert Group on SDG indicators and is prepared in collaboration with over 200 experts from over 50 agencies, funds, and programmes.

The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2021

United Nations

Supporting the global data response to COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic brought with it an unprecedented demand for urgently needed information to help save lives and livelihoods across the world. At the same time, the operation of statistical systems has been tremendously challenged due to lockdown measures and extraordinary budget cuts. UN DESA joined efforts with National Statistical Offices (NSOs), government agencies, international organizations, civil society, and the private sector around the world, to ensure that the best quality data and statistics are available to help address the crisis. This includes tracking the evolution of the disease, monitoring its social and economic impacts, and supporting governments' mitigation and recovery plans. As part of the 36-member Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities, the Department contributed to a series of reports entitled **How COVID-19 is changing the world: a statistical perspective**, which offer a snapshot of differential success in mitigating the pandemic across countries. The series has reached more than 50,000 readers since its release, providing insight into good practices and effective policies.

Conducted in collaboration with the World Bank and the UN Regional Commissions, a three-phase survey of NSOs assessed the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on statistical operations, and the responses by NSOs to the mounting challenges. UN DESA's capacity development efforts continued to support NSOs to integrate innovative and experimental sources, methods, and technologies to make crucial data open and easily accessible to all sectors of society.

In the white paper, **COVID-19: Ready to Respond**, UN DESA highlighted how Member States used integrated geospatial information to understand and respond to the impact of COVID-19. Prepared in the Department's role

as Secretariat of the United Nations Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management (UN-GGIM), the paper outlined how, from early on, researchers and governments have been making use of highly visual geospatial data and applications to record and report the virus' spread. With the virus inherently anchored to geographic locations, response to the virus is also about location. For decision-makers it means understanding and communicating where to deploy and strengthen healthcare services, hospitals, and medical supply chains, and mitigate the economic impact. This effort by the geospatial community and UN DESA continues as the focus shifts now towards disseminating vaccines.

Developing new and progressive methodological guidelines

Since 2018, UN DESA has led a revision of the statistical framework and methodological development of the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting–Ecosystem Accounting (SEEA EA). The SEEA EA enables countries to measure their natural capital and understand the contributions of nature to our prosperity. The Department

engaged over 100 experts to contribute to 23 discussion papers, and consulted with more than 500 additional experts in finalizing the framework. The SEEA EA takes a spatial approach and provides a framework for measuring the extent and health of ecosystems, as well as the services they provide to humanity. UN DESA's coordination of the 3-year revision process led to the submission of the draft text to the 52nd session of the United Nations Statistical Commission in March 2021, culminating in the adoption of SEEA EA as an international statistical standard, a critical step for introducing measures into national accounting systems to complement GDP.

UN DESA also continued to deliver important guidance for chief statisticians across the world for maintaining statistical capacity that meets current and evolving needs. The department guided preparation of the new **Handbook on Management and Organization of National Statistical Systems**, which was endorsed by the UN Statistical Commission in March 2021. The Handbook is a living document that will be updated with new practices and challenges including through the outcomes of a series of upcoming regional thematic conferences.

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FACILITATING MULTILATERAL ACTIONS AND DECISIONS

Integrating statistical and geospatial information in decision-making

UN DESA in 2020-2021 provided secretariat support to four data-related intergovernmental processes: The Statistical Commission, the UN Committee of Experts for Global Geospatial Information Management (UN-GGIM), the UN Group of Experts for Geographical Names (UNGEGN), and the Commission on Population and Development.

The substantive work of these bodies enables the development of statistical standards, norms and data processes to support the collection, production, and management of sound data for policy-making. The National Statistical Offices and National Geospatial Information Agencies were represented in these intergovernmental bodies and collaborated to integrate statistical and geospatial information and had a commensurate impact in responding to COVID-19 by informing decision-makers and communicating to people on necessary actions.

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PLACING WOMEN AT THE CENTRE

World's Women 2020: Tracking data on gender equality

The Secretary-General's flagship report **The World's Women 2020: Trends and Statistics** presents the latest assessment of progress towards gender equality. It is a collection of 100 brief data-driven stories, accompanied by a geospatial data hub, all presented on an interactive portal.

Gender equality was analysed in six critical areas: population and families; health; education; economic empowerment; power and decision-making; violence against women and girls, all impacted by COVID-19. The report shows that despite some slow progress over time, no country has achieved gender equality. The report is the outcome of an unprecedented partnership spearheaded by UN DESA, including more than 30 national statistical offices, Regional Commissions, and international agencies. The collaboration enabled the report to zoom into gender data also at the national and sub-national levels.

UN DESA further contributed to developing new data reporting guidelines in the area of demographics. As the custodian agency for SDG indicator 3.7.2 on adolescent birth per 1,000 women, UN DESA had previously reported only on adolescent fertility for young women aged 15-19 years. In October 2020, UN DESA organized an expert group meeting on the evaluation of adolescent fertility data and estimates, which developed recommendations with a view to also report on adolescent fertility at ages 10-14 years. In May 2021, an expert group meeting on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on fertility aimed to support the official United Nations population estimates and projections by identifying mechanisms through which the COVID-19 pandemic may affect fertility, assessing recent data on marriage, fertility preferences, family planning and births; and providing recommendations to estimate the impact of the pandemic on fertility levels and trends.

Strengthening national statistical capacities

Starting in 2016, UN DESA led a 10 million USD capacity development programme on statistics and data with the 10 implementing UN Secretariat entities of the UN Development Account. Several hundred activities were executed covering more than 130 countries, including 37 Least Developed Countries. The programme's success saw it extended until April 2021, beyond its original 2019 end date, with an additional 1.4 million USD in funding. The achievements included advancing gender statistics globally, improving poverty measurement in Latin America, providing e-learning on environment statistics in Africa, building skills for trade statistics in the Caribbean, modernizing the statistical system of Benin, and updating the Statistics Act of the Seychelles and the Kyrgyz Republic.

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> **On behalf of the National Statistical Committee (NSC) of the Kyrgyz Republic, I would like to express my gratitude for the long-term and fruitful collaboration with UNSD, aiming at strengthening the capacity of the NSC. The involvement […] has helped us in bringing to the attention […] the importance of the UN Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics to be translated into a modern statistical legislation, securing trust while supporting the modernization and resilience of official statistics in the Kyrgyz Republic.**
>
> **Akylbek Sultanov, Chairman of the NSC of the Kyrgyz Republic**

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STRENGTHENING PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS

Improving data governance

UN DESA has developed a new interactive online training course on data governance for sustainable development. While there is an increasing emphasis on the centrality of data in implementing the SDGs, data governance has not been given sufficient importance. UN DESA's online training course aims to help countries fill this gap.

Strengthening the collection of administrative data

UN DESA and the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data initiated the multi-stakeholder Collaborative on Use of Administrative Data for Statistics, consisting of countries and regional and international agencies. The Collaborative takes a cross-cutting approach to bring experiences from different thematic areas, countries and experts with different expertise. Administrative data collected by governments and service providers is increasingly important as a source for the production of official statistics in order to fill data gaps to monitor progress and implementation of the 2030 Agenda and to address emerging challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

BOOSTING PARTNERSHIPS AND MULTISTAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Building resilient and sustainable national data and information systems

On World Statistics Day 2020, UN DESA launched the Global Network of Data Officers and Statisticians, a new global professional network for data officers, statisticians, geospatial and other data experts. The Global Network and its webinar series aim to support governments to build resilient and sustainable national data and information systems for the full implementation of the SDGs and for other decision making. The Network serves to improve coordination and collaboration among peers and organizations, to connect existing but not necessarily well-connected networks and initiatives, and to provide and share information on capacity-building efforts globally. The Global Network has a broad and growing participation of 1,600 colleagues from National Statistical Systems, the UN System, NGOs, and Academia.

Assessing the deaths attributable to the pandemic

In February 2021, UN DESA and WHO came together to create the Technical Advisory Group on COVID-19 Mortality Assessment,

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bringing together over 30 experts from around the world and from different areas of specialization, including national statistical offices, health ministries, and academia, especially in the areas of demography, epidemiology and statistics. This technical advisory group supports efforts by WHO, UN DESA, and UN Member States to obtain accurate estimates of numbers of deaths attributable to the direct and indirect impacts of the pandemic.

With the changing age structure of societies as a key factor in determining the success of social and economic policy in the coming decades, UN DESA provided technical training in the collection of population data through census and surveys and population forecasting. The Department provided technical training to Georgia and Viet Nam in methodology and software for use in their national, regional, and municipal population projections. In the face of the limitations for in-person workshops, the Department developed a new approach of on-going remote, advisory support spanning several months, allowing for longer and more in-depth support as methods were applied.

Improving access to geospatial knowledge and skills

UN DESA made significant progress in improving and strengthening of nationally integrated geospatial information management in six target countries (Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Fiji, Mongolia, Nepal and Tonga). With the help of UN DESA, these countries have developed a practical basis to implement the Integrated Geospatial Information Framework, t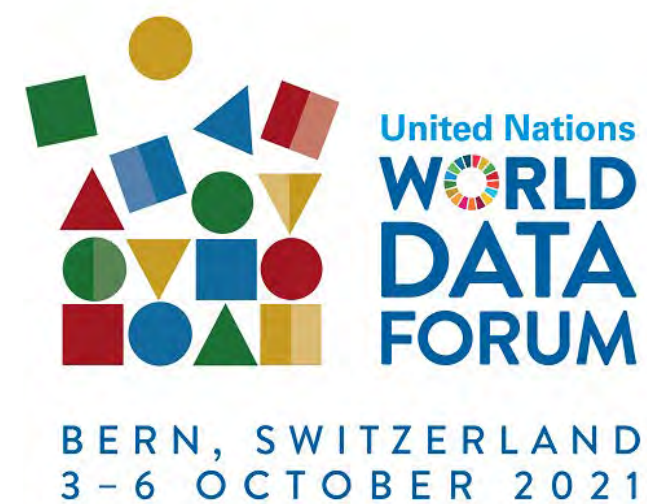he Global Statistical Geospatial Framework and other key guiding frameworks to better share and integrate official statistics and geospatial information, with other forms of national data and across national governments.

UN DESA, with the Government of China, established the UN Global Geospatial Knowledge and Innovation Centre in Deqing, China. The centre will provide opportunities to build and expand global geospatial capacity, competence and capability and strengthen geospatial information management arrangements in countries, especially developing countries.

Similarly, UN DESA and the government of Germany have agreed to establish the UN Global Geodetic Centre of Excellence in Bonn, Germany. The establishment of the Centre responds to a call by the UN General Assembly to engage in multilateral cooperation that addresses infrastructure gaps and duplications towards the development of a more sustainable Global Geodetic Reference Frame that leaves no-one behind. Geodesy plays a fundamental role in people's lives and is a foundation for evidence-based policies, decisions, and program delivery.

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United Nations
WORLD
DATA
FORUM

BERN, SWITZERLAND
3–6 OCTOBER 2021

Promoting peer-to-peer learning and collaboration

The United Nations World Data Forum 2020 was successfully transitioned from a planned in-person event for 1,500 participants to a virtual event which attracted more than 10,000 participants (40% under the age of 35) from more than 180 countries. The virtual programme contained 70 sessions with speakers from 300 organizations and covered a wide range of topics including data issues related to COVID-19, open data, citizen science, artificial intelligence, data privacy, communication, and funding. The Forum's virtual space also featured a youth documentary competition, an exhibit space, and networking opportunities.

The World Data Forum was organized around the quinquennial World Statistics Day which was coordinated by UN DESA and celebrated by NSOs around the world with the theme, *Connecting the world with data we can trust*, reflecting on the importance of trust, authoritative data, innovation, and the public good in national statistical systems.

Promoting statistical principles, integration of innovative data sources, and open data

UN DESA is supporting development and implementation of the UN Secretary-General's Data Strategy, which responds to the urgent need for the UN System to innovate and modernize the way data is compiled, integrated, presented, and communicated to users from multiple constituencies, and to maximize the value of data and statistics. The UN System plays a crucial role in supporting countries and in ensuring the quality, harmonization, and consistency of the data it curates and disseminates.

UN DESA, in partnership with Statistics Korea and ESCAP, organized the 6th International Conference on Big Data for Official Statistics. The conference focused on the COVID-19 response, Big Data and SDGs. The conference showcased the UN Global Platform and its regional hubs for Big Data in Brazil, China, Rwanda and the United Arab Emirates, which offer many opportunities for Big Data collaboration. The conference also highlighted how statistical institutes can acquire the right skills and capacities to fully benefit from use of new data sources and new technologies.

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SUPPORTING COUNTRIES IN SPECIAL SITUATIONS

Supporting LDC graduation

As the Secretariat of the Committee for Development Policy, UN DESA updates the official data for the Least Developed Countries (LDC) criteria. The Department obtains data from international agencies, and uses it to calculate criteria scores.

Despite limited statistical capacity in many LDCs and other developing countries, UN DESA seeks to ensure data coverage for all 143 developing countries and all 15 LDC indicators. Once the data indicates sufficient and sustained progress against the criteria, LDCs may start the process to graduate from the LDC status. In 2021 three additional countries were recommended for graduation. LDC criteria are also used, together with other criteria, to allocate ODA. UN DESA also published data fact sheets for all LDCs from the 2021 triennial review, updated time series estimates of the latest LDC criteria, and released a new set of supplementary graduation indicators.

DRIVING INNOVATION

Improving the efficiency of household survey systems

UN DESA responded quickly to the tremendous challenges to national household survey programmes caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. A survey by UN DESA and the World Bank found that 96% of national statistical offices either partially or fully stopped face-to-face data collection at some point during the pandemic. At the same time, there is an increased need for timely, high-quality data on the impacts of the pandemic, and heightened demands for more efficient household survey systems. UN DESA together with the Inter-Secretariat Working Group on Household Surveys (ISWGHS) and other expert groups leads discussions on how household surveys should be best positioned for the next decade. The ISWGHS developed the technical guidance note, **Planning and Implementing Household Surveys Under COVID-19**, a COVID-19 impact surveys dashboard, and the UN Expert Group on Innovative and Effective Ways to Collect Time-Use Statistics developed a survey instrument to inform policy makers on the impact of crises on people's daily life.

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A new dashboard on trade, travel and transport indicators was developed on the platform, tracking ships and airplanes world-wide, and allowing close monitoring of the economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. ARIES for SEEA was also launched on the platform, a state-of-the-art application that can generate ecosystem accounts for any region in the world.

The Department also develops training materials for big data and data science in official statistics. In 2021, hands-on training was provided remotely to Senegal and Uganda on the use of satellite data for crop statistics and for Cambodia in dissemination of national statistics and indicators using .STAT technology.

Leveraging big data: the UN Global Platform

Hosted by UN DESA, the UN Global Platform, is run by and for the global statistical community to enable statisticians, data scientists, and data engineers to develop new methods and applications using big data and data science.