

United Nations Statistical Commission

Sixty years of leadership and professionalism
in building the global statistical system

1947 - 2007



UNITED NATIONS

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Foreword

The United Nations Statistics Division extends its warmest welcome to the participants of the 60th anniversary session of the Statistical Commission. This special anniversary is indeed a milestone, and calls for both celebration and reflection. With this brochure we highlight the many achievements of the Statistical Commission in the last 60 years. After all, it was the Statistical Commission that laid the foundations of the global statistical system and keeps the system going in the midst of rapid changes taking place throughout the world.

Having met for the first time in 1947, the Commission was formally established as a functional body of the United Nations Economic and Social Council and given full responsibility for setting up its international work programme, to be implemented by the Statistics Division as its Secretariat. Its first concerns were to ensure professionalism and integrity in the national and international statistical services and to focus on the pressing issues of the development of statistical standards and methods, and the dissemination of available international statistics in a world recovering from global warfare. The urgency for such standardization and dissemination was especially critical at that time in the areas of statistics of international trade, industry, national accounts and demography.

As the post-war recovery period turned into a time of growth and prosperity, the Commission took up new challenges. In the 1950s and 1960s, decolonization became a central concern of the United Nations and in little over a decade, dozens of newly-independent States joined the fraternity of nations. The Commission led the way in calling for large-scale technical assistance to these countries to help them establish independent national statistical offices and their work programmes. These programmes typically were built upon the recommendations of the Commission in trade statistics, national accounts, population censuses and household surveys. In the majority of developing countries, remarkably extensive and successful programmes have been established and institutionalized. But in some others, especially the least developed ones, acute challenges remain and their needs continue to occupy critical slots in the Commission's annual agenda.

From the 1970s to the present day, the Commission has directed considerable attention to meeting new statistical needs in fields determined by global conferences on social and economic issues, such as the environment, equality of women, health for all, human settlements, social development and population, to name a few. The United Nations Millennium Summit in 2000 brought focus and impetus to the work of these conferences by agreeing on the Millennium Development Goals, and the Commission and the Statistics Division have achieved an unprecedented level of international cooperation to improve statistics and indicators needed to monitor the achievement of the goals, and ensure their reliable compilation and wide distribution.

As we enter the 21st century, the unparalleled pace and scope of globalization have posed new challenges for statisticians, such as the development of truly global economic statistics and improved coverage and greater details on the rapidly emerging international service sector. No less important, but requiring considerable innovation beyond the traditional methods and subjects familiar to official statisticians, is the need to develop tools for measuring the interaction and balance of economic development and the environment, the changes in the global economy, which is becoming increasingly borderless, and the changing definition of progress.

As the Statistical Commission enters its seventh decade, it can be proud of its achievements and confident that its work is more relevant than ever, as the demand for reliable and timely data to support policy decision making at all levels is constantly increasing. There can be no doubt that national and international official statistics, guided by the Statistical Commission, have contributed enormously to the understanding of national and global trends.

We at the United Nations Statistics Division are privileged to serve the Statistical Commission as its Secretariat. We are committed, as ever before, to continuing the advancement of the global statistical system with our best efforts.



PAUL CHEUNG
*Director,
Statistics Division*

1 Forging global cooperation in statistics

Professionalism, independence and participation of all countries

The Nuclear session of the Commission, in 1946, stressed the importance, in selecting members of the Commission, of “professional eminence, expert knowledge and experience in statistical work.”

League of Nations International Statistical Commission and Committee of Statistical Experts

By the end of World War I in Europe, statisticians in government and the academic world, and government ministries had come to understand the importance of reliable, comprehensive statistics on industry and international trade. They convinced the new League of Nations to consider the development of global statistics and the League, in response, convened an advisory “International Statistical Commission” in October 1920 to make recommendations on the League’s role.

The 1920 Commission stressed principles of professionalism and universal participation. An official “Assembly” under the League was proposed to provide a forum for “the statisticians of all nations to express their opinion upon matters of statistical importance. ... International statistical work [should be brought] into direct contact with the opinion of statisticians throughout the world.”

This Commission’s work led, in 1928, to the League’s convening a Statistical Conference of Governments, which produced the “International Convention relating to economic statistics”. The Convention specified in detail statistics and tables which the countries agreed to publish, comprising external trade, occupations, agriculture, livestock, forestry and fisheries, mining and metallurgy, industry and index numbers of prices. The League of Nations Committee of Statistical Experts took up methodological issues in implementing this agreement in its eight meetings from 1931 to 1939.

MILESTONES

The League of Nations, 1920-1939

- 1920 • International Statistical Commission convened by the League of Nations in Paris, 11 October
- 1928 • International Convention relating to economic statistics, signed at Geneva, 14 December
- 1931-1939 • Eight meetings of the League of Nations Committee of Statistical Experts

United Nations Statistical Commission

The “Nuclear”, or organizational, session of the Statistical Commission met at the United Nations temporary headquarters in Lake Success, New York, 20 miles east of Manhattan on Long Island, from 1-15 May 1946. The attendees were drawn from the world’s most respected ranks of professional statisticians: H. Campion from the United Kingdom, P.C. Mahalanobis from India, A. Sauvy from France, S.A. Rice from the United States and D.K. Lieu from China.

This session lost no time in preparing terms of reference for the new Statistical Commission and Statistical Office of the Secretariat, making arrangements to take over the statistical work of the League of Nations and proposing principles of coordination among the statistical services of the United Nations and its specialized agencies, and with non-governmental organizations such as the International Statistical Institute. It attached highest priority to promoting the development of national statistics and improvement of comparability, coordination with specialized agencies, the development of the Statistical Office and general improvement of statistics and statistical methods.

Professional integrity, objectivity and political independence were very much a concern of the Nuclear session, and it recommended that appointments to the Commission be made in an individual capacity, as had been done with the League of Nations Committee of Statistical Experts. This specific recommendation was not accepted by the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), which insisted on country selection of delegates. Nevertheless, experience has amply demonstrated that country delegations have always been headed by senior and experienced official statisticians of high professionalism, who have made common cause in maintaining and protecting the technical competence and objectivity of their deliberations in the Commission and in their work in their national offices. The value of broad participation and consultation has been shown many times over in ensuring broad applicability and adoption of Commission recommendations.

In addition, over the years membership has significantly expanded, from 12 countries elected by ECOSOC originally, to 24 today, and in the 1990s attendance by country observers, drawn by the importance and technical professionalism of the discussions, increased dramatically, from a handful in earlier years to over 70 observer delegations in 2006.

MILESTONES

United Nations Statistical Commission

- 1946 • First (“Nuclear”) session, held at Hunter College, New York, 1-15 May
- 1947 • First (regular) session, held in Lake Success, New York, 27 January-7 February
- 1994 • Special session, held in New York 11-14 April. Adopted the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics and reviewed technical cooperation in statistics and implementation of the 1993 System of National Accounts
- 1995 • Commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of international statistical work in the United Nations system. Twenty-eighth session, held in New York 27 February-3 March
- 1999 • Economic and Social Council resolution 1999/8, Functioning of the Statistical Commission, decided that the Commission should meet annually
- 2007 • Sixtieth anniversary of the Commission. Thirty-eighth session, to be held in New York 27 February-2 March

As attendance and the agenda have expanded, new methods of work have also been introduced. Sessions have focused more on policy guidelines and decisions and less on technical issues, which have been assigned to advisory groups, such as expert groups, Friends of the Chair, inter-agency and inter-secretariat groups and “city groups” on special statistical topics. Annual rather than biennial meetings were introduced in 1999 and use of advisory groups continued to expand.



In 2006, the Statistical Commission held its 37th session 7-10 March in the Economic and Social Council Chamber at United Nations Headquarters. A record number of observer delegations, 58, joined the 24 elected members for this session.

United Nations Statistics Division

The Statistical Commission at its Nuclear Session in 1946 stressed that the work of the new Statistical Office of the Secretariat should be based on highest standards of professionalism and technical proficiency. It stressed that "It is particularly important that the statistical unit of the Secretariat be staffed with personnel of the highest order of competence."

The general functions of the Statistical Office (now Statistics Division) of the Secretariat were sketched out at the Nuclear session and have remained relatively stable to the present time—technical work with the Commission on development and standardization of methodologies, international compilation and dissemination of statistics, technical cooperation with countries, coordination of international statistical services, and support of analytical applications in other offices of the Secretariat, such as development policy, population, environment, refugees, social development, equality of women, human settlements, drug control and peacekeeping.

Over the years, the ratio of clerical to professional staff has been relatively constant, about 55 to 45, but the total has fallen in the last two decades and the division of work has shifted. Professional staff now spend substantially more time on development of methods and technical cooperation with countries while clerical productivity has increased significantly. Professional staff have been called on to a much greater extent to fill gaps in technical cooperation caused by the decline in outside funding for technical cooperation staff which began in the early 1980s.

Like the Statistical Commission, the Statistics Division relies on a variety of consultative and technical advisory mechanisms for its work, including expert groups, interagency groups, collaboration with the "city groups" organized by the Commission on special statistical topics, workshops and seminars.

MILESTONES

United Nations Statistics Division

- 1951 • First directory of international statistics. *List of Statistical Series Collected by International Organizations*. Series M, No. 11
- 1966 • First Inter-Agency Meeting on Statistical Activities, held in Geneva from 11 to 14 July. Henceforth met annually as the Subcommittee on Statistical Activities of the United Nations Administrative Committee on Coordination. In 2003, became the Coordinating Committee on Statistical Activities
- 1975 • Revised *Directory of International Statistics*, Series M, No. 56. Comprised listings and explanations of international statistical services, series, standards, and computerized international statistics
- 1985 • Formation of the Inter-secretariat Working Group on National Accounts (ISWGNA), meeting twice annually
- 2002 • Formation of the Inter-agency and Expert Group on the Millennium Development Goals Indicators (IAEG), meeting twice annually
- 2006 • United Nations Project 21 awards for outstanding staff initiatives for the United Nations Comtrade database on Internet and Millennium Development Goals Indicators project



Photo: Ashok Rudra, *Prasanta Chandra Mahalanobis a biography*, Manzoor Khan, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, India, 1996

P.C. Mahalanobis and R. A. Fisher signing the register on the occasion of the award of medals at the 33rd session of the International Statistical Institute in Paris in 1961. Both were prominent participants in the early work of the Statistical Commission.

2 Tools of the trade

International standard classifications and definitions, and programme guidelines

“What people know about the world in which they live and the activities they are engaged in is in no small measure due to the fundamental role the UN has played in standardizing economic definitions, codes, classifications, and aggregation procedures in compiling national statistics.”

M. Ward
Quantifying the World—UN Ideas and Statistics

Ensuring consistency and continuity in statistics

A standard, controlled repertoire of statistical concepts, classifications and definitions is one of the official statistician's most important tools. Without it, there can be no continuity in statistics, rigorous testing of the results or comparison in time and space. As delegate J. Jahn of Norway put it at the first session of the Statistical Commission, "... uniformity of definitions and classifications... is an extremely difficult and important work ... [and] a matter of great urgency." Apart from organizational issues, statistical standards were among the Commission's first and highest priorities in its programme of work.

In its first few years, the Commission established international standard classifications for merchandise trade, industries and commodities, and endorsed comprehensive recommendations and guidelines for national population and housing censuses, national accounts and household sample surveys. Since the 1950s, it has established standards and guidelines for income distribution, vital statistics (in cooperation with the World Health Organization), social indicators, energy and environment statistics and environmental economic accounting.

Keeping the world's accounts

The international System of National Accounts (SNA) is probably the best-known of internationally agreed statistical standards. It comprises integrated concepts, classifications, definitions and tabulations relating to national income, production and consumption, for example gross and net national income and production (GNI, NNI and GDP).

SNA had its origins in the theoretical and analytical work of the British economist J. M. Keynes during the years of economic depression following World War I and in the enormous work of planning and managing the British economy for the war effort in 1939-1945.



The United Nations issues about ten publications each year of international statistical recommendations and programme guidelines, prepared at the Commission's request, in consultation with specialists and national offices. Most are also available on the United Nations Statistics Division Internet site.

In World War II, Keynes and his student Richard Stone saw first hand the value of good statistics on national economies through their service in support of industrial and labour force mobilization in the British government, and in the process gained a great deal of practical experience in their compilation. By the end of the war, Stone in cooperation with the United Nations was drafting the outline of a system of accounts, which was published in 1947, as requested by the Statistical Commission. "The Sub-Committee [of the Statistical Commission] hopes that the guiding principles and recommendations formulated in the Report and further elaborated in the Appendix will be applied to the widest possible extent in each country in the computation of national income and related accounts".

The third revision of the system, issued in 1968, substantially expanded the scope of the accounts by adding input-output accounts and balance sheets, giving more attention to estimates at constant prices and bringing SNA and the System of Material Product Balances of the Socialist countries closer together.

The fourth revision was approved by the Commission in 1993. Among other important changes, this version refined the definition of the production boundary to provide better coverage of household production including the informal sector, and create consistency with the balance of payments and other international financial statistics in cooperation with the International Monetary Fund. At its 2003 session, the Commission commissioned an update of the 1993 SNA to take into account new developments in the global economic environment such as outsourcing and environmental and economic accounting.

MILESTONES

National accounts and international comparisons

- 1947 • *Measurement of National Income and the Construction of Social Accounts. Report of the Sub-committee on National Income Statistics of the League of Nations Committee of Statistical Experts. Appendix: Definition and Measurement of the National Income and Related Totals. By Richard Stone. Studies and Reports on Statistical Methods, No. 7*
- 1953 • *A System of National Accounts and Supporting Tables. Series F, No. 2. Revisions were issued in 1960 and 1964 and completely new versions in 1968 and 1993 (Rev. 1 – Rev. 4). A new update is in preparation for publication in 2008*
- 1975 • *A System of International Comparisons of Gross Product and Purchasing Power. By Irving G. Kravis et al. for the United Nations Statistical Office, World Bank and International Comparison Unit of the University of Pennsylvania. World Bank/Johns Hopkins University Press*
- 1977-1981 • *Comparisons of the System of National Accounts and the System of Balances of the National Economy. Part One. Conceptual Relationships. Series F, No. 20. Part Two. Conversion of Aggregates of SNA to MPS and Vice Versa for Selected Countries. Series F, No. 20 (Part II)*
- 1977 • *Provisional Guidelines on Statistics of the Distribution of Income, Consumption and Accumulation of Households. Series M, No. 61*
- 1992 • *Handbook of the International Comparison Programme. Series F, No. 62*

Industry and trade statistics

- 1949 • *First International Standard Industrial Classification of all Economic Activities (ISIC). Series M, No. 4. The latest update was issued in 2003, Series M, No. 4, Rev. 3.1, and revision 4 is to be published in 2007*
- 1950 • *Standard International Trade Classification (SITC). Series M, No. 10. The latest revision was issued in 2006, Series M, No. 34, Rev. 4*
- 1970 • *International Trade Statistics; Concepts and Definitions, Series M, No. 52. Revision 1 was issued in 1982. Revision 2 was issued in 1998 as International Merchandise Trade Statistics; Concepts and Definitions*

MILESTONES

- 1974 • *Formation of the Expert Group on Harmonization of Statistical Classifications*
- 1991 • *Provisional Central Product Classification (CPC). Series M, No. 77. The final first version was issued in 1998 (Version 1.0) and a revised version was issued in 2003 (Version 1.1)*
- 2002 • *Manual on Statistics of International Trade in Services. Series M, No. 86*

Household sample surveys, levels of living and social statistics

- 1949 • *The Preparation of Sampling Survey Reports. Series C, No. 1. Prepared by Prof. G. Darmois, W. E. Deming, Prof. P. C. Mahalanobis, F. Yates and Prof. R. A. Fisher. Revised versions were issued in 1950 and 1964*
 - 1954 • *International Definition and Measurement of Standards and Levels of Living (United Nations publication (E/CN.3/179, Sales No. 1954.IV.5). Revised as An Interim Guide in 1961 (E/CN.3/270/Rev.1, Sales No. 61.IV.7)*
 - 1960 • *A Short Manual on Sampling, Vol. I, Elements of Sample Survey Theory. Series F, No. 9. A revised version was issued in 1972, Series F, No. 9, Rev. 1*
 - 1962 • *Statistical Indicators of Housing Conditions. Series M, No. 37*
 - 1964 • *Handbook of household surveys: A practical guide for inquiries on levels of living. Series F, No. 10. The Handbook was issued in a revised edition in 1984, Series F, No. 31*
 - 1974 • *Towards a System of Social and Demographic Statistics. Series F, No. 18*
 - 1989 • *Handbook on Social Indicators. Series F, No. 49*
 - 2005 • *Household Surveys in Developing and Transition Countries. Series F, No. 96*
 - 2007 • *Handbook on Poverty Statistics: Concepts, Methods and Policy Use (forthcoming)*
- Designing Household Survey Samples: Practical Guidelines (forthcoming)*

MILESTONES

Demographic statistics

- 1953 • *Principles for a Vital Statistics System—Recommendations for the Improvement and Standardization of Vital Statistics. Series M, No. 19. Revision 1 was issued in 1973 and Revision 2 in 2001*
- 1958 • *Principles and Recommendations for National Population Censuses and General Principles for a Housing Census, Series M, Nos. 27 and 28. Revised in 1967 as Principles and Recommendations for the 1970 Population Censuses and Principles and Recommendations for the 1970 Housing Censuses, Series M, Nos. 44 and 45. Revised and combined in one volume in 1980, Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses, Series M, No. 67, followed by a new revision in 1998*
- 1980 • *Recommendations on Statistics of International Migration. Series M, No. 58. A revised edition was issued in 1998*

Environment and energy statistics

- 1984 • *Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics. Series F, No. 56*
- 1987 • *Energy Statistics: Definitions, Units of Measure and Conversion Factors. Series F, No. 44.*
- 1993 • *Integrated Environmental and Economic Accounts—Interim Version. Series F, No. 61. Final version to be issued in 2007*



An enumerator visiting a household during the Population and Housing Census of Tanzania in 2002. The United Nations has provided financial and technical assistance to over 60 countries for population and housing censuses since 1946.

3 Taking the pulse of globalization

Continuous dissemination of comparable international statistics since 1921

“The availability of worldwide data is a relatively modern phenomenon... Apart from basic statistics on population and demography and records of international trade in goods [in the industrialized countries], little official information was disseminated before World War II.”

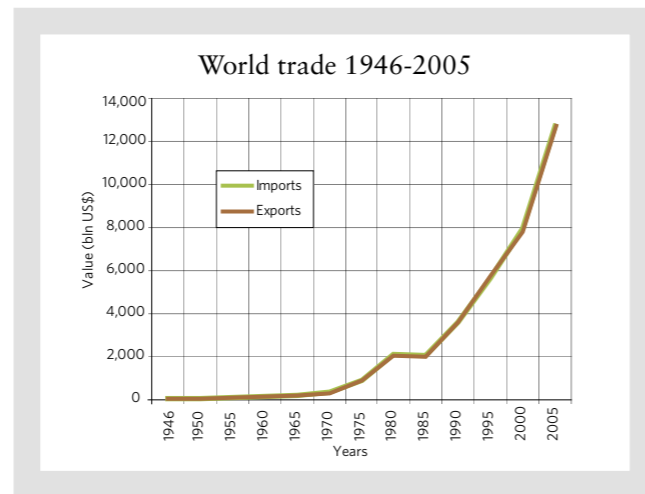
M. WARD
*Quantifying the World—
UN Ideas and Statistics*

The first session of the Commission approved the United Nations taking over from the League of Nations continuing publication of the *Statistical Yearbook* and *Monthly Bulletin of Statistics* (which focussed on international trade and finance, and primary commodities). There was no significant break in the publication of the *Monthly Bulletin of Statistics* as it moved from the League of Nations to the United Nations. The first United Nations *Statistical Yearbook*, completely revised from the League's yearbook, came out in 1948.

The first three sessions of the Commission also outlined and approved new publication programmes for national accounts (a concise compilation of available data was published in 1948 and the first yearbook in 1951), demographic statistics (first issued in 1949), and energy statistics (the first compilation, which included historical data from 1929, was issued in 1952).

Merchandise trade statistics

In the field of trade statistics, the Commission was anxious to reorganize and expand coverage and quickly prepared a minimal list of commodities for use in compiling a revised trade yearbook, which was first issued in 1951. The first issue provided data for 42 countries, 1938-1950, by country and by commodity and totaled 174 pages. By comparison the latest yearbook provides data for 180 countries and areas and 257 commodities, plus analytical tables, in two volumes, which total nearly 2,000 pages.



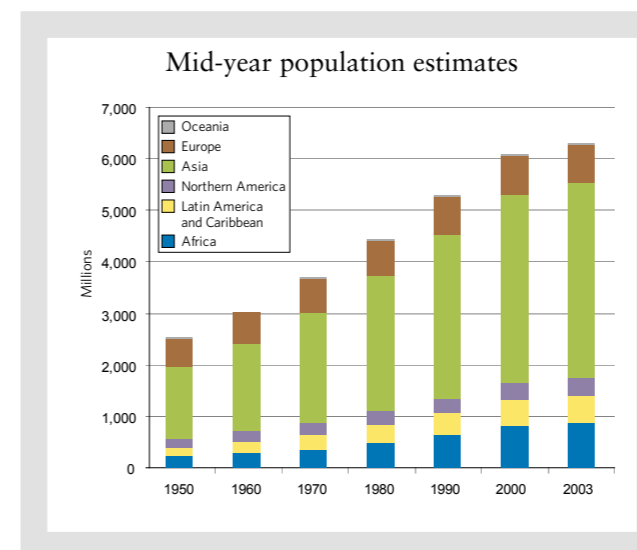
Source: United Nations Comtrade Database

International merchandise trade increased by a factor of 10 from 1946 to 1970 (to about \$US340 billion in exports), and by 37 times from 1970 to 2005, while global economic production increased by about 7 times in constant 1990 dollars from 1950 to 2001.

Population and housing censuses

Population statistics compiled in the *Demographic Yearbook* from national population and housing censuses are among the most complete and comprehensive data sources in international statistics. As a basis for their massive reconstruction programmes following World War II, countries were anxious to have up-to-date, reliable, detailed statistics on their populations, including the populations of colonies and territories. The first *Demographic Yearbook*, for 1949, provided coverage of the world's countries and areas which was nearly as complete as coverage today. Only a small number of countries of Africa and Asia were missing.

As decolonization proceeded in the 1950s, the Statistical Commission and Statistics Division were active in providing technical assistance to ensure continuity of census work in the newly independent countries as they organized their governments and planned their future. Still, some countries have not been able to keep their censuses up to date. Fifteen countries in Africa and five in Asia have not had a census in the most recent decade 1995 to the present.



Source: United Nations Demographic Yearbook

The increase in the rate of growth of world population peaked at two per cent per year in 1968 in the developed regions and 2.7 per cent in 1993 in the developing. It dropped to 0.3 per cent per year in 2005 in the developed and 2.4 per cent per year in the developing.

Information technology— towards a global data network

In the United Nations Statistics Division, as in national statistical offices, the development of modern computing and compilation and processing of official statistics have gone hand in hand in pioneering computing and information technologies.

The United Nations received its first mainframe computer, an IBM 7044/1401, in 1965, and the New York Computer Services office was established to operate it. In 1971, NYCS was complemented by the establishment by a consortium of international agencies of the International Computing Centre in Geneva. The Statistics Division was from the beginning one of the major users of both systems, particularly as the trade statistics database (Comtrade) was introduced at ICC, with comprehensive trade data from 1962. In New York, a series of programs in specific fields was built up and eventually consolidated at NYCS in the early 1980s as the United Nations Statistical Information System (UNSI) for basic processing and production of most of the yearbooks, and a dedicated system was developed for the *Demographic Yearbook*. Outside user access for United Nations Comtrade and UNSIS was made available in 1986, targeting especially national governments, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and the World Bank.

In 1984 the Division purchased its first IBM personal computer and the transition to a new era of information technology began. United Nations headquarters established its first local area network in 1992 and the migration to decentralized servers

MILESTONES

- Monthly Bulletin of Statistics, Statistical Yearbook and United Nations Common Database (UNCDB)**
- 1919 • *Monthly Bulletin of Statistics*. Published by the Supreme Economic Council of the Allied and Associated Powers until 1921, then by the League of Nations to mid-1946 and subsequently by the United Nations
 - 1927 • *International Statistical Yearbook*. Published by the League of Nations until 1945
 - 1948 • First issue of the United Nations *Statistical Yearbook*
 - 1992 • *Monthly Bulletin of Statistics Online*
 - 1993 • First *Statistical Yearbook* on CD-ROM
 - 1999 • United Nations Common Database becomes available on Internet
 - 2006 • *Statistical Yearbook* fiftieth edition
- International merchandise trade and trade in services**
- 1934 • League of Nations *International Trade Statistics* (annual until 1944)
 - 1951 • First United Nations *Yearbook of International Trade Statistics*
 - 1965 • Installation at the International Computing Centre, Geneva, of the first United Nations mainframe computer (an IBM 7044/1401), for trade statistics processing
 - 2005 • Full United Nations Comtrade database accessible on Internet
 - Pilot release on Internet of United Nations International Trade in Services Database
- National income and national accounts**
- 1948 • *National Income Statistics of Various Countries, 1938-1947*
 - 1951 • *Statistics of National Income and Expenditure*. Series H. Became the *Yearbook of National Accounts Statistics* with the 1957 issue, published in two volumes, *Individual Country Data* and *International Tables*. Series X

and desk-top applications quickly gathered momentum in the Statistics Division. By 2000, virtually all statistical applications had been reworked and transferred to the Division's PC network except United Nations Comtrade. By the end of 2005 the United Nations Comtrade transition was completed and mainframe use was discontinued altogether.

Close behind the local area network revolution was the Internet revolution. The Division worked with the Department of Public Information in setting up the first secretariat-wide web site in 1995 and organized its own site as well, covering the Division's entire work programme. The *Monthly Bulletin of Statistics* was one of the first international statistical publications to become available on Internet. Internet dissemination reached a higher level of sophistication and integration with the release of the first-generation United Nations Common Database in 1999, incorporating selected data from throughout the UN system and not readily available in print, with a new-generation user-friendly interface. A second generation version of the Common Database was completed in 2006. In 2007, a new data retrieval system will be completed to provide for the first time web services for the Division's statistical partners to exchange data using standardized data exchange protocols.

MILESTONES

1987 • The two volumes of the *Yearbook* were renamed *National Accounts Statistics, Main Aggregates and Detailed Tables* and *National Accounts Statistics, Analysis of Main Aggregates*

1992 • *Trends in International Distribution of Gross World Product, 1970-1989—National Accounts Statistics, Special Issue, Series X, No. 18*

2004 • National Accounts Main Aggregates Database accessible on Internet

Demographic and housing statistics

1949 • First *Demographic Yearbook*

First issue of *Population and Vital Statistics Report, Series A* (quarterly; biannually from 2004)

1974 • First *Compendium of Housing Statistics, Series N* (quinquennial). In 1985 became the *Compendium of Human Settlements Statistics*

1985 • First Statistics Division publication prepared entirely on PC. *Statistical Indicators on Youth, Series Y, No. 1*

2000 • Fiftieth issue of the *Demographic Yearbook*

Demographic Yearbook Historical Supplement 1948-1997, CD-ROM

Energy

1952 • First issue of *World Energy Supplies* (annual). Covered selected years, 1929-1950. Series J, No. 1. From 1979, *Yearbook of World Energy Statistics*; from 1983, *Energy Statistics Yearbook*

1983 • *Energy Balances and Electricity Profiles, Series W* (biennial)

Industrial statistics

1960 • *Patterns of Industrial Growth 1938-1958, Series P, No. 1*

1965 • *The Growth of World Industry 1938-1961—International Analyses and Tables, Series P, No. 3*

1968 • First issue of *Industrial Commodities Statistics Yearbook, Series P*



Photo: JiaShipphoto.dk

Standard shipping containers for land and sea transport only came into general use in 1956 but now are used for the bulk of international trade in manufactured goods. The Emma Maersk is the largest container ship in the world and is shown above at Rotterdam, the world's largest port.

4 Facts vs. perceptions

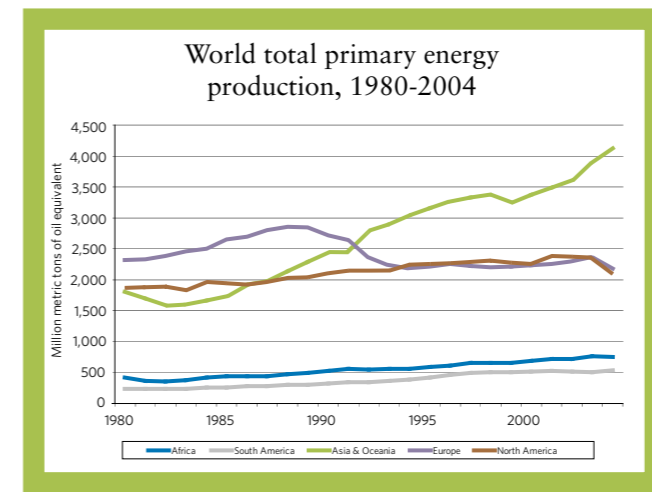
What gets measured is what gets done!

“In today's world with continuous technological progress and huge accumulation of wealth, the gap between North and South keeps widening and hunger and poverty still run amock in many developing countries.”

Press release of the People's Republic of China Mission to the United Nations on eradication of poverty and other development issues, 10 November 2006

Development statistics and the global conferences

The topic of development statistics was brought to the Statistical Commission's agenda in 1971, when the Economic and Social Council in its resolution 1566(L) called for "special regard to reviewing and appraising economic and social progress" in connection with implementation of the Second United Nations Development Decade. In response to this resolution and repeated calls for improved statistics from the series of global



Source: United Nations Energy Statistics Yearbook.

Primary energy production was about the same in the developed regions in 2005 as in 1990, but increased substantially in the developing regions, especially Asia (including western Asia).

MILESTONES

1963 • *Compendium of Social Statistics, Series K* (quinquennial until 1991)

1970 • General Assembly resolution 2626(XXV), International Development Strategy for the Second United Nations Development Decade

1971 • ECOSOC resolution 1566(L), Co-ordination of work in the field of statistics [and the Second United Nations Development Decade]

1976 • *World Statistics in Brief, Series V* (annual)

1991 • *The World's Women, Trends and Statistics, Series K* (quinquennial)

1996 • Statistics and Indicators on Women and Men Web site launched on Internet with annual updating

Social Indicators Web site launched on Internet with quarterly updating

2000 • ECOSOC resolution 2000/27, Basic indicators for the integrated and coordinated implementation of and follow-up to major United Nations conferences and summits at all levels

2003 • General Assembly resolution 57/270B, Integrated and coordinated implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic and social fields

Indicators for Monitoring the Millennium Development Goals—Definitions, Rationale, Concepts and Sources, Series F, No. 95. Millennium Development Goals Indicators Web site launched on Internet with biennial updating

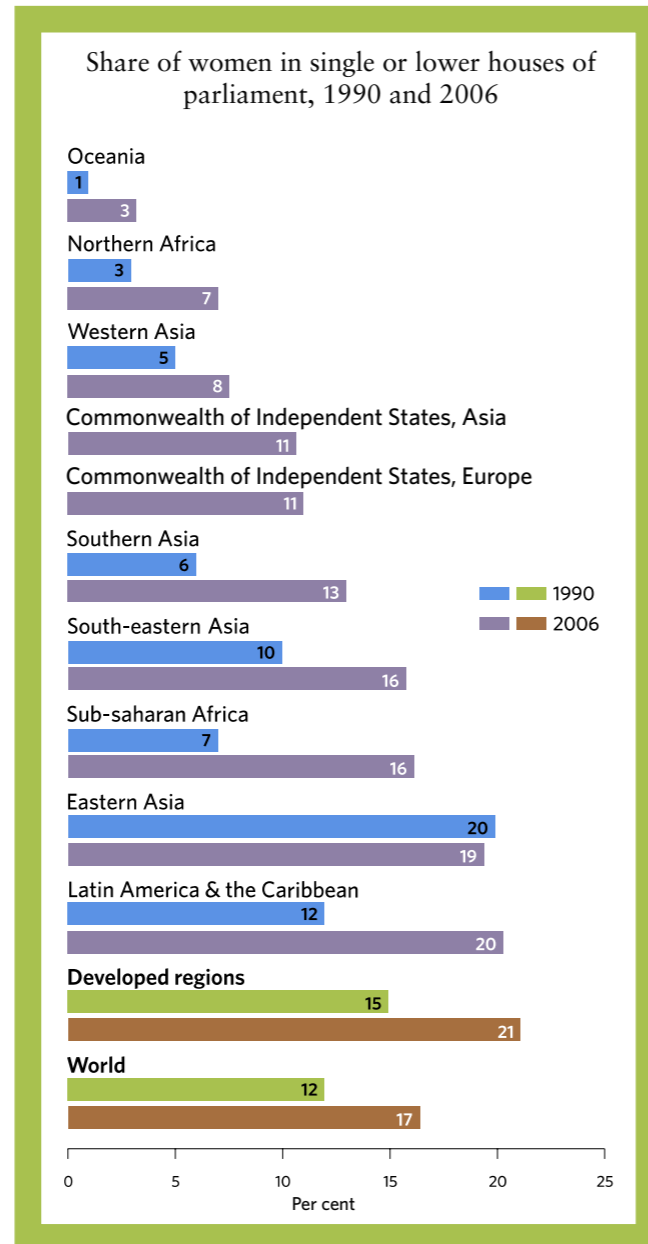
2005 • *The Millennium Development Goals Report* (annual)

conferences on global development issues which began in 1972, the Commission has become the international focal point for developing and harmonizing statistics and indicators for monitoring internationally agreed development goals.

One of the first global conferences to lay out a clear statistics agenda was the World Conference of the International Women's Year, held in Mexico City in 1975. It agreed, "adequate data and information are essential in formulating policies and evaluating progress and in effecting attitudinal and basic social and economic change. A scientific and reliable data base should be established and suitable economic and social indicators urgently developed which are sensitive to the particular situation and needs of women as an integral part of national and international programmes of statistics."

Follow-up world conferences on women and in many other fields adopted similar language on statistics and indicators needed for monitoring implementation and achievement of programmes of action, including energy, environment, human settlements, disability, youth, agriculture and rural development, health, education, social development and the elimination of poverty, and population. Key, overarching goals and targets were summarized in the recommendations of the United Nations Millennium Summit in 2000. The Commission responded to this series of conferences with studies on the implications for statistics of the World Summit for Social Development in 1995 (document E/CN.3/1995/20), an expert group meeting in 1996 on the implications for statistics of major United Nations conferences generally (document E/CN.3/AC.1/1996/R.4) and a report in 2005 of the Friends of the Chair on Millennium Development Goals indicators (document E/CN.3/2006/15), and its 2006 draft resolution for ECOSOC on strengthening statistical capacity (E/RES/2006/6).

On the complex measurement issues for the MDG indicators covering poverty, hunger, education, health, status of women, forests, urban slums, youth employment, new technologies and development assistance, the Statistical Commission and Inter-agency and Expert Group on MDG Indicators have provided an effective focal point for consultation and cooperation with countries and among United Nations agencies including the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, International Labour Organization, International Telecommunications Union, United Nations Children's Fund, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, United Nations Human Settlements Programme, United Nations Population Fund, World Bank, World Health Organization, Inter-Parliamentary Union, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development and World Trade Organization.



Source: United Nations Statistics Division, *Millennium Development Goals 2006 Report*, based on statistics compiled by the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

5 Strengthening statistical capacity in countries

“Without a coordinated effort to enhance and sustain statistical capability in many developing countries and countries with economies in transition, effective monitoring of progress towards national as well as internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals, is being compromised.”

Economic and Social Council Resolution 2006/6

Technical cooperation in the first decades

Since its inception, the Commission has promoted technical cooperation with countries to develop sustainable, professional statistical organizations and programmes including population and housing censuses, household sample surveys, national accounts, merchandise trade, statistics on women and men, vital statistics, advanced data processing and information technologies, and statistical organization.

The statistical programmes which have received the most United Nations support at the national level have been the World Population and Housing Programme, the National Household Survey Capability Programme, national accounts and statistical organization, but advisory services and technical meetings have been organized in virtually all fields of work in the Statistics Division. Libraries of publications in the form of handbooks, guides, training manuals and the like have been prepared to assist country work in these fields.

The Commission took stock of early progress at its 1953 session. From 1949 to 1953, the principal agencies of the United Nations system fielded 85 consultants in all regions, with the greatest numbers in demographic statistics, agricultural statistics, economic statistics and statistical organization. In 1975, advisory services provided by the Statistics Division reached a peak with a total of over 1,700 work-months provided.

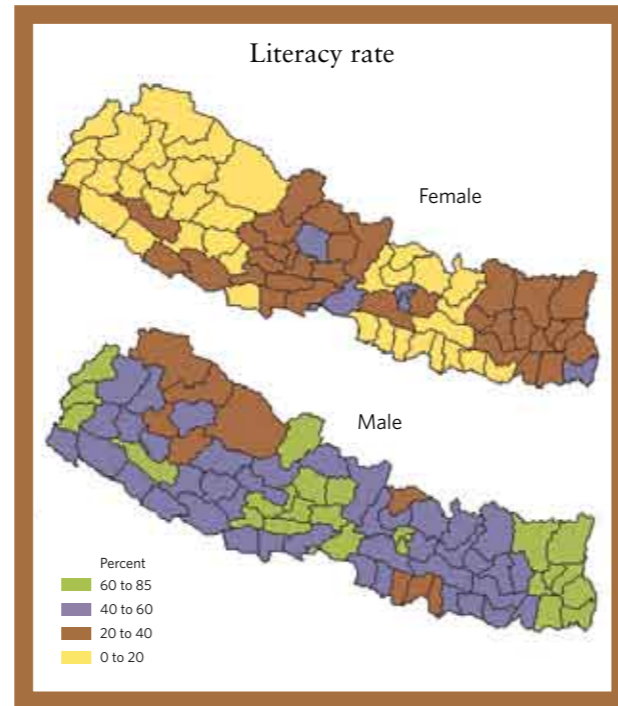
MILESTONES

- 1953 • Memorandum of the Secretary-General for the Statistical Commission at its seventh session, "Assistance in implementation of recommendations and improvement of national statistics". Part IV and annex tables
- 1973 • Interregional Seminar on Statistical Organization. *Report and Proceedings of the United Nations Interregional Seminar on Statistical Organization* (Ottawa, mimeo.)
- 1976 • ECOSOC resolution 2055(LXII), National Household Capability Programme
- 1977 • *The Organization of National Statistical Services—A Review of Major Issues*. Series F, No. 21. Revised and expanded versions were issued as *Handbook of Statistical Organization—A Study of the Organization of National Statistical Services* in 1982, Series F, No. 28, and *Handbook of Statistical Organization, Third Edition: The Operation and Organization of a Statistical Agency* in 2003, Series F, No. 88
- 1978 • Report of the Secretary-General for the twentieth session of the Statistical Commission, "International technical cooperation in statistics", 1979-1983 (E/CN.3/523)
- 1979 • ECOSOC resolution 1979/5, National Household Survey Capability Programme
- 1994 • Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics adopted by the Statistical Commission at its Special Session
- 1999 • "Practical guidelines for good practices in technical cooperation for statistics" endorsed by the Statistical Commission at its 30th session (E/CN.3/1999/19)
- 2003 • First regional Training Workshop on Data and Indicators to Monitor Progress Towards the Millennium Development Goals, held in Nairobi 22-26 September 2003. *Proceedings*. United Nations Statistics Division and African Population and Health Research Centre. CD-ROM
- 2006 • ECOSOC resolution 2006/6, Strengthening statistical capacity

About half of the assistance in the early 1970s was in demographic statistics, mainly censuses and related data processing, largely supported by the United Nations Population Fund, with additional substantial support from the United Nations Development Programme. United Nations expenditures in this period peaked at about \$14 million per year. As a result, the United Nations was instrumental in the 1950s through 1980s in supporting censuses, often the first census by modern standards, in the majority of the world's developing countries, and in the installation of those countries' first automated data processing systems.

Technical cooperation and capacity-building in statistics

By the late 1970s, the emphasis had begun to shift towards household surveys, as reflected in ECOSOC resolutions of 1976 and 1979 on the National Household Survey Capability Programme (NHSCP), with many agencies besides the Statistics Division and UNFPA providing substantial support. By 2006, frequent and wide-ranging household surveys have become a standard tool of national offices, with probably several hundred successfully conducted in developing countries every year with substantial support from United Nations Children's Fund, United Nations Population Fund, United Nations Development Programme, World Bank and bilateral agencies, especially the United States in the Demographic and Health Surveys.



Source: *Geographical Information Systems for Population Statistics* (United Nations, 1997)

Literacy rates in Nepal by sex and district based on the 1991 population census. New technologies for geographical information systems (GIS) are now being widely adopted in developing regions for data compilation, integration and analysis of data across sources such as population and housing censuses, household surveys and administrative service records, with technical assistance from the United Nations.

For the first time in history, the nations of the world had declared through the UN Charter that they were intent upon improving all of humankind, but this could not be done without proper knowledge of social, economic, and demographic facts. Given the disruptions of the Second World War, the UN's founders felt they were groping in the dark, so it is not surprising that as early as February 1946, the ECOSOC set up a Statistical Commission. Assembling statistics, studying how to define what is an equitable 'standard of living,' measuring population growth and fertility rate, and studying plant loss or climate change may seem arcane scientific procedures. But they would ultimately provide the data that would accompany major international actions and legislation, particularly as regards the developing world.

– Paul Kennedy, *The Parliament of Man* (Random House, 2006)