



## BETTER DATA BETTER LIVES

6–9 March 2018  
United Nations, New York

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 #UN49SC

### The power of data to improve our lives

Statistics, numbers, figures – they tell the story of our lives. How well we live, and how well we take care of ourselves, each other and the environment. Through data, for example, we know how healthy people are, how many people live in poverty worldwide, how many children are not able to go to school, and where we stand on gender equality and our efforts to combat climate change.

Having all the needed data is critical for the international community to properly evaluate the current state of the world and to determine how best to move forward, improving peoples' lives. As UN Secretary-General António Guterres recently put it, "accurate data is the lifeblood of good policy and decision-making."

As nations across the globe strive to fulfill their commitment to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the availability, timeliness and accuracy of data is more important than ever. Only with high-quality data can we formulate the policies to bring the necessary change, and know if we are on the right track and if we are progressing fast enough to meet our goals by 2030.

### 232 global indicators help us track SDGs progress

On 6-9 March 2018, statisticians from around the globe will come together at UN Headquarters for the 49th Session of the UN Statistical Commission. As in previous sessions, this year's event is expected to draw a large number of data experts with one goal in common – to ensure that reliable data is collected to help serve nations and people across the world.

One of the top items on a busy Commission agenda is on the data and indicators to measure SDGs progress. These 232 global indicators developed to help follow up and review the 17 goals and 169 targets of the 2030 Agenda, are the result of tireless efforts by the global statistical community through the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators.

“I commend the UN Statistical Commission, the Inter-agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators, and the Statistics Division of UN DESA, for their mammoth efforts preparing this framework,” said Peter Thomson, President of the 71st Session of the General Assembly, when the framework was adopted by the UN General Assembly in July 2017.

“It will help all of us to measure what we truly value; to keep our promise to leave no one behind and, most importantly, to ensure accountability for the lofty commitments made in September 2015,” Mr. Thomson said.

## Data hubs and platforms for innovation

In addition to data for the SDGs, a variety of topics are up for discussion and decision by this year’s Commission including open data, big data and statistics on climate change, refugees, disability, work and employment, and agricultural and rural statistics.

In keeping with tradition, the official session will be preceded by the Friday Seminar on Emerging Issues on 2 March, taking place under the theme “The Data Revolution in Action: Building a Federated System of SDG Data Hubs and Collaborative Platforms for Innovation.”

To meet the challenges that measuring the SDGs brings, the seminar will explore the need to build a modern statistical infrastructure, as well as ways to integrate SDG data and information platforms with each other to support policy and decision-making at all levels.

## Bringing trusted data to the public

In addition to the Friday Seminar and a number of other side events, UN DESA’s Statistics Division will also organize the High-level Forum on Official Statistics on Monday 5 March.

Taking place under the theme “Communicating data and statistics: Bringing trusted and actionable data to the public, the media and policy-makers,” the Forum will shine a light on the need to communicate data more effectively to help policy makers, the media and the general public identify, understand, and make full use of trusted sources of data and statistics to support development efforts.

When we increase statistical literacy and improve our communication surrounding data, we allow citizens to better understand the world around them. We then also enhance the understanding of data and its role to realize the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, making our world a better place. Because with better data, we have a chance to live better lives.

For more information:

[49th Session of the UN Statistical Commission](#)

[Side events at the UN Statistical Commission](#)

[Sustainable Development Goals Report 2017](#)

## Sustainable Development Goals indicators



## Water decade kicks off, sending waves of action for sustainability

There is a global water crisis. 40 percent of the world's people are affected by water scarcity and two billion people are forced to drink unsafe water. Pressure on the world's precious freshwater resources is rising and the need for action is urgent. Managing water well is essential for the international community to deliver the promise of the

2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Without this, most of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) cannot be achieved. Every drop matters.

It's time to change our approach to water. That is why the UN Secretary-General and World Bank President asked eleven Heads of Government and State and a Special Adviser to form the High Level Panel on Water, providing leadership and direction to efforts to achieve the water-related goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

It is also against this backdrop that the International Decade (2018–2028) for Action – Water for Sustainable Development will kick off on World Water Day on 22 March, putting a greater focus on water and sanitation during the next ten years.

Water and sanitation are critical for sustainable development and the eradication of poverty and hunger, and is indispensable for human development, health and well-being. Water-related challenges, including limited access to safe water and sanitation, increasing pressure on water resources and ecosystems, and an exacerbated risk of droughts and floods, have received increasing attention in the global development arena.

Water is at the heart of recent milestone agreements such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030, and the 2015 Paris Agreement. The World Economic Forum ranks the water crisis in the top three of global risks for the third consecutive year. Failing to respond effectively to these challenges will have devastating global effects.

To be successful, Member States and the United Nations system will need to respond in a coordinated and effective manner. In its resolution 71/222, the General Assembly proclaims the period from 2018 to 2028 the International Decade for Action, “Water for Sustainable Development”, to further improve cooperation, partnership and capacity development in response to the ambitious 2030 Agenda.

This Water Action Decade will focus on the sustainable development and integrated management of water resources and sanitation to achieve social, economic and environmental objectives and to implement and promote related programmes and projects, as well as to advance cooperation and partnership at all levels to achieve internationally agreed water-related goals and targets, including those contained in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

These objectives will be pursued by improving knowledge generation and dissemination, facilitating access to knowledge and the exchange of good practices; developing new information relevant to water-related Sustainable Development Goals; pursuing advocacy, networking and promoting partnerships and action by different actors; and, strengthening communication actions at various levels for the implementation of the water-related Goals.

The UN Secretary-General, with the support of UN-Water, was invited to take appropriate steps within existing resources to plan and organise the activities of the Decade at the global, regional and country levels. The Resolution further requested the UN Secretary-General, with the support of UN-Water, the specialized agencies, the regional commissions and other entities of the UN system, to facilitate the implementation of the Decade in cooperation with Governments and other relevant actors.

The President of the General Assembly will formally launch the International Decade (2018–2028) for Action – Water for Sustainable Development on 22 March at UN Headquarters in New York, where the action plan of the Water Action Decade will be presented and discussed by Member States and panellists, as well as other actors present, who are eager to accelerate progress on water related goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda. Making every drop count.

For more information:

[UN Water](#)

[Water Action Decade – 2018-2028](#)

[UN DESA's Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform – Water and sanitation](#)

[Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#)

## HIGHLIGHTS



### Safeguarding the world's forests – our best bet for sustainable societies

10,000 years ago, at the end of the last great ice age, 6 billion hectares of forests covered 45 per cent of the Earth's land. Over the last 5,000 years, 1.8 billion hectares were lost, and most of this loss, 1.4 billion hectares, happened in the last 300 years. Today, forests cover about one third of land on

our planet. An estimated 75% of global forest loss and degradation today, can be attributed to deforestation for agricultural expansion. Per FAO figures, by 2050 global agriculture production will increase by 60%, and meat production by 76%. Meeting this

global demand for food, without impacting forests and taking environmental risks, poses a significant challenge.

In the past two years, we have seen a groundswell of support for forests. Starting with the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2015 and culminating in the adoption of the UN Strategic Plan for Forests 2030 by the UN General Assembly last year, the message from the international community has been loud and clear – now is the time to invest in reversing forest loss, increasing forest area – to create a greener, cleaner, future for us all.

SDG 15 of the 2030 Agenda calls upon us to “protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss” by 2030. The UN Strategic Plan for Forests 2030, envisions “a world in which all types of forests and trees outside forests are sustainably managed, contribute to sustainable development and provide economic, social, environmental and cultural benefits for present and future generations.”

The Strategic Plan includes 6 Global Forest Goals and 26 associated targets, including groundbreaking targets to increase forest area globally by 3 per cent or 120 million hectares, and to eradicate extreme poverty for all forest dependent people, by 2030. The Global Goals and targets also cover combating climate change, increasing forest protected areas, mobilizing financing and inspiring innovation, promoting governance, and enhancing cooperation across sectors and stakeholders.

Forested watersheds and wetlands supply 75 per cent of the world’s freshwater for household, agricultural and industrial use. Forests contribute to increased rainfall and help control erosion and flooding. A recent study on climate impacts of tropical forest loss found that deforestation in South America, South Asia and Africa could cause warming and altered rainfall patterns and alter crops growing conditions in the tropics and beyond; as far as the US Midwest, Europe and China.

One third of the world’s largest cities, including Bogota, Durban, Jakarta, Madrid, New York and Rio de Janeiro draw their drinking water from forest watersheds. Trees and green spaces in cities provide many benefits for urban communities, from reducing energy use and lowering greenhouse gas emissions, to improving air quality and stormwater management. Forests and trees thus impact the daily lives of people everywhere, and for this reason the theme of the 2018 International Day of Forests on 21 March is “Forests and Sustainable Cities.”

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



## Keeping it clean – how you can take action for safe water

Good water quality is essential to human health, social and economic development, and the ecosystem. Environmental sustainability can be incorporated in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), while the water and sanitation SDG (SDG6) clearly includes the target to improve water quality. As populations grow and natural environments become

degraded, ensuring there are sufficient and safe water supplies for everyone is becoming increasingly challenging. But there are different ways for people to get involved and take action for safe water.

The availability of safe and sufficient water supplies is inextricably linked to how wastewater is managed. Increased amounts of untreated sewage, combined with agricultural runoff and industrial discharge, have degraded water quality and contaminated water resources around the world.

Globally, 80% of wastewater flows back into the ecosystem without being treated or reused, contributing to a situation where around 2.1 billion people lack access to safely managed drinking water services, putting them at risk of contracting cholera, dysentery, typhoid and polio.

A major part of the solution is to produce less pollution and improve the way we manage wastewater. Consumers can reduce their grey water footprint for example by not disposing medicines, paints or other pollutants through the sink or toilet. Businesses can bring water pollution to zero through recycling and treatment. Farmers can optimize the usage of fertilizers and pesticides, as well as improve wastewater management.

Governments can support consumers and businesses towards reducing pollution, as well as invest in sustainable wastewater management. Sustainable wastewater management could help protect our ecosystems and give us energy, nutrients and other recoverable materials, as well as play a major role in meeting our growing water demand.

Water must therefore be carefully managed during every part of the water cycle: from fresh water abstraction, pre-treatment, distribution, use, collection and post-treatment, to the use of treated wastewater and its ultimate return to the environment, ready to be abstracted to start the cycle again.

Ahead of World Water Day 2018, find ideas [here](#) on how to get involved and make waves for safe water.

For more information:

UN Water

## EXPERT VOICES



Fix the roof while the sun is shining, economy experts advise

“Fix the roof while the sun is shining” can best describe the unique opportunity that the international community has been given by the recovering economy. The global economic outlook has visibly strengthened, creating a favourable environment for countries to remove

the barriers that are impeding the progress of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

At a recent seminar on the “Global Economic Outlook and its Implications for the Sustainable Development Goals,” experts looked at how the current vibrancy of the global economy can allow countries to strengthen the process of implementing policies that support the SDGs.

More people have been lifted out of extreme poverty in the last 15 years than ever before, but deep inequalities persist. Because of positive economic conditions, policy changes to halt or reverse the rise in income inequality can now be realized, which would have a positive effect on advancing the Sustainable Development Goals.

The experts pointed out that a focus on one of the SDGs does not mean neglecting the others. For instance, by using innovation and infrastructure (SDG 9) to directly impact the other goals, progress on realizing all SDGs can be expedited.

Another important piece of the puzzle is the balance of labour and capital. Although the economy has picked up, it has not yet translated into sufficient job growth. The experts agree that employment growth is not in sync with the current rate of working-age population growth, especially when it comes to youth.

Vinicius Pinheiro from the International Labour Organization said that “huge investment in skills development is needed not only to prepare the current generation for the current labour market, but to prepare for the future.” This is vital especially for the youth who are just beginning their careers.

The economic boom can also contribute to finding concrete solutions to environmental problems. Although each country has its own unique environmental concerns and challenges, with improved economic conditions, policies that align with the goals of the Paris Climate Agreement can be implemented.



Heather Tallis of The Nature Conservancy noted there was a “real opportunity for there to be an alignment between economic growth and a strong and healthy environment.” She demonstrated how the Happy Seeder project in India was able to reduce air pollution while ensuring more successful yields. Technological innovations in farming and air quality can open a whole new industry for jobs and improve the lives of people all around the world, she said.

The private sector has its own role to play in advancing the Global Goals. Instead of waiting for government incentives, many companies are taking the initiative and involving local communities into their projects.

The American infrastructure company, Meridiam emphasizes inclusion in all the projects they are involved with. For example, during the refurbishment of LaGuardia Airport in New York, they are insisting on employing local workers and using local materials to involve New Yorkers in a project that is a part of their community.

Although the global economic boom is exciting news, serious risks remain for countries. Intense fragmentation and security concerns in vulnerable regions around the world make it difficult to implement policies that would progress job growth and the SDGs. In addition, market unpredictability could affect investments in the technologies that are needed to achieve the Goals. Weak structural growth is also a concern. With innovations in infrastructure and technology to support the Goals, must come new structures to properly support them.

With the global economy on the rise and the willingness and determination from countries to come up with policies that support job growth, inclusion and the Sustainable Development Goals, success is possible. Although risks must be considered, countries and the private sector should take the current bull market by the horns and come up with new solutions and technologies that support the advancement of a society that is inclusive and sustainable.

For more information: [bit.ly/wespreport](http://bit.ly/wespreport)

## IN CASE YOU MISSED IT



### Life-saving numbers: how solid data can protect refugees and migrants

Judging by media reports alone, we might be led to believe that migration is the defining challenge of the 21st century; that it is an unprecedented strain on the social services of states and a threat to their values. Yet, recent UN

DESA data shows that 96.6 per cent of all people live in the country of their birth. More

than that, research confirms the multiple benefits that migrants bring to receiving and origin countries alike.

On 15-16 February, UN DESA's Population Division gathered top experts from around the world for the Sixteenth Coordination Meeting on International Migration to find ways of bridging the yawning data gap and to help counter the overwhelming negative narrative about migrants with solid evidence.

"We believe that knowing the facts about global migration trends, and about the contributions of migrants to both destination and origin countries, can help dispel myths and misperceptions about migrants and migration," said John Wilmoth, Director of the Population Division, in his opening statement delivered on behalf of UN DESA's head Liu Zhenmin.

Perhaps the most persisting misconception is that migration is a problem, a negative phenomenon that should be curbed or even stopped. The available data on the contributions of migrants to global development contradicts this myth. The truth is that international migrants augment the gross domestic product, introduce new ideas and add to cultural diversity of their destination countries, while bringing investment, skills, knowledge and technologies back to their places of origin.

In fact, at the meeting, experts such as Ronnie Goldberg, Senior Counsel of United States Council for International Business identified this "global skills mobility" as an important tool for global development. In 2016, migrants from developing countries sent home an estimated U.S. \$413 billion in remittances, evaluated by the World Bank. However, such data are scarce and rarely make the headlines, overshadowed by more eye-catching negative stories.

"The challenges in data collection look difficult to surmount," admitted Mr. Wilmoth in his closing remarks. Most countries are making progress, but much remains to be done. For example, 17 per cent of African countries still have no information on the number of international migrants since their 2000 censuses.

Filling this data gap is a global urgency, not only because of xenophobia and negative stereotypes surrounding migration, but to address much more immediate concerns. In a [Facebook Live interview](#) streamed by UN DESA on 15 February, Professor Ellen Percy Kraly of Colgate University explained how robust data can help to save lives on the ground.

"For [international] agencies and organizations to effectively use their resources, they need to know numbers," she said. "It sounds forensic, but it will help that mother and her child if an organization knows how many people they need to serve and what their characteristics are."

"Most refugees actually return to their own country," added Bela Hovy, Chief of the Migration Section of UN DESA's Population Division. "Having a good demographic profile at the moment of displacement is very important, not only for the logistics of moving people back to their country, but also in terms of their reintegration and development."

The Sixteenth Coordination Meeting discussed the current data needs and improving methodologies, shared some of the latest findings in the area and the results of pilot studies. These debates will help inform the ongoing negotiations of the [Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration](#).

Set to be adopted in December this year, the Compact will lay down internationally agreed guidance for well-managed migration in a way that protects the human rights of people on the move and makes better use of their contribution to sustainable development.

For more information: Sixteenth Coordination Meeting on International Migration

## MORE FROM UNDESA

### Quake-proofing the global economy



The world of finance started February 2018 with a massive tremor. The first shock sent the US stocks tumbling, with Dow Jones posting its biggest single-day drop in history on 5th February. The shock waves travelled around the world, sending stocks in Europe and Asia into a tailspin. While the disruption was short-lived, ugly visions of the earthquake-level shocks of the recent financial crisis reared their heads as risk-averse investors scrambled to understand what had hit them.

We now know that the shock was sparked by higher-than-expected wage growth in the US. Higher wages usually spell inflation. The return of normal inflation rates – after a period when deflation was a much greater concern – will prompt central banks to raise interest rates more rapidly.

In December last year, UN DESA's *World Economic Situation and Prospects 2018* report cautioned that the tightening of purse-strings by major central banks might cause sudden spikes in market volatility. But even having that knowledge, could countries have shielded themselves against these and other risks beyond their control?

The March issue of the *World Economic Situation and Prospects Monthly Briefing* analyses some tools that could help emerging economies brave the next such "tremor." Chief among them are macroprudential policies – named for their objective of containing systemic risks and protecting the financial system as a whole.

These policies may soon be put to the test, as years of pumping cash into the global economy and low borrowing costs have allowed financial vulnerabilities to build up, including high levels of debt. In 2017, non-financial corporate debt in emerging economies exceeded 100 per cent of their gross domestic product (GDP).

As the US and other major economies normalize their monetary policies, emerging economies should prepare for a period of potentially more volatile and lower capital flows. For many of them, effective use of macroprudential tools could soften the blow and allow them even more policy space in the future. Be it a minor tremor or a huge shock, such quake-proofing is crucial, if the momentum of the global economy is to be maintained.

The Monthly Briefing on the World Economic Situation and Prospects is available at <http://bit.ly/wespbrief>

*Photo: Jonathan Ernst / World Bank*

## Action continues to #SaveOurOcean



When the international community came together at the Ocean Conference in June 2017 to begin reversing the decline of the ocean's health, many Member States and actors stressed the need for effective Conference follow-up to ensure that all nations are working together to meet their Sustainable Development Goal 14 implementation obligations and that we also follow up on the 1,400 voluntary commitments made.

To follow-up on these commitments and their realization, to catalyze and generate new voluntary commitments, and to facilitate collaboration and networking amongst different actors in support of SDG 14, the United Nations have launched nine thematic multi-stakeholder Communities of Ocean Action.

Each community is coordinated by focal points who work together with the United Nations Secretary-General's Special Envoy for the Ocean, Mr. Peter Thomson, and the UN DESA to carry out its activities.

Supporting the work of the Communities, UN DESA has revamped *The Ocean Conference Registry of Voluntary Commitments*, which now provides a platform for all stakeholders to report on their commitments, and for sharing of knowledge and best practices within and across the nine Communities of Ocean Action.

The nine Communities of Ocean Action are:

1. Coral reefs
2. Implementation of international law as reflected in United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea
3. Mangroves

4. Marine and coastal ecosystems management
5. Marine pollution
6. Ocean acidification
7. Scientific knowledge, research capacity development and transfer of marine technology
8. Sustainable blue economy
9. Sustainable fisheries

For more information: [Communities of Ocean Action](#) for supporting implementation of SDG 14

*Photo: 2016 World Oceans Day Oceanic Photo Competition, Above Water Seascapes Category – Winner: Mathieu Foulquié, France*

## UPCOMING EVENTS

- |                              |   |
|------------------------------|---|
| 5-9 March, New York          | Informal technical briefing series on the 2018 report of the Inter-agency Task Force on Financing for Development |
| 6-9 March, New York          | 49th Session of the United Nations Statistical Commission   |
| <b>12-16 March, New York</b> | Committee for Development Policy, Twentieth session   |
| <b>21 March</b>              | International Day of Forests  |
| <b>22 March, New York</b>    | Launch of the International Decade for Action: Water for Sustainable Development 2018-2028                        |

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