

STATISTICS

MAKING THE NUMBERS ADD UP TO INFORM AND IMPROVE POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS



GLOBAL CONTEXT

Reliable statistical information – statistics and indicators used in the analysis of international trade, investment and development – is indispensable for formulating sound economic policies and recommendations. Policy decisions, once taken, may commit countries for many years as they strive to integrate into the world economy and improve the living standards of their citizens. Having access to high-quality research and evidence-based policy analysis thus enables countries to make informed decisions and design better policies. This, in turn, is essential to fostering social, environmental and economic development.

Good quality, robust statistics are inherent to the work of UNCTAD. UNCTAD compiles, validates and processes a range of data collected from national and international sources. Most time-series data cover extended periods of time, with some dating back to 1948, for almost all economies in the world. The breadth of information makes possible analysis of emerging and timely issues in the context of long-lasting trends and a wide geographical scope. When data are missing or there is a break in a series, UNCTAD applies its expertise and methodology to make estimates. UNCTAD statistics are thus grounded in continuity, accuracy and timeliness. Statistical work also conforms to the United Nations principles governing international statistical activities – formulated with significant contributions from UNCTAD.



HOW CAN STATISTICS BECOME THE BASIS FOR POLICY DECISIONS?

The UNCTAD Statistics Programme produces more than 150 indicators and statistical time series essential for the analysis of international trade, economic trends, foreign direct investment (FDI), external financial resources, the population and labour force, commodities, the information economy and maritime transport. In many cases, UNCTAD statistics are compiled jointly or in close cooperation with other statistical agencies. For example, quarterly and annual trade-in-services statistics are jointly compiled with the World Trade Organization. This is not only an efficient use of resources but also ensures comparable and consistent results.

On a practical level, being able to use data is key to conducting the research and analysis that are the foundation of policymaking. The UNCTADstat database houses data for every country in the world. Such information can be used to automatically generate country profiles. The profiles are individual summaries of selected descriptive statistics that can be of interest to a range of users – from economists and modellers, who typically want all the data they can get, to journalists who need a few pertinent facts. UNCTADstat can also generate detailed bespoke tables, charts and maps for specialist users.

Reliable FDI data is crucial for the national statistical analysis of investment and for better shaping and evaluating national policies. To make this a reality on the ground, UNCTAD proposes workshops that aim to enhance the capacity of developing country government agencies to compile, disseminate and report FDI and transnational corporation data.

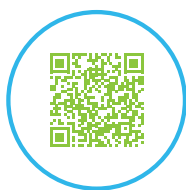


HOW CAN STATISTICS CONTRIBUTE TO CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT?

UNCTAD assists national statistical agencies in developing countries and countries with economies in transition in their data collection and dissemination efforts. In cooperation with United Nations agencies, development banks and other international organizations, such as Eurostat, capacity-building initiatives are carried out in the areas of international trade, FDI, debt, commodities, information and communications technology (ICT) and the creative economy.

UNCTAD trains hundreds of people every year around the world using e-learning courses on merchandise trade and trade in services, developed in cooperation with the World Trade Organization and the United Nations Statistics Division.

UNCTAD has also been working with the West African Economic and Monetary Union statistical commission to develop a common questionnaire, legislation and information technology system to improve the collection of trade-in-services statistics. The statistics programme is working with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, United Nations regional commissions in Africa, Europe, and Asia and the Pacific, as well as the European Union, to pioneer new statistics on illicit financial flows and gender in trade.



✓ RESULTS AND IMPACTS AT A GLANCE

The UNCTADstat database is updated and enhanced continuously to provide users with the latest available data. Between 1 November 2018 and 31 October 2019, the UNCTADstat website received almost 565,000 visits and 9 million page views from more than 200 countries.

Country profiles and interactive data exploration tools, such as, the **trade flows map** or the **revealed comparative advantage** tool enable users to have access to a wide range of easily accessible data.

UNCTAD produces a number of publications to further facilitate access to data. To celebrate the fiftieth edition of the *Handbook of Statistics*, a revised version was launched in 2017. This new handbook provides a user-friendly overview of trade, FDI, macroeconomic, population and maritime statistics from around the world. The report also includes nowcasts for the latest information available. It is available in PDF form and in an electronic, interactive version, from which statistics can be downloaded directly.

In 2019, UNCTAD statistics launched a new statistical report on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development entitled “*SDG [Sustainable Development Goal] Pulse*”. This is an online report, featuring updates on UNCTAD custodian indicators, as well as a broader overview on progress. It also features statistics illustrating how UNCTAD contributes to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

The programme publishes a range of other statistical reports, including the monthly, *Commodity Price Bulletin*, the quarterly *Trade-in-Services Bulletin*, and the annual *Key Statistics and Trends in International Trade*, *Key Statistics and Trends in Trade Policy*, and *Factsheets*. In addition, UNCTAD produces the online publication *Development and Globalization: Facts and Figures*, which offers practical tools for a better understanding of development trends and their evolution over time. The 2016 edition was dedicated to the measurement of the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. The 2020 edition will focus on small island developing States.

The scarcity, unreliability and inconsistency of FDI data pose a serious challenge for policymakers, academics and practitioners. To fill that gap, UNCTAD launched *Bilateral FDI Statistics 2014*, which presents FDI data systematically. The tool covers inward and outward FDI flows and stocks by region and economy.

RESULTS IN-DEPTH: APPLYING THE NUMBERS – UNCTAD FLAGSHIPS

The annual UNCTAD flagship publications – the *Trade and Development Report*, *The Least Developed Countries Report*, *Economic Development in Africa Report*, *World Investment Report* and *Review of Maritime Transport* – provide rigorous research and policy recommendations on globalization, interdependence and development.

The reports draw on the Statistics Programme’s data for their analysis of issues ranging from current economic trends and major policy issues of international concern, to trends in FDI and emerging measures to improve the contribution of FDI to development, and socioeconomic analysis and data on the world’s most impoverished countries. The data and analysis serve as the basis for the policy recommendations presented by UNCTAD in the reports for addressing such issues at the national, regional and multilateral levels.



PROGRAMME FACTS AND FIGURES

Scope: more than 150 indicators and time-series data

Start date: 1967

Annual reports: 2

Factsheets per year: 10

Country profiles per year: 2 series

Bulletins per year: 17

Website: unctad.org/statistics

UNCTADstat database: unctadstat.unctad.org



Sustainable Development Goals addressed:

Directly: 17

Indirectly: 2, 8, 9, 10, 12, 16



DONORS/FUNDING SOURCE (2014–2019)

West African Economic and Monetary Union, Multi-donor/Cross-cluster Trust Fund on Capacity-building in Investment for Development, United Nations Development Account, One United Nations funds