



## Communicating Gender Data to deliver impactful messages

Gender statistics are increasingly becoming a mainstream part of National Statistical Systems. Integrating a gender perspective into statistics and collecting the facts and delivering them to policy makers and the public are essential for leaving no one behind. How gender statistics are communicated is as important as the statistics themselves. Therefore, strategies for communicating gender statistics to deliver impactful messages are becoming crucial. The purpose of this brief is to share details of a workshop on communicating gender statistics co-hosted by the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific and UN-Women Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific. The brief shares knowledge and presents insights shared by participants.

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### Introduction

The Global Gender Statistics Programme was established in 2006 by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs Statistics Division to advance gender statistics through the promotion of synergies among initiatives at the national, regional and global levels.<sup>1</sup> One objective of the Programme is to enhance the capacity of countries to collect, disseminate and use quality gender statistics through effective use of networking; building strong and supportive partnerships; establishing collaborative arrangement among governmental, intergovernmental, as well as individual experts; and fostering effective management and sharing of information among stakeholders.

UN ESCAP, the Asia-Pacific regional arm of the United Nations, is the largest of five UN regional commissions, supporting member States representing 60% of the world's population and 60% of the world's poor. In 2017, member States in Asia and the Pacific endorsed a Regional Strategy for the Improvement of Population and Social Statistics. The strategy has three goals including goal 2 to improve the availability and quality of disaggregated data and goal 3 on data accessibility, analysis, interpretation and use.

Data accessibility and use is also a key aim of UN Women's "Making Every Woman and Girl Count" Flagship programme<sup>2</sup>. The programme aims to bring about a radical

shift in how gender statistics are used, created and promoted. It seeks to address the urgent need to increase the availability of accurate information on gender equality and women's rights in order to inform policy and decision-making. UN Women's global report, "[Turning promises into action: Gender equality in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#)", makes an urgent call to step up efforts to end discrimination against women and girls everywhere.

In this respect, from 11<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> June 2019, the ESCAP Statistics Division and UN Women's Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific partnered to deliver a hands-on training workshop to data users and producers on how to communicate, understand and use gender data. The workshop on **communicating gender data: promoting better use and delivering impactful messages** was held in Bangkok and attended by data users and producers from national statistical offices, line ministries, civil society organizations and the media.

The aim of the workshop was to promote better use of gender data to inform policy making, enhance accountability and track progress towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. More specifically, the workshop covered topics such as data visualization techniques, media messaging, statistical literacy, advocating with gender data and building effective communication strategies with data.

<sup>1</sup> <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/doc11/2011-4-SG-GenderStats-E.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.unwomen.org/en/how-we-work/flagship-programmes/making-every-woman-and-girl-count>

## What are gender statistics

The understanding of gender statistics, their uses and users has changed over time. Initially focussed on producing statistics on women, the shifting of data demand from “women only” to “women and men” came from women’s organizations and women’s advocates who needed statistics to support new programmes oriented towards reducing disadvantages faced by women.

Gender statistics are not only data disaggregated by sex, but the term has to reflect differences and inequalities in the situation of women and men tied to socially constructed attributes and opportunities. The definition closely follows the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPFA)<sup>3</sup>, which was adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995.

There are several characteristics embedded in the definition of gender statistics as shown in [Box 1](#).

### Box 1: Four characteristics of gender statistics

1. Data are collected and presented by sex as a primary and overall classification
2. Data reflect gender issues
3. Data are based on concepts and definitions that adequately reflect the diversity of women and men and capture all aspects of their lives; and
4. Data collection methods take into account stereotypes and social and cultural factors that may induce gender bias in the data.

Source: UN DESA Statistics Division: *Integrating a gender perspective into statistics*.  
<https://www.un.org/development/desa/capacity-development/tools/tool/integrating-a-gender-perspective-into-statistics/>.

## Promoting better use and delivering impactful messages - communicating gender statistics

Gender equality has been increasingly recognized as being essential to the process of sustainable development and the formulation of effective national development policies and programmes. The demand for gender statistics has increased over the years owing to international conventions and gender mainstreaming in policies. However, while many national statistical offices have attempted to establish and succeeded in establishing sound gender statistics programmes, additional guidance is needed to improve the availability of

data and to ensure proper mainstreaming of gender issues in all areas of official statistics

At the workshop on communicating gender data: promoting better use and delivering impactful messages, participants had opportunities to plan and implement activities to take forward communication strategies in their own countries. Sessions were designed to provide parallel activities for both data users and data producers, with a focus on:

1. guidelines on communicating gender data,
2. training/familiarizing data producers on gender data visualization techniques; on media messaging and marking gender statistics appealing to the general public,
3. creating dialogue between data users and producers to align priorities and understand each other’s needs,
4. training/familiarizing data users on basic statistical literacy; on strategies to advocate for gender data and with gender data; and on how to utilize gender data to create appealing media stories and
5. ultimately, promoting and enhancing use of gender statistics.

Workshop documents and support materials are available on the ESCAP website at [Communicating gender data: promoting better use and delivering impactful messages](#).

## Why Data Communication?

Nowadays, many official statistics agencies are moving to improve data communication by *pro-active efforts*. To make this transition, statisticians are going from introvert to extravert and taking more active roles in public life and the media.

Among others, the roles/ activities could involve the following aims and needs:<sup>4</sup>

- Aim to demonstrate trustworthiness
- Work with multiple audiences and communication professionals
- Pre-empt misunderstandings
- Need to research alternative visual formats
- Need to be engaging and yet true to the evidence
- Need to recognise psychology of attention to drama
- Need to counter that drama with good communication

<sup>3</sup> [https://beijing20.unwomen.org/~media/headquarters/attachments/sections/csw/pfa\\_e\\_final\\_web.pdf](https://beijing20.unwomen.org/~media/headquarters/attachments/sections/csw/pfa_e_final_web.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> David Spiegelhalter, *Trustworthy Communication of numbers and evidence*, UNECE Workshop, Cork. [2018].

## Examples of gender statistics communication activities:

### Prior to release of a gender statistics product

- List the product in published advices showing forthcoming products and their release dates;
- Contact key users and relevant advisory groups directly to ensure they are aware of the product's release date and topic coverage.

### Day of release

- Issue a media release about the product and its key statistical messages;
- Hold an event to formally launch the product using a high-profile speaker.

### Period after release

- Conduct seminars or information sessions for users to explain and discuss the main findings;
- Present sessions based on the product at policy forums and conferences;
- Provide brochures and other exhibits promoting the product at relevant venues.<sup>5</sup>

## Gender statistics communication strategies

The Workshop covered three main communication strategies: presenting gender statistics, visualising gender statistics and building effective communication to non-expert audience including crafting data stories using appropriate language.

### Presenting gender statistics

Some simple rules can be applied when presenting gender statistics. A summary of recommendations for user friendly presentation are shown in [Box 2](#).

## Box 2: Recommendations for Gender statistics presentation<sup>6</sup>

- Women and men should be presented side by side to facilitate comparisons
- Women should always be presented before men
- The words "women" and "men" and "girls" and "boys should be used instead of "females" and "males" (which have a biological connotation) whenever possible
- When data are presented to a broader audience, numbers should be rounded to 1,000, 100 or 10, and percentages should be rounded to integers, to facilitated comparisons between women and men
- The gender-blind total should be deleted in tables and graphs to facilitate comparisons between women and men
- In table, alphabetic text, such as labels, should be aligned left. Numeric values should be aligned right, usually on the rightmost digit; if numeric values are decimals, they should be aligned on the decimal point
- Charts that give clear, visual information should be used instead of tables whenever possible
- Too many categories should be avoided in pie charts and stacked bars
- The same color should be used for women along all charts
- Preference should always be given to a simple layout when designing charts:
  - Only one type of gridline, either vertical or horizontal, should be used, or not at all
  - Ticks are not necessary on the axis representing a qualitative variable
  - Labels for values presented inside a graph are distracting and redundant
  - Graphs with a third unnecessary dimension are misleading

### Visualising gender statistics

People make use of the digital era by sending and receiving information via social media platforms. But due to the huge amount of data and information flows, something which is not eye-catching such as black & white data tables could be easily skipped by audiences. Hence, statisticians also have to move from conventional data presentation to an infographic (information graphic) to make the data easily understandable

<sup>5</sup> Dissemination and communication of gender statistics, Workshop on Improving Gender Statistics in Rwanda-Session 7, March 25-27, 2014, supported by the Bank-Netherlands Partnership Program (BNPP) and World Bank. [2014].

<sup>6</sup> UNDESA Statistics Division: Integrating a gender perspective into statistics. <https://www.un.org/development/desa/capacity-development/tools/tool/integrating-a-gender-perspective-into-statistics/>

at a glance. The process of creating infographics is sometimes referred to as data visualization. Infographic tools can be selected to create more noticeable data presentation and to achieve impactful messages. Skills needed cover data analysis skills, design skills and storytelling skills.

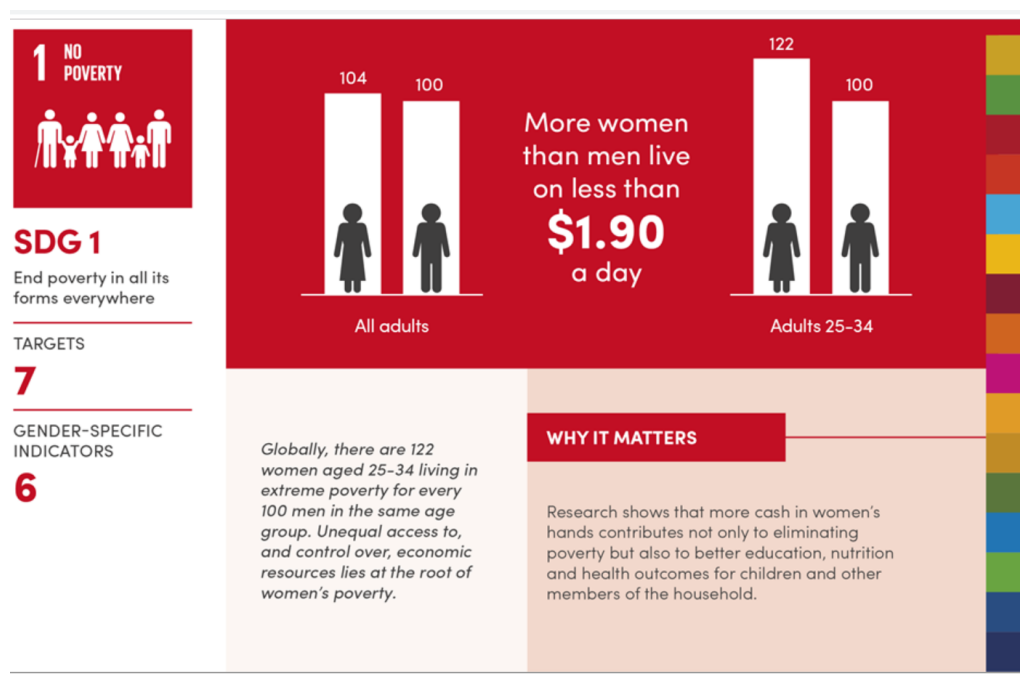
Accompanying the “Turning promises into action” report on gender equality in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is an example of an infographic using gender statistics<sup>7</sup>. An excerpt from the infographic, for No Poverty or SDG 1, is shown in [figure 1](#). The infographic includes many of the recommendations for gender statistics presentation such as the presentation of women and men side by side, presenting of women before men in the text, use of words ‘women’ and ‘men’ instead of ‘females’ and ‘males’,

rounding of data, use of clear visual information in charts, use of charts not tables and the same colour for women in both charts.

### Crafting data stories using appropriate language strategy<sup>8</sup>

While there are many important strategies and recommendations to follow when releasing gender statistics to the public, language is one of the most important. Language is reflection of the attitudes, behaviours and norms within a society. It also shapes people’s attitudes as to what is ‘normal’ and acceptable.

Figure 1: No Poverty Infographic



Source: Infographic: Why gender equality matters to achieving all 17 SDGs, UN-Women

Using gender-sensitive language can:

- make it easier to see important differences between the needs of women and men;
- challenge unconscious assumptions people have about gender roles in society;
- lay the foundation for greater gender equality throughout society;
- raise awareness of how language affects our behaviour;
- make people more comfortable with expressing themselves and behaving in ways that were once not considered ‘typical’ of their gender.

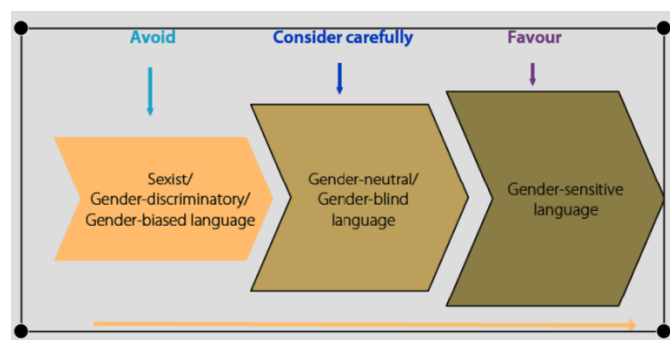
There are number of different ways gender relationships can be expressed with accuracy, such as avoiding the use of language that refers explicitly or implicitly to only one gender and ensuring, through inclusive alternatives, the use of gender-sensitive and inclusive language. [Figure 2](#) shows the language inclusivity scale which ranges from “Exclusive

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/multimedia/2018/7/infographic-why-gender-equality-matters-to-achieving-all-17-sdgs>

<sup>8</sup> Toolkit on Gender-sensitive Communication, European Institute for Gender Equality.

language” to “Inclusive language”. It is normally recommended that we should aim to favour the most inclusive form of language.

Figure 2: The inclusivity scale in language



Source: <https://eige.europa.eu>.

Gender-neutral language is not gender-specific and considers people in general, with no reference to women or men. It is also called gender-blind language, for example “People do not fully appreciate the impact they have on the environment.” One potential benefit of gender-neutral language is that it can be more inclusive of those who do not identify in a binary way with one gender.

In practice it is not always easy to judge where our language falls on the inclusive/exclusive scale, therefore data producers should also study the key principles for inclusive language use.

### Lessons learned and challenges ahead

Workshop participants expressed their positive impression of the training content delivered from the experts and facilitators, especially the infographic training session where they learned new techniques and received access to a free trial of a data visualization tool. Participants were able to practice using the tool to produce an infographic outline piece based on gender statistics.

The unique combination of participants from media with government officials was highly appreciated. It was the first time for many countries for such an opportunity to work and discuss communication policy strategies together. Many considered this to enhance better understanding and better collaboration between both sides in the future.

However, challenges do remain. Participants realised that effectively communicating gender statistics is an integrated skill, in which data producers are needed to be equipped with appropriate tools and desirable knowledge strategies.

Although advocacy for and dissemination of gender statistics were agreed, not all participants agreed whether it is essential for data producers to be communicating gender statistics. In other words, should it be a role of data providers to motivate public and policymaker’s interest in gender statistics?

Despite this, workshop participants agreed that in order to have impactful messages, effective communication strategies are needed including good presentation, data visualisation and gender-inclusive language.

Figure 3: Data producers and data visualization



Source: <https://www.alert-software.com>.

### References

David Spiegelhalter, UNECE Workshop on Statistical Data Dissemination and Communication, 25-27 June 2018, Cork, Ireland [2018]. *Trustworthy communication of numbers and evidence*.

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United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Statistics Division, Studies in Methods, Series F No.111 [United Nations] [2016]. *Integrating a Gender Perspective into Statistics*

For more information regarding ESCAP’s work in statistics development please visit: <http://www.unescap.org/our-work/statistics>

Previous issues of Stats Brief: <http://www.unescap.org/resource-series/stats-brief>

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