Securing the future of demographic and health data

Organization: Multilateral
Data Type: Official statistics, Survey data, Civil registration and vital statistics, Data for SDG monitoring, Cross cutting
Region: Global
Timeline: 2026-2027, aligned with the work of the ISWGHS Task Force on Sustainable Demographic and Health Statistics. Initial activities will focus on country assessments and consultations, followed by defining strategies for international standards development; the innovation incubator; data harmonization infrastructure; a South–South cooperation and multilateral technical assistance platform; a coordinated funding mechanism; and data platforms. A global Blueprint will be developed and submitted to the UN Statistical Commission in 2027, with continued implementation and scaling thereafter.
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Sponsoring Organization:

The Inter-Secretariat Working Group on Household Surveys

Supporting Organization(s):

The ISWGHS is a multi-stakeholder partnership that includes 12 international organisations and 11 member states

Objective:

The objective is to support countries in transitioning toward sustainable, nationally owned systems for the production and use of demographic and health data. This includes strengthening capacity to define national priorities, soliciting domestic financing and producing and using data for national priorities; improving coordination among partners in financing and technical support; promoting the adoption of common standards and guidance; and defining a pathway for sustainable health and demographic data. The commitment aims to ensure the continued availability of high-quality, comparable, and policy-relevant data, while reducing reliance on single externally funded programmes. It will also support countries in identifying priority data needs and building resilient systems capable of responding to evolving demands and crises.

Description:

The sustainability of demographic and health data systems is at risk due to declining and uncertain financing for large-scale survey programmes, including the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS). Many countries rely heavily on externally funded surveys to produce essential data for SDG monitoring, policy design, and service delivery. This dependence creates vulnerabilities, including disruptions in data availability, limited national ownership, and fragmentation across data sources. At the same time, increasing demand for timely, disaggregated, and policy-relevant data highlights the need for more resilient and integrated approaches. Without coordinated action, countries risk widening data gaps, particularly in health and gender, and reduced capacity to respond to crises and emerging challenges.

The commitment will deliver a Blueprint for Sustainable, Country-Led Demographic and Health Data Systems, to be submitted to the UN Statistical Commission in March 2027. This includes defining principles and processes for developing an agreed core set of priority demographic and health indicators for international comparability, drawing on national priorities. It will also outline strategies and implementation plans across key areas, including international standards development, an innovation pipeline to pilot and scale new methods, data harmonization infrastructure, and platforms for South–South cooperation and coordinated technical assistance. In addition, the Blueprint will propose mechanisms for coordinated financing and the development of data platforms to support integration and use. Together, these efforts aim to strengthen national ownership, improve data availability and comparability, and establish more resilient.

Progress will be monitored through periodic reporting on key milestones aligned with the pre- and post-2027 work programme. In the lead-up to the 2027 United Nations Statistical Commission, this will include the completion of national assessment, the development of principles and processes for an agreed core set of priority indicators, and the formulation of strategies for international standards, innovation, data harmonization, capacity development, and coordinated financing. Following 2027, monitoring will focus on the operationalization of these components, including the establishment of innovation pipelines, data harmonization infrastructure, South–South cooperation platforms, and pooled funding mechanisms, as well as the initiation of standards, tools, and guidance.

Success will be assessed through indicators such as the number of countries engaged, progress toward an internationally agreed core set of priority indicators, and the extent to which countries are transitioning toward more sustainable and nationally owned demographic and health data systems in the post-DHS context. Additional measures will include strengthened coordination mechanisms (including South–South learning exchanges), mobilization and alignment of financing, improvements in the availability, quality, and use of priority indicators, and evidence of greater integration across data sources, including surveys, administrative systems, and CRVS.

The initiative will include regular consultations with countries and partners to ensure responsiveness to national priorities and evolving needs, alongside structured reporting through global platforms, including the United Nations Statistical Commission. These processes will support transparency, accountability, and collective learning, while tracking progress toward the implementation of the Blueprint for Sustainable, Country-Led Demographic and Health Data Systems.

ISWGHS
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