

[Human Development Reports – Frequently Asked Questions](#)

General questions about data in the Human Development Report

What kind of statistics can I get from the HDR?

The Human Development Report usually presents two types of statistical information: statistics in the [human development indicator tables](#), which provide a global assessment of country achievements in different areas of human development, and statistical evidence in the thematic analysis in the chapters, which may be based on international, national or sub-national data.

The Human Development Report also incorporates many of the Millennium Development Goals indicators in the human development indicators tables (see [Index to Millennium Development Goal Indicators in the indicator tables HDR 2006 \(PDF\)](#) [64 KB]). Data for these indicators provide a statistical reference for assessing the progress in each country towards the Millennium Development Goals and their targets.

Where do data in the indicator tables of HDR come from?

The Human Development Report Office is primarily a user, not a producer, of statistics. To allow comparisons across countries and over time in the HDR, it relies on [international data agencies](#) with the resources and expertise to collect and compile international data on specific statistical indicators. For more information see the [contact information](#) of major data agencies.

Sources for all data used in the indicator tables are given in short citations at the end of each table. These correspond to full references in the [Statistical references HDR 2006 \(PDF\)](#) [70 KB]. When an agency provides data it has collected from another source, both sources are credited in the table notes. But when an agency has built on the work of many other contributors, only the ultimate source is given. The source notes also show the original data components used in any calculations by the Human Development Report Office to ensure that all calculations can be easily replicated.

Where do data in the thematic analysis (chapters) come from?

The statistical evidence used in the thematic analysis in the Report is often drawn from the [human development indicator tables](#). But a wide range of other sources are also used, including commissioned papers, government documents, national human development reports, reports of non-governmental organizations, journal articles and other scholarly publications. Official statistics usually receive priority. But because of the cutting-edge nature of the issues discussed, relevant official statistics may not exist, so that non-official sources of information must be used. Nevertheless, the Human Development Report Office is committed to relying on data compiled through scholarly and scientific research and to ensuring impartiality in the sources of information and in its use in the analysis.

Where information from sources other than the Report's indicator tables is used in boxes or tables in the text, the source is shown and the full citation is given in the bibliography. In addition, for each chapter a summary note outlines the major sources for the chapter, and endnotes specify the sources of statistical information not drawn from the indicator tables.

Does the HDR report any data on the Millennium Development Goals?

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are a set of quantified, time-bound goals stemming from the Millennium Declaration, adopted by all UN member countries. The Human Development Report incorporates in each edition many of the Millennium Development Goals indicators in the human

development indicators tables (see [Index to Millennium Development Goal Indicators in the indicator tables HDR 2006 \(PDF\)](#) [64 KB]).

The [Human Development Report 2003](#) provided more detailed analysis of the MDGs and dealt with the challenges and policies of the goals.

The United Nations Statistics Division maintains the global Millennium Indicators Database (<http://mdgs.un.org>), compiled from international data series provided by the responsible international data agencies. The database forms the statistical basis for the UN Secretary-General's annual report to the UN General Assembly on global and regional progress towards the Millennium Development Goals and their targets. It also feeds into other international reports providing data on the Millennium Development Goal indicators across countries, such as this Report and the World Bank's annual World Development Indicators.

The United Nations Statistics Division is continuously updating the Millennium Indicators Database. The World Bank does the same for its annual World Development Indicators. By generously sharing data, the World Bank and other international agencies - such as the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Institute for Statistics (UIS), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and the World Health Organization (WHO) - enable the Report to include the most current data in the Millennium Indicators Database and the more recent estimates for the Millennium Development Goal indicators.

The 2006 global Report contains data on some of the MDG indicators and an updated analysis of human development trends that include some of the goals. This section also includes an index to the MDG data contained in the Report. The animated graphs showing progress towards the Goals, developed for HDR 2003 are also available here.

Progress towards the MDGs:

- [State of HD HDR 2006 \(PDF\)](#) [557 KB]
- MDG progress in animation (HDR 2003) [[view the animation](#)]
- [Index to Millennium Development Goal Indicators in the indicator tables HDR 2006 \(PDF\)](#) [64 KB]

Other MDG resources:

- [MDG Monitor: Tracking the Millennium Development Goals](#)
- [Global and national efforts](#)
- [UNSD Millennium Indicators Database](#)

Why is there a time lag between the reference date of most data and the release date of the Report?

To provide a sound statistical basis for global assessment of human development across countries, we strive to present the most-up-to-date data available at the time when the Report is prepared. Due to the time required for international agencies to collect, compile and publish the relevant international data series, it is inevitable that a time lag exists. With the generous help of many data agencies, this time lag has been narrowed from three years to two for many of the indicators in this Report since 1999.

Questions about the Human Development Index (HDI)

What is the human development index (HDI)?

The HDI – human development index – is a summary composite index that measures a country's average achievements in three basic aspects of human development: health, knowledge, and a decent standard of living. Health is measured by life expectancy at birth; knowledge is measured by a combination of the adult literacy rate and the combined primary, secondary, and tertiary gross enrolment ratio; and standard of living by GDP per capita (PPP US\$). For details on how to calculate the HDI, see [Technical note 1 HDR 2006 \(PDF\)](#) [598 KB] and also the interactive [HDI calculator](#) and the Excel tool [Calculating the indices \(Excel\)](#) [58 KB] - interactive tools that help understand the calculation of the HDI.

How is the HDI used?

1. To capture the attention of policy makers, media and NGOs and to draw their attention away from the more usual economic statistics to focus instead on human outcomes. The HDI was created to re-emphasize that people and their capabilities should be the ultimate criteria for assessing the development of a country, not economic growth.
2. To question national policy choices - asking how two countries with the same level of income per person can end up with such different human development outcomes (HDI levels). For example, Viet Nam and Pakistan have similar levels of income per person, but life expectancy and literacy differ greatly between the two countries, with Viet Nam having a much higher HDI value than Pakistan. These striking contrasts immediately stimulate debate on government policies on health and education, asking why what is achieved in one country is far from the reach of another.
3. To highlight wide differences within countries, between provinces or states, across gender, ethnicity, and other socioeconomic groupings. Highlighting internal disparities along these lines has raised national debate in many countries.

Is the HDI enough to measure a country's level of development?

Not at all. The concept of human development is much broader than what can be captured in the HDI, or any other of the composite indices in this Report (see gender-related development index, gender empowerment measure, and human poverty index). The HDI, for example, does not reflect political participation or gender inequalities. The HDI and the other composite indices can only offer a broad proxy on some of the key the issues of human development, gender disparity, and human poverty. A fuller picture of a country's level of human development requires analysis of other human development indicators and information (see [Human development indicators HDR 2006 \(PDF\)](#) [583 KB] [Human development indicators HDR 2006 \(PDF\)](#) [583 KB]).

Can the gross domestic product per capita be used to measure human development instead of the HDI?

No. GDP per capita only reflects average national income. It tells nothing of how that income is distributed or how that income is spent - whether on universal health, education or military expenditure. Comparing rankings on GDP per capita and the HDI can reveal much about the results of national policy choices. For example, a country with a very high GDP per capita such as Oman, who has a relatively low level of educational attainment, can have a lower HDI rank than, say, Uruguay, who has roughly 60% of the GDP per capita of Oman.

Why is GDP per capita (PPP US\$) used over GDP per capita (US\$) in the HDI?

The human development index (HDI) attempts to make an assessment of 177 very diverse countries and areas, with very different price levels. To compare economic statistics across countries, the data must first be converted into a common currency. Unlike conventional exchange rates, PPP (Purchasing Power Parity) rates of exchange allow this conversion to take account of price differences between countries. GDP per capita (PPP US\$) accounts for price differences between countries and therefore better reflects people's living standards. In theory, at the PPP rate, 1 PPP dollar has the same purchasing power in the domestic economy of a country as 1 US dollar has in the US economy. For further discussion on the use

of PPP, see Box 2, in the Note on statistics in the Human Development Report 2001: [Purchasing Power Parity HDR 2001 \(PDF\)](#) [103 KB].

Why doesn't the HDI include dimensions of participation, gender, and equality?

As a simple summary index, the HDI is designed to reflect average achievements in three basic aspects of human development – leading a long and healthy life, being knowledgeable, and enjoying a decent standard of living. Participation, gender disparity and human deprivation are measured in other indices (see gender-related development index, gender empowerment measure, and the human poverty index) or other indicators of the Report. Measurement issues related to these indices demonstrate the conceptual and methodological challenges that remain to be tackled.

Where do data for HDI come from? What are the criteria for a country to be included in the HDI?

Currently, for various reasons, there still exist many data gaps in even some very basic areas of human development indicators. While actively advocating for the improvement of human development data, as a principle and for practical reasons, HDRO does not collect data directly from countries or make estimates to fill these data gaps in the Report.

The one exception is the human development index (HDI). The Human Development Report Office strives to include as many UN member countries as possible in the HDI. For a country to be included, data ideally should be available from the relevant international data agencies for all four components of the index (the primary sources of data are the United Nations Population Division for life expectancy at birth, the UNESCO Institute for Statistics for the adult literacy rate and combined gross enrolment ratio for primary, secondary and tertiary schools and the World Bank for GDP per capita [PPP US\$]). But for a significant number of countries data are missing for one or more of these components.

Striving to include as many UN member countries as possible and in response to the desire of countries to be included in the HDI, the Human Development Report Office makes every effort in these cases to identify other reasonable estimates, working with international data agencies, the UN Regional Commissions, national statistical offices and UNDP country offices. In a few cases the Human Development Report Office has attempted to make an estimate in consultation with regional and national statistical offices or other experts. This information may be reviewed in the [HDR Readers guide HDR 2006 \(PDF\)](#) [128 KB].

Why isn't the HDI compiled for all UN member countries?

While the data in the Report demonstrate the wealth of human development statistics available, they also reveal many data gaps in basic areas of human development. Not all UN member countries have sufficient data available to calculate the HDI or other indices. However, for the 17 UN member countries not included in the HDI in HDR 2006, basic human development indicators (where available) are shown in

[Table 1a HDR 2006 \(PDF\)](#) [62 KB].

Is the HDI comparable over time?

The HDI is comparable over time when it is calculated based on the same methodology and comparable trend data. HDR 2006 presents a time series in HDI for 1975, 1980, 1985, 1990, 1995, 2000 and 2004. This time series uses the latest HDI methodology and the most up-to-date trend data for each component of the index (please see indicator [Table 2 HDR 2006 \(PDF\)](#) [87 KB], Human development index trends. Please note that the HDI is designed to capture long-term progress in human development, rather than short-term changes. [Read more...](#)

Is the HDI comparable across editions of the HDR?

Due to revisions to the data series for some or all of the components of the HDI, changes in the HDI methodology, or variations in the country coverage, the HDI values and ranks presented in the 1990 through 2006 editions of the Report are not directly comparable. The year-to-year changes in the index often reflect data improvement, instead of real increase or decrease in the level of human development

(see [HDR Readers guide HDR 2006 \(PDF\)](#) [128 KB].

The Human Development Report Offices strongly advises against constructing HDI trend analysis based on the HDI published in different editions of the Report. For the most up-to-date HDI trend data based on

consistent country coverage, methodology and data, please refer to [Table 2 HDR 2006 \(PDF\)](#) [87 KB] Human Development Index Trends.

Is the HDI available before 1975?

Comparable data are not available for many countries for all components of the HDI before 1975, so 1975 is the first year for which the HDI was calculated. Estimates for some indicators are available before this time, such as life expectancy, which are available since 1950.

Why was the HDI methodology changed in the 1999 HDR?

The methodology of the HDI has evolved and improved over time. In 1999, the formula used to treat the income component of the HDI was significantly refined, setting the methodology on a more solid

analytical foundation, for details see [Technical note 1 HDR 1999 \(PDF\)](#) [117 KB].

Questions about other indices used in the Human Development Report

What is the gender-related development index (GDI)?

The GDI – gender-related development index – is a composite indicator that measures the average achievement of a population in the same dimensions as the HDI while adjusting for gender inequalities in the level of achievement in the three basic aspects of human development. It uses the same variables as the HDI, disaggregated by gender. For details on how to calculate the GDI see [Technical note 1 HDR 2006 \(PDF\)](#) [598 KB].

What is the gender empowerment measure (GEM)?

The GEM – gender empowerment measure – is a composite indicator that captures gender inequality in three key areas:

- Political participation and decision-making, as measured by women's and men's percentage shares of parliamentary seats;
- Economic participation and decision-making power, as measured by two indicators – women's and men's percentage shares of positions as legislators, senior officials and managers and women's and men's percentage shares of professional and technical positions;
- Power over economic resources, as measured by women's and men's estimated earned income (PPP US\$).

For details on how to calculate the GEM see [Technical note 1 HDR 2006 \(PDF\)](#) [598 KB].

How are the GDI and the GEM used?

The GDI is not a measure of gender inequality. Rather, it is a measure of human development that adjusts the human development index (HDI) to penalize for disparities between women and men in the three dimensions of the HDI.

To illustrate the fact that gender empowerment does not depend on income, it is useful to compare relative rankings on the GEM and the relative level of national income. For example,

- Poland ranks 30th in the GEM, ahead of Japan, in 42nd place, yet income per person in Poland is about one third that of Japan's (12,974 PPP US\$ vs. 29,251 PPP US\$ for 2004).
- The UK and Finland have very similar income per person (30,821 PPP US\$ and 29,951 PPP US\$ for 2004) yet in the GEM Finland ranks 6th, the UK 16th.

Both indicators can be disaggregated to highlight gender inequality within countries, which can vary widely across regions.

What is the human poverty index (HPI-1 and HPI-2)?

Poverty has traditionally been measured as a lack of income - but this is far too narrow a definition. Human poverty is a concept that captures the many dimensions of poverty that exist in both poor and rich countries—it is the denial of choices and opportunities for living a life one has reason to value. The HPI-1—human poverty index for developing countries – measures human deprivations in the same three aspects of human development as the HDI (long and healthy life, knowledge and a decent standard of living). HPI-2—human poverty index for selected high-income OECD countries—includes, in addition to the three dimensions in HPI-1, social exclusion.

For HPI-1 (developing countries), deprivation in health is measured by the probability at birth of not surviving to age 40; deprivation in knowledge is measured by the percentage of adults who are illiterate; deprivation in a decent standard of living is measured by two variables: the percentage of people not having sustainable access to an improved water source and the percentage of children below the age of

five who are underweight. See: [Table 3 HDR 2006 \(PDF\)](#) [104 KB].

For HPI-2 (selected high-income OECD countries), deprivation in health is measured by the probability at birth of not surviving to age 60; deprivation in knowledge is measured by the percentage of adults lacking functional literacy skills; deprivation in a decent standard of living is measured by the percentage of people living below the income poverty line, set at 50% of the adjusted median household disposable income; and social exclusion is measured by the rate of long-term (12 months or more) unemployment of

the labour force. See: [Table 4 HDR 2006 \(PDF\)](#) [82 KB].

For details on how to calculate the HPI-1 and HPI-2 see [Technical note 1 HDR 2006 \(PDF\)](#) [598 KB].

How is the HPI used?

- To focus attention on the most deprived people and deprivations in basic human capabilities in a country, not on average national achievement. The human poverty indices focus directly on the number of people living in deprivation – presenting a very different picture from average national achievement. It also moves the focus of poverty debates away from concern about income poverty alone.
- To highlight the presence of human poverty in both the rich and poor countries. High income per person

is no guarantee of a poverty-free country. Even among the richest countries, there is human poverty. The HPI-2 for selected high-income OECD countries (HPI-2) shows that out of 18 countries, the US has the second highest level of income per person, and the third highest rate of human poverty.

- To guide national planning for poverty alleviation. Many National Human Development Reports now break down the HPI by region or other socioeconomic groups to identify the areas or social groups within the country most deprived in terms of human poverty. The results can be dramatic, creating national debate and helping to reshape policies.

Why aren't all the countries included in the GDI, GEM, and HPI?

Lack of data is a particular constraint in monitoring gender disparity and poverty. Coverage of the GDI in HDR 2006 is limited to 136 countries, GEM to 75 countries, and the HPI-1 to 102 developing countries and HPI-2 to 18 high-income OECD countries (see also "[Why isn't HDI compiled for all UN member countries?](#)").

Other questions about the data

Does the HDR report data on Afghanistan or Iraq?

Afghanistan and Iraq belong to the restricted group of UN member countries that are not included in the human development index and other main indicator tables due to lack of data. However, available data on key aspects of human development for these countries are presented in [Table 1a HDR 2006 \(PDF\)](#) [62 KB].

Does the HDR report any sub-national data?

To provide a statistical basis for global assessment of human development across countries, the human development indicator tables usually present country-level statistics. However, in selected indicator tables, such as crime and time use, we present data on major cities or by rural-urban residence. In the thematic analysis of the Report, one can often find statistics that refer to sub-regions or socioeconomic groups within a country. You may also look into country specific [National Human Development Reports](#), which often contains rich disaggregated statistical information.

Does the HDR report more complete time series data for economic, education or poverty indicators?

The database from HDR 2006 can be accessed online. It contains all the data that appear in the human development indicator tables. Whenever possible, trend data are included for two key time points. For more complete time series data, please refer to the relevant source agency that supplied the data (see the list of the [main data sources](#) and their areas of focus) or [contact us](#) directly for further help.

Are data comparable in different editions of the HDR?

As a result of periodical revisions to data by international agencies, statistics presented in different editions of the Report are often not comparable. For this reason the Human Development Report Office strongly advises against constructing trend analysis based on data from different editions of the Report.

Why do some national data differ from data in the HDR and why does the HDR show that data is missing when data is available from national sources?

When compiling international data series, international data agencies often need to apply internationally adopted standards and harmonization procedures to improve comparability across countries. Where the international data are based on national statistics, as they usually are, the national data may need to be

adjusted. Where data for a country are missing, an international agency may produce an estimate if other relevant information can be used. And because of the difficulties in coordination between national and international data agencies, international data agencies may not always be in the position to incorporate the most recent national data. All these factors can lead to significant discrepancies between national and international estimates.

This Report has often brought such discrepancies to light. And while the Human Development Report Office advocates for improvements in international data, it also recognizes that it can play an active role in such efforts. When discrepancies in data have arisen, it has helped to link national and international data authorities to address those discrepancies. In many cases this has led to better statistics in the Report.

If you believe that data in the most recent HDR are incorrect or missing which should be available at the country level, please [contact us](#) and the relevant statistical agencies (see the list of the [main data sources](#) and their areas of focus, and the [contact information](#) for major data agencies) to help us ensure we are using the latest and best data available.

How are the Regional/Income classifications determined?

The indicator tables of this year's Report cover 175 UN member countries along with Hong Kong, SAR (China) and Occupied Palestinian Territories. These countries and areas are classified in four ways: by human development level, by income, in major world aggregates and by region [see [Tables HDR 2006 \(PDF\)](#) [1,220 KB]]. These designations do not necessarily express a judgment about the development stage of a particular country or area. The term country as used in the text and tables refers, as appropriate, to territories or areas.

Human development classifications. All countries included in the HDI are classified into three clusters by achievement in human development: high human development (with an HDI of 0.800 or above), medium human development (0.500–0.799) and low human development (less than 0.500).

Income classifications. All countries are grouped by income using World Bank classifications based on gross national income (GNI) per capita. Effective as of 1 July 2005 the income classification was as follows: high income (gross national income per capita of \$10,066 or more in 2005), middle income (\$826 - 10,065) and low income (\$825 or less). These values are updated every year.

Major world classifications. The three global groups are developing countries, Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). These groups are not mutually exclusive. Unless otherwise specified, the classification world represents the universe of 193 countries and areas covered.

Regional classifications. Developing countries are further classified into the following regions: Arab States, East Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean (including Mexico), South Asia, Southern Europe and Sub-Saharan Africa. These regional classifications are consistent with the Regional Bureaux of UNDP. An additional classification is least developed countries, as defined by the United Nations.

Human Development Reports – United Nations Development Programme – <http://hdr.undp.org>