

Synopsis of the Status of Key Development Statistics in Africa

GDP Statistics

Motivation and Objectives

GDP remains one of Africa's most influential economic statistics, shaping assessments of economic size, debt sustainability, fiscal space and the resources available for jobs, infrastructure and social investment; even modest differences can alter debt-to-GDP, deficit-to-GDP and tax-to-GDP ratios. Yet national statistical offices and international outlets may report different GDP values for the same country and year because of differences in revisions, rebasing, exchange-rate conversion and publication timing, creating uncertainty over which figure should inform country analysis, international comparisons and public communication.

The brief aims to: (i) establish the size and persistence of differences in GDP statistics across national and international sources; (ii) determine whether the differences arise from local-currency estimates, conversion to current United States dollars, or timing and revision practices; (iii) examine their implications for ECA's use and publication of GDP statistics in policy analysis, projections, forecasts, research and external communication; and (iv) develop a methodological basis for constructing ECA's GDP statistics.

Highlights of the Status of Statistics

1. About one-third of comparisons between NSO and international-outlet GDP statistics in local currency differ by at least 3.0 percent, with the largest difference reaching 36.9 percent between an NSO and UNSD.
2. NSO and World Bank GDP statistics in local currency consistently differ by at least 3.0 percent in nine African countries over the period 2010-2024.
3. Differences of at least 1.0 percent in current-USD GDP statistics are recorded in 47 African countries across the IMF, World Bank and UNSD.
4. One-quarter of current-USD GDP comparisons across the three international outlets differ by at least 3.0 percent, with the largest difference of 27.0 percent recorded between UNSD and the IMF.
5. Local-currency and exchange-rate inputs jointly account for 99.7 percent of the difference between UNSD and World Bank estimates, 45.6 percent between the IMF and World Bank, and 43.1 percent between the IMF and UNSD. Egypt records the largest remaining unexplained difference, averaging USD 25.8 billion between IMF and UNSD estimates.
6. No international outlet is consistently superior across all countries and years. National statistics should remain the starting point for country-level analysis, while international sources should support cross-country comparison, with clear source labelling, metadata and verification of persistent differences above 3.0 percent.