

Synopsis of the Status of Key Development Statistics in Africa

Population Statistics

Motivation and Objectives

Population statistics are essential social indicators and denominators for assessing policy outcomes across economic, social and environmental development. Yet differences in census coverage, frequency and periodicity, methods, dissemination and projection approaches across African countries produce inconsistent population figures, affecting indicators such as immunization and net enrolment rates when denominators are unrealistic.

This brief addresses four objectives: First, it profiles the frequency, periodicity, projections, and dissemination of Africa's population censuses. Second, it compares the populations of member states across national and international outlets. Third, it assesses the extent of differences across outlets, if any, based on the recency and availability of countries' projected figures. Fourth, it determines variations in income classifications of member states based on differences in national and international GDP and population statistics across outlets.

Highlights of the Status of Statistics

1. The Democratic Republic of Congo, and Somalia have not conducted a population census in the last four decades; Eritrea and South Sudan have not conducted a census since independence; and the Central African Republic, Libya, Nigeria, and Ethiopia have census gaps of about two to three decades.
2. Forty-one African countries have maintained census recency of less than ten years (2017-2026). However, some countries have not strictly adhered to the recommended ten-year intercensal period. The longest census intervals or gaps are recorded in Angola (44 years: 1970 to 2014), Madagascar (25 years: 1993 to 2018), Liberia (24 years: 1984 to 2008), the Central African Republic (23 years: 2003 to date), the Republic of the Congo (23 years: 1984 to 2007) and Cameroon (18 years: 1987 to 2005).
3. In 2024, national population estimates (actual and projections) for 42 member states compared to an international outlet show an overestimation totalling about 62.4 million persons for 36 countries and an underestimation of about 4 million persons for the remaining six countries.
4. Two countries, Ethiopia (22.6 million persons) and Egypt (10 million persons) account for about half of the differences between the 2024 overestimated population figures between national and international outlets.
5. Comparing national census counts and international mid-year estimates for 51 member states, 45 countries show an overestimation totalling approximately 59.3 million persons, while six show an underestimation of about 3.8 million persons.
6. Five countries - Ethiopia (2007: +9.4 million), Egypt (2017: +8.9 million), Nigeria (2006: +8.6 million), Uganda (2024: +4.1 million) and Kenya (2019: +3.6 million) - account for more than half of the overestimated difference, together contributing about 34.6 million persons