

POPULATION STATISTICS IN AFRICA

Status and Implications for Policy Discussions

United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA)

African Centre for Statistics (ACS)

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Acronyms & Abbreviations

Acronym	Meaning
ACS	African Centre for Statistics
CAR	Central African Republic
CRVS	Civil Registration and Vital Statistics
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
ECA	Economic Commission for Africa
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IMIS	Integrated Management Information System
IPUMS	Integrated Public Use Microdata Series
NADA	National Data Archive
NSOs	National Statistics Offices
PHC	Population and Housing Census
P & R	Principles and Recommendations for PHC
PES	Post Enumeration Survey
UN	United Nations
UNPD	United Nations Population Division
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
Tanzania	United Republic of Tanzania
WHO	World Health Organization

1. Introduction

A population census is a humongous undertaking because it seeks complete coverage of all persons and their characteristics within a national jurisdiction. The exercise aims to obtain an actual count of persons through direct enumeration rather than estimation. However, population estimates and projections are still required to support trend comparisons and provide a coherent account of the interrelationships among fertility, mortality, and migration, the principal sources of population change. In several African countries, national population figures have differed from those produced by international agencies, partly because long intervals between censuses, sometimes exceeding two decades, require greater reliance on assumptions and model-based estimates. This challenge is particularly significant for Africa because three of the four most populous countries, namely Nigeria, Ethiopia, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, have census reference points that are about two decades old.

The value of population statistics extends beyond the analysis of demographic trends, patterns, and dynamics. Population figures also serve as denominators for assessing micro- and macro-level outcomes of policy interventions and changes in economic, social and environmental indicators. For example, some African countries report health and education indicators, including immunization and net enrolment rates, whose interpretation is statistically counterintuitive when numerator and denominator data are drawn from different reference periods or population sources. Variations in census coverage, methodology and the reporting of stock and flow measures can therefore lead to the use of different population figures. Another methodological issue is the zero-net-migration assumption used in some national population projections. Remittance inflows from diaspora populations demonstrate substantial international mobility, but they do not by themselves establish a country's net migration balance; the appropriateness of the assumption must instead be assessed using evidence on both immigration and emigration.

This brief presents differences in national and international population aggregates to support responsible use of the figures. Four specific objectives are pursued in this regard: First, profile the frequency, periodicity, projections, and dissemination of Africa's population censuses. Second, compare the total population of member states across national and international outlets. Third, assess any differences across outlets, if any, based on the recency and availability of the country's projected figures. Fourth, determine variations in income classifications of member states based on differences in GDP and population statistics across national and international outlets.

The next section presents the conceptual issues, approach, statistical markers, and data sources and coverage to assess the differences in Africa's population statistics across national and international outlets. Highlights of the key findings of the differences follow this. The next three sections diagnose the sources of these differences, outline pathways to strengthen the conduct of population censuses, and reflect on policy guidance for the use of population statistics in Africa. The final section presents the brief's conclusion.

2. Definition of Concepts, Statistical Markers, Geographical Coverage, Data Sources and Time Stamps

2.1. Definition of Concepts

- i. **Population Census** – This is a complete count of the number of persons living in a national jurisdiction and their general characteristics.
- ii. **Population and Housing Census** – This is a complete count of the number of persons living in a national jurisdiction and their general characteristics, with particular emphasis on structures, housing and dwelling conditions.
- iii. **De jure (Dynamic) Population** – This refers to the usual number of persons living in a dwelling, where household decisions apply.
- iv. **De facto (Static) Population** – This refers to the number of persons living in a dwelling where household decisions apply during the reference period.
- v. **Population Projection** – These are the computed population figures for intercensal periods, which are usually based on three principal historical demographic values, that is, births, deaths, and migration, and assumptions of incidence.
- vi. **The UNPD Cohort-Component Method of Population Projection** – This refers to a demographic accounting method, combined with Bayesian Hierarchical Models, to project future variables probabilistically.
- vii. **The Country Cohort-Component Method of Population Projection** – This is a mathematical extrapolation model, along with the Ratio and Share method.
- viii. **Population Estimate** – This is the projected population figure up to the current year of an assessment.
- ix. **Post Enumeration Survey** – This is a post-census activity aimed at assessing the coverage of counting different segments of the populace.
- x. **Population Adjustment** – This refers to revisions that occur after efforts to enumerate all persons in a national jurisdiction, based on the post-enumeration survey and a desktop assessment of changes in the three principal sources of population change.
- xi. **Zero Net Migration** – This is the assumption that the number of people entering a country (immigrants) is equal to the number of people leaving the same country (emigrants) over a given period.
- xii. **GDP per Capita** – This measures a country's economic output per person. It is calculated by dividing a nation's total GDP by its total population.

2.2. Statistical Markers and Geographical Coverage

2.2.1. Statistical Markers

- i. **Data recency** – This is the latest available reference census year with respect to 2026.
- ii. **Census frequency** – This refers to the total number of censuses conducted in a Member State from the 1960s to 2026.
- iii. **Census periodicity** – This refers to the period between population censuses of a country. This is also termed inter-census periods.
- iv. **Publication year and census year** – This refers to the time gap between the census year and the year the census preliminary report is published.

2.2.2. Geographical Coverage

This statistical brief covers all 54 African Member States. The number of Member States is reduced when the information sought is not available on the national statistical office's website. For population estimates and per capita figures, the datasets cover 54 African countries for 2024 and are sourced from global sources. The national population count data from PHC covers 50 countries, and the national estimates cover 42 countries.

2.3. Data Sources and Time Stamps

- i. **National Statistics Offices** – These are the primary producers of population statistics through population and housing censuses and surveys.
- ii. **United Nations Population Division** – These are modelled estimates that provide harmonized and internationally comparable total population indicators by year.
- iii. **World Bank** – Population and per capita GDP data are sourced from World Development Indicators.
- iv. **Micro-Data and the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series** – The microdata is assessed from national websites and the University of Minnesota.

3. Key Findings

This section presents key findings on the status of population statistics in Africa. It covers four major statistical markers: census frequency, census recency, census periodicity, dissemination periods, and microdata availability, as well as GDP per capita estimates.

3.1. Number, Periodicity and Recency of the Population Censuses

- Since the 1960s, the number of population censuses undertaken among African countries ranges from zero (Eritrea and South Sudan) to 9 censuses (South Africa), followed by 7 censuses (Botswana, Cabo Verde, Gambia, Lesotho, Mauritius, Morocco, Namibia, and Tunisia).
- Three countries (the Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea and Somalia) have not conducted a population census in the last four decades, followed by the Central African Republic, South Sudan, Libya, Nigeria, and Ethiopia with a three- to two-decade gap.
- In alignment with the recommended decennial conduct of census, 41 African countries have maintained a census recency of less than 10 years (2017 - 2026).
- Angola (44 years: 1970 to 2014), Madagascar (25 years: 1993 to 2018), Liberia (24 years: 1984 to 2008), Central African Republic (23 years: 2003 to date), Congo (23 years: 1984 to 2007) and Cameroon (18 years: 1987 to 2005) recorded the longest intercensal periods.

Population and Housing Census Coverage in Africa

Countries listed
54

Countries missing the 2020 round
16

Last census before 1990
2

■ Census conducted (year shown) □ Round missed **Red year** : last census over 10 years ago



* Eritrea (independence in 1993) and South Sudan (independence in 2011): No census since independence.

Cells showing two years mark two censuses conducted within the same round: South Africa (1985 and 1991; 1996 and 2001), Tunisia (1975 and 1984), Seychelles (1997 and 2002).

Sierra Leone conducted a mid-term census in 2021 (shown in red); its last full census was in 2015, more than 10 years ago.

"Last" is the most recent full census year in each row. Somalia's 1986 data was collected but never published.

Figure 1. Number, Periodicity and Recency of Population Censuses Among African Countries

3.2. Differences in Census Dissemination Timelines

- Uganda, Ghana, Angola, Tanzania, Kenya, São Tomé and Príncipe, and Cabo Verde published preliminary census reports within one to two months.
- Madagascar published preliminary census results from its 2018 census 14 months after enumeration.
- Ethiopia, Sudan, Burkina Faso, and Nigeria published their preliminary census results within nine to twelve months.
- In 31 countries, preliminary census reports were released within three to eight months.

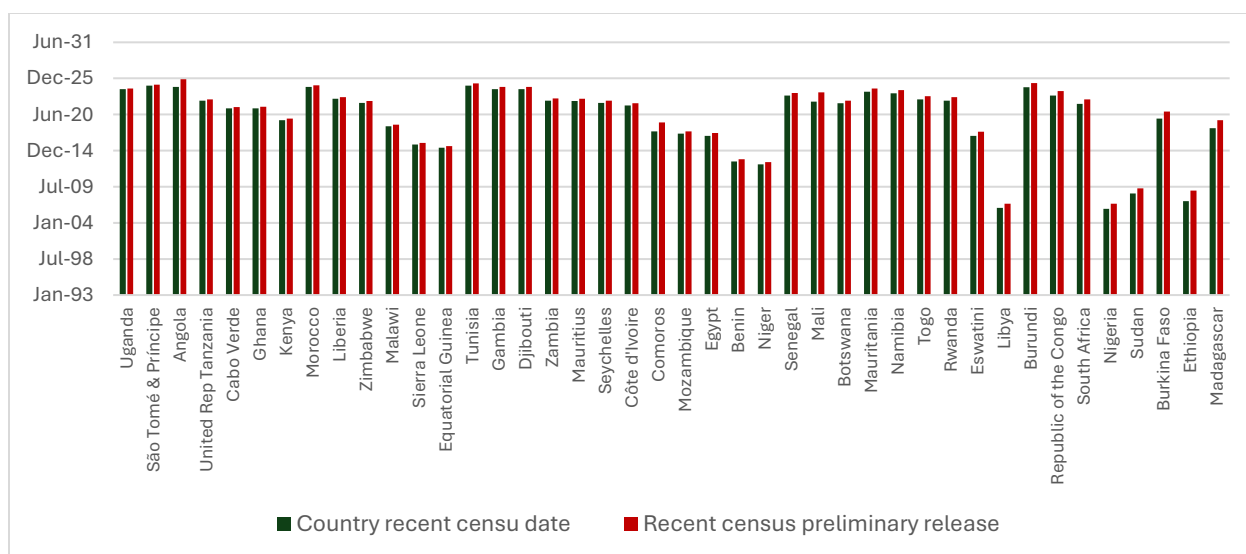


Figure 2. Census Date and Preliminary Report Dissemination Periods Across Countries

3.3. Variations in Global and National Population Estimation

- In 2024, national population estimates (actual and projections) for 42 member states, compared with 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.
- 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 reported by national and international outlets.
- Twelve other countries recorded overestimations of more than one million persons, including Kenya (+4.0 million), Uganda (+3.3 million), Angola (+2.8 million), and Tanzania (+2.3 million).
- South Sudan's population is underestimated by 3.3 million.

Table 1. Differences of National and Global Population Medium Estimations by Country, 2024

Country	National Estimation 2024	Global Estimation 2024	Difference (Global – National)	Classification
Ethiopia	109,496,000	132,059,768	22,563,768	Overestimate
Egypt	106,500,000	116,538,258	10,038,258	
Kenya	52,428,290	56,432,945	4,004,655	
Uganda	46,736,160	50,015,093	3,278,933	
Angola	35,121,734	37,885,850	2,764,116	
Tanzania	66,278,276	68,560,157	2,281,881	
Chad	18,675,548	20,299,123	1,623,575	
Benin	12,910,087	14,462,724	1,552,637	
Ghana	33,007,618	34,427,414	1,419,796	
Mozambique	33,244,414	34,631,766	1,387,352	
Malawi	20,270,568	21,655,286	1,384,718	
Morocco	36,764,403	38,081,173	1,316,770	
Madagascar	30,811,969	31,964,956	1,152,987	
Togo	8,406,000	9,515,236	1,109,236	
South Africa	63,020,000	64,007,187	987,187	
Zimbabwe	15,675,158	16,634,373	959,215	
Guinea	13,989,796	14,754,786	764,990	
Burundi	13,353,051	14,047,786	694,735	
Mali	23,928,700	24,478,596	549,896	
Guinea-Bissau	1,713,187	2,201,352	488,165	
Rwanda	13,798,561	14,256,567	458,006	
Namibia	2,687,636	3,030,131	342,495	
Tunisia	11,972,169	12,277,109	304,940	
Lesotho	2,116,428	2,337,423	220,995	
Côte d'Ivoire	31,719,275	31,934,230	214,955	
Djibouti	1,003,800	1,168,722	164,922	
Mauritania	5,020,364	5,169,396	149,032	
Burkina Faso	23,409,015	23,548,781	139,766	
Liberia	5,496,122	5,612,817	116,695	
Gabon	2,429,555	2,538,952	109,397	
Mauritius	1,213,974	1,271,169	57,195	
Eswatini	1,202,285	1,242,822	40,537	
Cabo Verde	511,534	524,877	13,343	
Seychelles	123,538	130,419	6,881	
Botswana	2,515,674	2,521,139	5,465	
São Tomé & Príncipe	233,090	235,537	2,447	
Comoros	899,282	866,628	-32,654	Underestimate
Niger	27,101,791	27,032,413	-69,379	
Senegal	18,593,261	18,501,985	-91,277	
Sierra Leone	8,884,032	8,642,023	-242,010	
Zambia	21,641,442	21,314,956	-326,487	
South Sudan*	15,254,269	11,943,409	-3,310,861	

Note: 12 countries excluded due to unavailability of 2024 data: Algeria, Libya, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Equatorial Guinea, DRC, Republic of Congo, Eritrea, Sudan, Somalia, Gambia, and Nigeria.

** The projection is produced from the 2008 census conducted before independence.*

Country	Year	National Census	International Mid-Year*** Estimate	Difference (Global – National)	Classification
Ethiopia	2007	73,750,932	83,103,218	9,352,286	Overestimate
Egypt	2017	94,798,827	103,696,058	8,897,231	
Nigeria	2006	140,431,790	149,077,334	8,645,544	
Uganda	2024	45,905,417	50,015,093	4,109,676	
Kenya	2019	47,564,296	51,202,828	3,638,532	
Tanzania	2022	61,741,120	64,711,821	2,970,701	
Sudan	2008	30,894,000	33,623,980	2,729,980	
Madagascar	2018	25,674,186	27,494,926	1,820,740	
Burundi	2024	12,332,788	14,047,786	1,714,998	
Ghana	2021	30,832,019	32,518,665	1,686,646	
Angola	2024	36,604,681	37,885,850	1,281,169	
Morocco	2024	36,828,360	38,081,173	1,252,813	
Togo	2022	8,095,498	9,089,739	994,241	
Malawi	2018	17,564,000	18,528,081	964,081	
Zimbabwe	2022	15,178,957	16,069,056	890,099	
Chad	2009	11,039,873	11,893,754	853,881	
Algeria*	2008	34,080,030	34,816,961	736,931	
Benin	2013	10,008,749	10,708,834	700,085	
Niger	2012	17,138,707	17,836,770	698,063	
Mali	2022	22,395,485	23,072,640	677,155	
Central African Republic	2003	3,895,139	4,529,047	633,908	
South Sudan**	2008	8,260,490	8,817,647	557,157	
Zambia	2022	19,693,423	20,152,938	459,515	
Burkina Faso	2019	20,505,155	20,961,953	456,798	
Rwanda	2022	13,246,394	13,651,030	404,636	
South Africa	2022	62,027,503	62,378,410	350,907	
Gambia	2024	2,422,712	2,759,988	337,276	
Libya	2006	5,657,692	5,980,211	322,519	
Tunisia	2024	11,972,169	12,277,109	304,940	
Mozambique	2017	27,909,798	28,166,394	256,596	
Côte d'Ivoire	2021	29,389,150	29,639,737	250,587	
Equatorial Guinea	2015	1,222,442	1,453,923	231,481	
Lesotho*	2016	2,007,201	2,130,422	123,221	
Liberia	2022	5,250,187	5,373,294	123,107	
Gabon*	2013	1,811,079	1,913,059	101,980	
Djibouti	2024	1,066,809	1,168,722	101,913	
Mauritania	2023	4,927,532	5,022,442	94,910	
Botswana	2022	2,346,179	2,439,892	93,713	
Eswatini	2017	1,093,238	1,158,195	64,957	
Mauritius	2022	1,233,427	1,276,130	42,703	
Republic of the Congo	2023	6,142,180	6,182,885	40,705	
Sao Tome and Principe	2024	209,607	235,537	25,930	
Cabo Verde	2021	491,233	516,649	25,416	
Seychelles	2022	119,878	125,523	5,645	
Guinea-Bissau*	2009	1,520,830	1,526,377	5,547	Underestimate
Comoros	2017	758,316	756,670	-1,647	
Senegal	2023	18,126,390	18,077,574	-48,817	

Sierra Leone	2015	7,092,113	7,037,655	-54,458
Namibia	2023	3,022,411	2,963,095	-59,316
Cameroon*	2005	17,463,836	17,074,594	-389,242
Guinea	2025	17,521,167	15,099,727	-2,421,440

3.4. Differences in Population Counts During National Census and Global Estimates

- Out of 51 countries, the global demographic model **overestimates** population figures in 45 African countries and **underestimates** baseline counts in 6 countries.
- The total overestimation is approximately 59.3 million persons, compared with an underestimation of about 3.8 million persons.
- 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 (about 34.6 million persons) of the overestimated difference over the period 2007 to 2025.
- **Guinea's** 2025 count is underestimated by 2.4 million people, and **Cameroon's** (2005) by 389,242.

Table 2. Differences of National Recent Census Count and Global Estimates, by Year

Note: Three countries are excluded due to lack of data: DRC, Eritrea, and Somalia.

**Countries whose recent census results have not been disseminated.*

*** The projection is produced from the 2008 census conducted before independence.*

**** Differences between the National census date and the Global Mid-year are considered insignificant.*

3.5. Availability of Census Microdata

3.5.1. Country Repository

Dissemination of population census microdata to users is indispensable. Hence, the availability of census microdata dissemination portals is assessed with the NSO's official website. The check found that 32 countries have microdata dissemination portals, while data dissemination portals for 22 countries are unavailable. Key highlights are:

- 30 countries have used NADA for microdata dissemination.
- Morocco and South Africa used Miro-données and Nesstar, respectively.
- Egypt also used the ERF portal for dissemination.

Among the countries reviewed, NADA (National Data Archive) is the predominant data dissemination platform. Angola, Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cabo Verde, Chad, Central African Republic, Comoros, Ethiopia, Ghana, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Liberia, Madagascar, Mali, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo, Uganda, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe use NADA as their main dissemination portal. Some countries combine NADA with other online platforms: Egypt uses NADA and the ERF (Economic Research Forum) portal. Other countries rely on different dissemination solutions, such as Morocco through Micro-données/Open Data, and South Africa through Nesstar (Networked Social Science Tools and Resources).

3.5.2. International Repository

The availability of population census microdata was cross-referenced with international databases, primarily the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series inventory for African countries. The review confirmed that 40 African countries have successfully preserved and made at least one census microdata set available in the repository. The depth of availability of census microdata varies significantly across the continent:

- South Africa leads the region with six census microdata samples, while Gambia, Kenya, Malawi, Mali, and Sudan each have four.
- Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, and Tunisia each have two to three census microdata samples.
- To date, the repository has no census microdata for 14 African countries.

Table 3. Available Population Census Microdata by Countries and Rounds, IPUMS

Country	2010s	2000s	1990s	1980s	1970s	1960s
Algeria		2008	1998*	1987*	1977	1966
Benin	2013	2002*	1992*		1979*	
Botswana	2011	2001	1991*	1981*	1971	1964
Burkina Faso		2006*	1996*	1985*	1975	
Cameroon		2005*		1987*	1976*	
Cape Verde	2010	2000*	1990*	1980	1970	1960
Central African Republic		2003*		1988	1975	
Chad		2009	1993*			1962
Comoros	2017	2003*	1991	1980		1966
Egypt	2017	2006*	1996*	1986*	1976	1960
Eswatini	2017	2007*	1997	1986*	1976	1966
Ethiopia		2007*	1994*	1984*		
Gabon	2013	2003*	1993			
Gambia	2013	2003*	1993*	1983*	1973*	1963
Ghana	2010	2000*		1984*	1970	
Guinea	2014		1996*	1983*		
Kenya	2019	2009	1999*	1989*	1979*	1969*
Lesotho	2016	2006*	1996*	1986*	1976	1966
Liberia		2008*		1984	1974*	
Madagascar			1993*		1975	
Malawi	2018	2008*	1998*	1987*	1977*	
Mali		2009*	1998*	1987*	1976*	1960
Mauritania	2013	2000*		1988*	1977	
Mauritius	2011	2000*	1990*	1983*	1972	1962
Morocco	2014	2004*	1994*	1982*	1971	1960
Mozambique	2017	2007*	1997*	1980	1970	1960
Namibia	2011	2001*	1991	1981	1970	1960
Niger	2012	2001*		1988*	1977	
Nigeria		2006*	1991*			1963
Rwanda	2012	2002*	1991*		1978	

Senegal	2013	2002*		1988*	1976*	
Sierra Leone		2004*		1985	1974	1963
South Africa	2011	2001*	1991* / 1996*	1980* / 1985*	1970*	1960
South Sudan**		2008*	1993*			
Sudan		2008*	1993*	1983*	1973*	
Tanzania	2012	2002*		1988*	1978	1967
Tunisia	2014	2004*	1994*	1984*	1975	1966
Uganda	2014	2002*	1991*	1980		1969
Zambia	2010	2000*	1990*	1980*		1969
Zimbabwe	2012	2002*	1992*	1982		1969

Note: Years marked with an asterisk (*) indicate that a microdata sample survives. Source: https://international.ipums.org/international/microdata_inventory.shtml, last revised May 2009.

** indicates the microdata produced from the 2008 census before 2011 independence.

3.6. Variation in Income Classification

For the 2024 reference period, we analyzed per capita income across 54 African countries using varying combinations of country-published and internationally sourced GDP and population datasets.

- Guinea-Bissau (–28.5%), Ethiopia (–20.6%), Djibouti (–16.4%), Namibia (–12.7%) and Benin (–12.0%) record the largest downward revisions in their respective per capita income when country-published population is used rather than the estimate from an international source.
- Comoros (+3.6%), Sierra Leone (+2.7%), Seychelles (+1.8%), Zambia (+1.5%), Senegal (+0.5%) and Niger (+0.3%) return higher per capita income when country-published population is used rather than the estimate from an international source.
- Togo, Botswana and Burkina Faso remain within $\pm 1\%$.

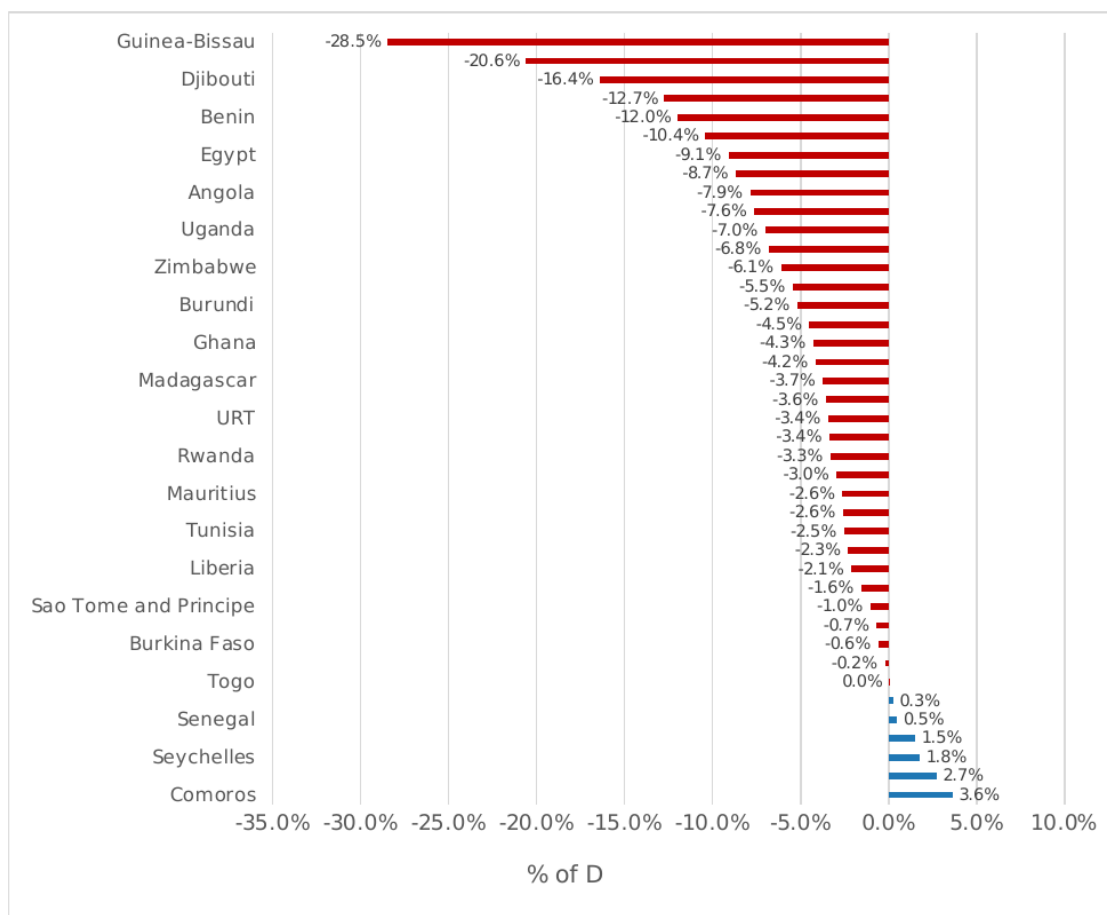


Figure 3. Effect of Population Source on GDP per Capita, 2024 (%)

Source: Annex Table A1, column "D – C, % of D" (Ggdp/Gpop less Ggdp/Cpop, expressed as a share of D).

- Three countries move across income groups when the population denominator changes from an international source to a country-published estimate.
- **Ethiopia, Guinea-Bissau, and Uganda** move from a low-income category to a lower-middle-income status because the denominator of the per capita income computation changes from an international source to a country-published estimate.

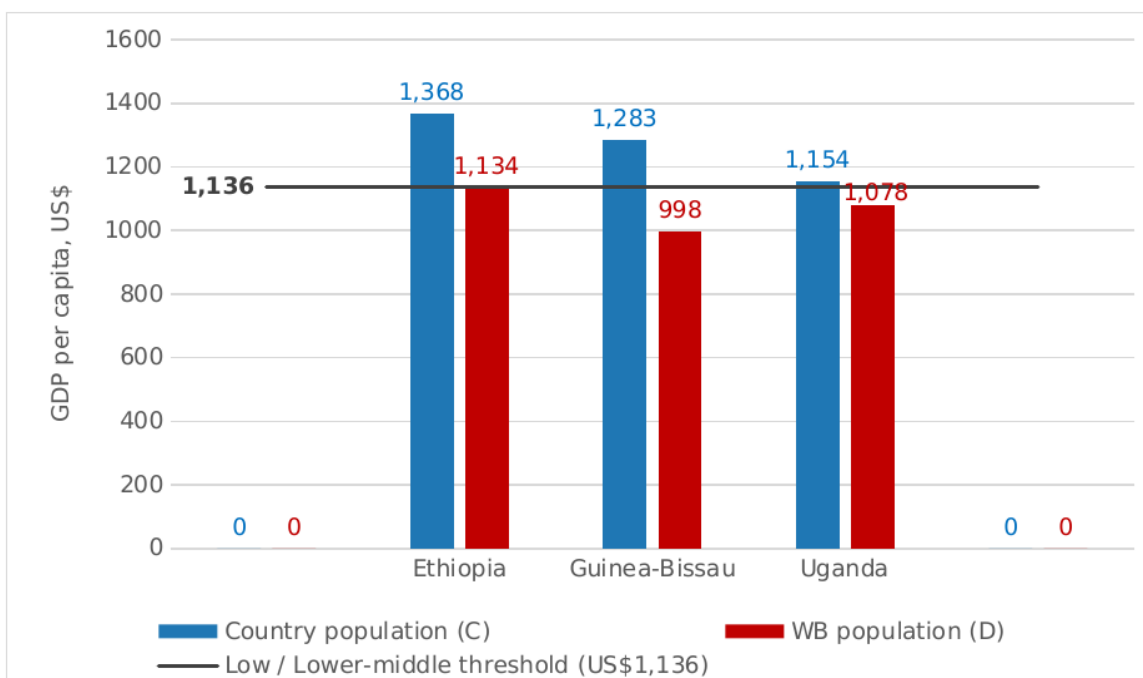


Figure 4. Income Classification Changes with the Population Source, 2024 (US\$)

Source: Annex Table A1, columns C and D, against the World Bank Low / Lower-middle income threshold of US\$1,136.

4. A Diagnosis of the Sources of Differences in Population Statistics in Africa

This section reflects potential sources of differences in population statistics in Africa. Specifically, it examines how variations arise from data periodicity and frequency, assumptions about fertility and mortality, census adjustments, migration, and the use of *de facto* and *de jure* counts.

4.1. Differences in Data Periodicity

Data periodicity is a major contributor to inconsistent population figures across Africa. Of 52 countries, only 6 (Kenya, Lesotho, Morocco, Mozambique, Tunisia, and Zimbabwe) meet the United Nations' recommendation to conduct a census every 10 years. Among countries that never comply with the recommendations, Angola, Madagascar, Liberia, the Central African Republic, Libya, and Cameroon exhibit severe census intervals of 44, 25, 24, 23, 22, and 18 years, respectively. These prolonged delays between censuses widen data gaps, limiting the ability to reflect the current demographic situation and rendering baseline figures highly inaccurate for long-term projections. To fill these gaps, national and international agencies must apply their own statistical estimates or modify baseline figures, resulting in highly different datasets.

4.2. Differences in Data Frequencies

The number of census implementation rounds directly compromises the quality of population estimates. On average, African nations have conducted only 4.8 out of a recommended 6 census rounds over the six-decade period from the 1960s to the 2020s. Countries such as Somalia (1975) and the Democratic Republic of Congo (1984) have conducted only one census round, while Eritrea and South Sudan have no census data. Further, Angola, the Central African Republic, Ethiopia, Libya, Madagascar, and Nigeria have 3 censuses in their census history, and 13 countries have 4 rounds. This shortfall leaves statistical models without adequate or up-to-date baselines for long-term projections. To meet domestic demand, National Statistical Offices produce localized estimates, while global agencies rely on external, historical datasets to project population sizes. So, differences in census frequency and implementation methods across countries yield inconsistent population results.

4.3. Differences in Fertility and Mortality Assumptions

Fertility and mortality are the primary demographic drivers shaping population size, distribution, and composition. For national projections, NSOs align fertility and mortality assumptions with national health policies (targets set for contraceptive use), maternal and child health programs focused on reducing mortality, poverty eradication programs, domestic multi-year development plans, and available national census and survey data. This dataset may have reference-period and coverage errors; therefore, an adjustment is applied to generate the estimates. Conversely, international organizations base their assumptions on a country's current position in the demographic transition for fertility, improvement in life expectancy and HIV/AIDS, historical trends, and global models. These contrasting approaches to estimating demographic dynamics and events, along with outdated baseline data, lead to differences in population estimates.

4.4. Differences in Migration Assumptions

Assumptions about migration also introduce significant variance between national and international estimates. NSOs predict internal migration by assessing labour governance policies and strategies, local socioeconomic development factors such as job creation in industrial centres, education services, movement towards resource areas, alongside empirical census and survey data. International agencies, however, rely heavily on the assumption of continuity of recent trends: that a country's recent net migration levels (whether positive or negative) will remain relatively constant in the short-to-medium term. Besides, it uses the "Zero-Migration" Horizon, which assumes that net international migration will gradually decline. Thus, differences in assumptions about the level and trends of migration contribute to variations in population estimates across the continent.

4.5. Difference in Census Adjustment

While adjusting census data is standard practice, methodologies and scopes vary by institution. The cause and purpose of census adjustments also affect the level of adjustment. National offices typically adjust base-year data using PES data to correct coverage or content errors. International agencies often apply independent adjustment factors to specific cohorts or across the entire population to adjust perceived undercounts. As a result, subsequent estimates build on different adjusted baselines, widening the gap between national official figures and international estimates over time.

4.6. Differences in De Jure vs De Facto results

National and international agencies differ in how they use population by residence for projections. The choice of the appropriate population count depends on the accuracy of the methodology. Thus, NSOs publish population projections using *de facto* or *de jure* population baselines for their national data demand. In contrast, international agencies almost exclusively use the *de facto* population to project countries' population size. As a result, the two approaches yield differences in population projections.

5. Statistics Community-Focused Considerations for Addressing Differences in Population Statistics between National Sources and UNPD

Pursuant to the operational mandate of the African Centre for Statistics and in collaboration with UNPD, strategic pathways have been identified to strengthen regional and national capacities and statistical systems. These interventions will primarily aim to safeguard national data sovereignty and promote adherence to scientific rigour, international comparability, and coherent statistical standards. These pathways will provide a framework for phased implementation of practical, immediate interventions over the next couple of years, in the context of the 2030 round of population censuses. The following are initial reflections on the possible interventions:

5.1. Leverage Ongoing Engagement Between UNPD and Member States on Existing Differences in Population Statistics in Africa

Given the significant policy and livelihood implications of differences in population statistics between countries and global agencies, some African Member States, including Uganda and Egypt, have engaged the UNPD to identify the sources of variation and explore pathways towards alignment. By documenting the status of population statistics across all 54 African Member States, this publication provides a basis for streamlining and scaling up continental processes to investigate and resolve such differences. The ACS will provide coordination and technical support to countries seeking to understand and address these gaps. In line with UNPD's schedule for periodic revisions, this initiative will be implemented over the next six months and sustained through the next revision cycle in 2029.

5.2. Align Population Counts Between UNPD and African Countries During Census Years

The role of decennial censuses in providing more accurate counts and profiles of national populations will be strengthened through targeted awareness creation and stronger coordination among UNPD, ACS, and Member States during census years. This awareness creation will have two complementary dimensions: strengthening Member States' understanding of the demographic models used to produce comparable and coherent population statistics and deepening international agencies' appreciation of the assumptions and national contexts that underpin countries' population counts and demographic profiles. This intervention will promote transparency, improve accuracy and alignment, and safeguard national data sovereignty. ACS will integrate this approach into its support for Member States throughout the 2030 round of population and housing censuses.

5.3. Strengthen National Data Architecture for Quality Checks During Census Years

In addition to applying demographic models to improve the accuracy and international comparability of population counts, ACS will support African national statistical systems in developing data architectures that strengthen quality assurance. This effort will incorporate emerging data sources, including national identification systems, civil registration records, call detail records and geospatial resources. These complementary sources are not intended to replace conventional census operations; rather, they will provide subnational context and help identify deviations from expected demographic patterns and trends.

Over the next six months, ACS will develop guidance notes on the appropriate use of these data sources as part of its support to African Member States in preparing for and conducting the 2030 round of population and housing censuses.

5.4. Broaden and Deepen Digitalisation of the 2030 Round Censuses

Within the framework of the ACS Roadmap for the Transformation and Modernisation of Official Statistics in Africa, 2023–2030, support to Member States for the 2030 round of population and housing censuses will focus on expanding country coverage and deepening the use of digital technologies across the entire census lifecycle. In this regard, ACS has developed a wide range of digital tools to support all phases of census operations. These include census project-management systems; tools for calibrating and preparing tablets and other field devices; and real-time monitoring platforms for tracking field performance, enumeration coverage, operational progress, and data quality during pilot censuses and the main enumeration.

After census enumeration and data processing, ACS also supports Member States in strengthening the communication, dissemination, and use of census results through digital dissemination portals, interactive dashboards, data stories, and mobile applications.

To facilitate broader access to and responsible sharing of census microdata, ACS has also embarked on developing tools and methodologies for data anonymization and de-identification, as well as tools for producing 10 per cent public-use census microdata samples while safeguarding the confidentiality and privacy of individual respondents.

5.5. Build Regional and National Capacities to Assess Internal Coherence and Comparability of Census Results

Current support and emerging need. ACS and other international agencies, particularly the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), have supported African Member States across nearly all previous census rounds, with an emphasis on strengthening data collection and producing census results. The findings of this brief show that future assistance should extend beyond these areas to build the capacity of African statistical systems to assess and maintain the coherence of population census results over long time series and across geographic areas, while preserving national context.

Capacity-building priorities. ACS will draw on lessons from the Latin American and Caribbean Demographic Centre (CELADE), the Population Division of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), to shape an approach that:

- institutionalizes technical demography expertise at regional and national levels;
- strengthens the assessment of internal coherence and comparability across census rounds and geographic areas; and
- supports better alignment of population census figures across Africa.

6. Multi-Stakeholder-Focused Considerations for Strengthening Africa's Population Statistics

Strengthening the enabling conditions for statistical activities in African Member States is essential to producing timely, comparable, accessible, and usable population data that supports the continent's development. These enabling conditions should be organized around five priorities: adopting a whole-of-government approach to supporting statistical activities; developing and implementing protocols for aligning standards for international comparability and contextualization of population counts; promoting the deliberate use of statistics throughout the policy engagement value chain; safeguarding the independence of statistical operations across institutional, technical, and political dimensions and over time; and institutionalizing predictable, adequate and sustainable programme-based funding for statistical operations.

The ACS will leverage ongoing development initiatives that bring together the communities of development practitioners and statisticians, such as the Seville Platform of Action for Financing for Development, to deepen advocacy and action on the five priorities identified. Also, the diverse activities of the UN Economic Commission for Africa, particularly the engagement with Ministers of Finance, Economic Development and Planning and other Ministerial meetings to socialize the strengthening of the enabling conditions for statistical activities in Africa.

7. Conclusion

This brief presents the status of population statistics in Africa, revealing critical data gaps and differences on the continent. While reliable and consistent population data is widely recognized as a cornerstone for policy formulation, programme monitoring, and evaluation, significant challenges remain. Differences in census frequency, periodicity, and recency, combined with diverse assumptions and adjustments, have led national and global agencies to release different estimates, posing major obstacles for policymakers, programme managers, and researchers.

This analysis highlights severe delays in conducting population censuses. Between the 1960s and early 2030s, African countries conducted an average of 4.9 censuses. Member states conduct censuses, on average, 12 years apart, with extremes of 44–18 years between censuses, falling short of the UN's recommended 10-year interval. Currently, the average census recency on the continent stands at 8 years. However, the extremes are stark: the DRC and Somalia have not conducted a census in four decades, and Eritrea and South Sudan have not conducted a census since independence. Furthermore, comparisons between national and international outlets show large differences, while the availability of microdata for research and income determination remains severely limited.

Addressing these challenges requires collaborative action from both national and global agencies. National Statistics Offices must prioritize improving census frequency, ensuring periodicity, and minimizing data discrepancies. Ultimately, producing and disseminating timely, high-quality, reliable population data is vital to drive effective policy decisions and monitoring programs that uplift human well-being. Because ultimately, **“Better Data, Better Lives.”**

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Annex Table A1. Per Capita Income Classification by Country, 2024

Country	A. GDP p.c. (Cgdp/Cpop)	B. GDP p.c. (Cgdp/Gpop)	C. GDP p.c. (Ggdp/Cpop)	D. GDP p.c. (Ggdp/Gpop)	WB income band (D)	WB income group (D)	D – A	D – B	D – C	Group (A)	Group (B)	Group (C)	A vs D	B vs D	C vs D	D – C, % of D
Algeria	..	5,754.75	..	5,752.99	4,496 – 13,935	Upper- middle	..	-1.76	..	..	Upper- middle	..	..	Same	..	..
Angola	3,416.40	3,416.40	2,934.95	2,720.82	1,136 – 4,495	Lower- middle	-695.58	-695.58	-214.13	Lower- middle	Lower- middle	Lower- middle	Same	Same	Same	(7.9%)
Benin	1,665.32	1,665.32	1,664.02	1,485.38	1,136 – 4,495	Lower- middle	-179.94	-179.94	-178.64	Lower- middle	Lower- middle	Lower- middle	Same	Same	Same	(12.0%)
Botswana	7,714.50	7,714.50	7,666.43	7,649.82	4,496 – 13,935	Upper- middle	-64.68	-64.68	-16.61	Upper- middle	Upper- middle	Upper- middle	Same	Same	Same	(0.2%)
Burkina Faso	984.03	984.03	988.36	982.49	≤ 1,135	Low	-1.54	-1.54	-5.87	Low	Low	Low	Same	Same	Same	(0.6%)
Burundi	354.94	354.94	227.48	216.23	≤ 1,135	Low	-138.71	-138.71	-11.25	Low	Low	Low	Same	Same	Same	(5.2%)
Cabo Verde	..	..	5,305.07	5,170.21	4,496 – 13,935	Upper- middle	..	..	-134.86	..	..	Upper- middle	..	..	Same	(2.6%)
Cameroon	..	..	..	1,830.01	1,136 – 4,495	Lower- middle	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Central African Republic	..	..	..	516.16	≤ 1,135	Low	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Chad	..	..	1,065.92	980.67	≤ 1,135	Low	..	..	-85.25	..	..	Low	..	..	Same	(8.7%)
Comoros	..	..	1,790.41	1,857.87	1,136 – 4,495	Lower- middle	..	..	67.46	..	..	Lower- middle	..	..	Same	3.6%
Côte d'Ivoire	..	..	2,746.38	2,727.89	1,136 – 4,495	Lower- middle	..	..	-18.49	..	..	Lower- middle	..	..	Same	(0.7%)
DRC	..	11,156.44	..	692.89	≤ 1,135	Low	..	-10,463.55	..	..	Upper- middle	..	..	Different	..	..
Djibouti	..	..	4,136.43	3,552.72	1,136 – 4,495	Lower- middle	..	..	-583.71	..	..	Lower- middle	..	..	Same	(16.4%)
Egypt	..	..	3,642.41	3,338.47	1,136 – 4,495	Lower- middle	..	..	-303.94	..	..	Lower- middle	..	..	Same	(9.1%)
Equatorial Guinea	..	6,069.20	..	7,003.58	4,496 – 13,935	Upper- middle	..	934.38	..	..	Upper- middle	..	..	Same	..	..
Eritrea	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Eswatini	4,049.07	3,918.46	4,041.38	3,909.56	1,136 – 4,495	Lower- middle	-139.51	-8.90	-131.82	Lower- middle	Lower- middle	Lower- middle	Same	Same	Same	(3.4%)
Ethiopia	1,668.84	1,384.38	1,367.54	1,133.88	≤ 1,135	Low	-534.96	-250.50	-233.66	Lower- middle	Lower- middle	Lower- middle	Different	Different	Different	(20.6%)
Gabon	..	..	8,600.62	8,230.04	4,496 – 13,935	Upper- middle	..	..	-370.58	..	..	Upper- middle	..	..	Same	(4.5%)
Gambia	..	859.72	..	871.34	≤ 1,135	Low	..	11.62	..	..	Low	..	..	Same	..	..
Ghana	..	..	2,523.31	2,419.25	1,136 – 4,495	Lower- middle	..	..	-104.06	..	..	Lower- middle	..	..	Same	(4.3%)
Guinea	25,757.50	24,191.16	1,787.64	1,694.95	1,136 – 4,495	Lower- middle	-24,062.55	-22,496.21	-92.69	High	High	Lower- middle	Different	Different	Same	(5.5%)
Guinea-Bissau	..	..	1,282.86	998.38	≤ 1,135	Low	..	..	-284.48	..	..	Lower- middle	..	..	Different	(28.5%)
Kenya	..	..	2,296.42	2,133.46	1,136 – 4,495	Lower- middle	..	..	-162.96	..	..	Lower- middle	..	..	Same	(7.6%)
Lesotho	1,127.91	1,026.25	1,129.87	1,023.04	≤ 1,135	Low	-104.87	-3.21	-106.83	Low	Low	Low	Same	Same	Same	(10.4%)
Liberia	940.56	923.76	869.58	851.50	≤ 1,135	Low	-89.06	-72.26	-18.08	Low	Low	Low	Same	Same	Same	(2.1%)
Libya	..	..	..	6,569.16	4,496 – 13,935	Upper- middle	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Madagascar	537.70	537.70	570.97	550.38	≤ 1,135	Low	12.68	12.68	-20.59	Low	Low	Low	Same	Same	Same	(3.7%)
Malawi	..	..	558.05	522.37	≤ 1,135	Low	..	..	-35.68	..	..	Low	..	..	Same	(6.8%)
Mali	1,111.74	1,084.51	1,118.38	1,093.25	≤ 1,135	Low	-18.49	8.74	-25.13	Low	Low	Low	Same	Same	Same	(2.3%)

Mauritania	..	..	2,167.02	2,104.54	1,136 – 4,495	Lower-middle	..	..	-62.48	..	..	Lower-middle	..	..	Same	(3.0%)
Mauritius	12,065.74	11,576.86	12,305.09	11,990.94	4,496 – 13,935	Upper-middle	-74.80	414.08	-314.15	Upper-middle	Upper-middle	Upper-middle	Same	Same	Same	(2.6%)
Morocco	..	..	4,368.66	4,217.60	1,136 – 4,495	Lower-middle	..	..	-151.06	..	..	Lower-middle	..	..	Same	(3.6%)
Mozambique	685.31	657.58	684.39	656.98	≤ 1,135	Low	-28.33	-0.60	-27.41	Low	Low	Low	Same	Same	Same	(4.2%)
Namibia	4,952.72	4,413.32	5,075.54	4,501.85	4,496 – 13,935	Upper-middle	-450.87	88.53	-573.69	Upper-middle	Lower-middle	Upper-middle	Same	Different	Same	(12.7%)
Niger	728.04	730.73	727.99	729.86	≤ 1,135	Low	1.82	-0.87	1.87	Low	Low	Low	Same	Same	Same	0.3%
Nigeria	..	..	..	1,084.16	≤ 1,135	Low	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Republic of the Congo	..	2,457.06	..	2,482.25	1,136 – 4,495	Lower-middle	..	25.19	..	..	Lower-middle	..	..	Same	..	..
Rwanda	1,182.62	1,141.27	1,095.12	1,059.94	≤ 1,135	Low	-122.68	-81.33	-35.18	Lower-middle	Lower-middle	Low	Different	Different	Same	(3.3%)
Sao Tome and Principe	..	..	3,539.37	3,502.62	1,136 – 4,495	Lower-middle	..	..	-36.75	..	..	Lower-middle	..	..	Same	(1.0%)
Senegal	1,732.90	1,742.27	1,730.20	1,738.73	1,136 – 4,495	Lower-middle	5.83	-3.54	8.53	Lower-middle	Lower-middle	Lower-middle	Same	Same	Same	0.5%
Seychelles	18,118.99	17,143.35	18,039.86	18,364.53	> 13,935	High	245.54	1,221.18	324.67	High	High	High	Same	Same	Same	1.8%
Sierra Leone	..	..	784.68	806.65	≤ 1,135	Low	..	..	21.97	..	..	Low	..	..	Same	2.7%
Somalia	..	..	..	629.54	≤ 1,135	Low	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
South Africa	..	..	6,365.36	6,267.19	4,496 – 13,935	Upper-middle	..	..	-98.17	..	..	Upper-middle	..	..	Same	(1.6%)
South Sudan	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Sudan	..	..	..	984.61	≤ 1,135	Low	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Tanzania	1,195.11	1,155.04	1,195.50	1,155.71	1,136 – 4,495	Lower-middle	-39.40	0.67	-39.79	Lower-middle	Lower-middle	Lower-middle	Same	Same	Same	(3.4%)
Togo	1,267.96	1,121.14	1,266.17	1,266.09	1,136 – 4,495	Lower-middle	-1.87	144.95	-0.08	Lower-middle	Low	Lower-middle	Same	Different	Same	(0.0%)
Tunisia	4,295.08	4,179.85	4,294.30	4,187.64	1,136 – 4,495	Lower-middle	-107.44	7.79	-106.66	Lower-middle	Lower-middle	Lower-middle	Same	Same	Same	(2.5%)
Uganda	..	..	1,153.54	1,077.91	≤ 1,135	Low	..	..	-75.63	..	..	Lower-middle	..	..	Different	(7.0%)
Zambia	..	..	1,169.20	1,187.11	1,136 – 4,495	Lower-middle	..	..	17.91	..	..	Lower-middle	..	..	Same	1.5%
Zimbabwe	2,618.59	2,467.59	2,648.90	2,496.16	1,136 – 4,495	Lower-middle	-122.43	28.57	-152.74	Low	Low	Lower-middle	Different	Different	Same	(6.1%)

Abbreviations:

Cgdp: Country-sourced GDP estimate.

Cpop: Country-sourced population estimate.

Ggdp: Globally-sourced GDP estimate (World Bank).

Gpop: Globally-sourced population estimate (World Bank).

Income groups: Low ($\leq$ US\$1,135), Lower-middle (US\$1,136 – 4,495), Upper-middle (US\$4,496 – 13,935), High ($>$ US\$13,935).

Note: WB income thresholds are defined on GNI per capita (Atlas method); columns A–D are GDP per capita. Classifications here are therefore indicative, not official WB assignments.

Note: “..” denotes that country-sourced data are unavailable; the cell is empty by construction.

Annex Table A2: Census Microdata Dissemination Portal by Country

Country	Data Dissemination Portal
Angola	NADA
Benin	NADA
Botswana	NADA
Burkina Faso	NADA
Burundi	NADA
Cabo Verde	NADA
Chad	NADA
Comoros	NADA
Central African Republic	NADA
Egypt	NADA / ERF
Ethiopia	NADA
Gambia	NADA
Ghana	NADA
Guinea-Bissau	NADA
Kenya	NADA
Liberia	NADA
Madagascar	Instant
Mali	NADA
Morocco	Micro données – Open Data
Mozambique	NADA
Namibia	NADA
Niger	NADA
Nigeria	NADA
Rwanda	NADA
Senegal	NADA
Sierra Leone	NADA
South Africa	Nesstar
Togo	(NADA)
Uganda	NADA
Tanzania	NADA
Zambia	NADA
Zimbabwe	NADA