

July 2017

household surveys

factsheet

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Household surveys

What are household surveys?

Household surveys are currently the most important data source for a range of key demographic and socioeconomic statistics for developing countries in which vital registration and administrative systems are lacking and the information gaps are largest. This will remain the case until better sources of data are available through credible, functioning and sustainable systems. There are three major international household survey programmes in use around the world.

Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS)

The Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) is an international household survey programme developed by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in the 1990s. MICS was originally created to monitor the goals of the [1990 World Summit for Children](#).¹ Since then, close to 300 surveys have been carried out in over 100 countries.

Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS)

The Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) is a nationally-representative household survey developed by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) in the 1980s. DHS built on previous work in the 1970s through the [World Fertility Survey and Contraceptive Prevalence Surveys](#).² Since then, over 300 surveys have been carried out in just under 100 countries.

Living Standards Measurement Study (LSMS)

The Living Standards Measurement Study (LSMS) is a household survey developed by the Development Research Group at the World Bank in the 1980s. The programme is housed in the Survey Unit of the World Bank's Development Data Group. Since the 1980s, over 100 surveys have been carried out in just under 40 countries.

Who funds and supports household surveys?

- **DHSs** are funded and developed by USAID while their implementation is coordinated by ICF International, a strategic consulting firm, with support from other partners. USAID contributes around two-thirds of the funding and the rest comes from domestic sources.
- The **MICS programme** is developed and financially supported by UNICEF, with additional support from other UN agencies, development partners and governments. Government institutions typically fund and carry out the surveys themselves, with financial support from donors and technical assistance from UNICEF and its partners.
- The **LSMS programme** is financed, developed and implemented by national statistical offices in collaboration with the World Bank, with the Bank providing technical assistance. LSMS and related surveys generally known as Household Income and Expenditure Surveys are highly customised between countries and their funding schemes can vary significantly. A recent component of the LSMS is its Integrated Surveys on Agriculture (LSMS-ISA). This has significant funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. ISAs frequently include extensive questions on land ownership and crop yields.

Countries choose the survey (or surveys) they wish to implement based on their needs as well as availability of funding from domestic and external sources.

How often are household surveys undertaken?

The **DHS Program** is carried out in phases, of which there have been seven to date, with phase one starting in 1984. The questionnaires have changed substantially between phases. Countries carry out a DHS survey on average every five years, but not all countries have done so every five years.

The **MICS programme** is carried out in rounds, of which there have been six to date. The first round began in 1995 and was carried out in over 60 countries and the sixth round began in 2016. Not all countries that have carried out a MICS survey have done so for each round.

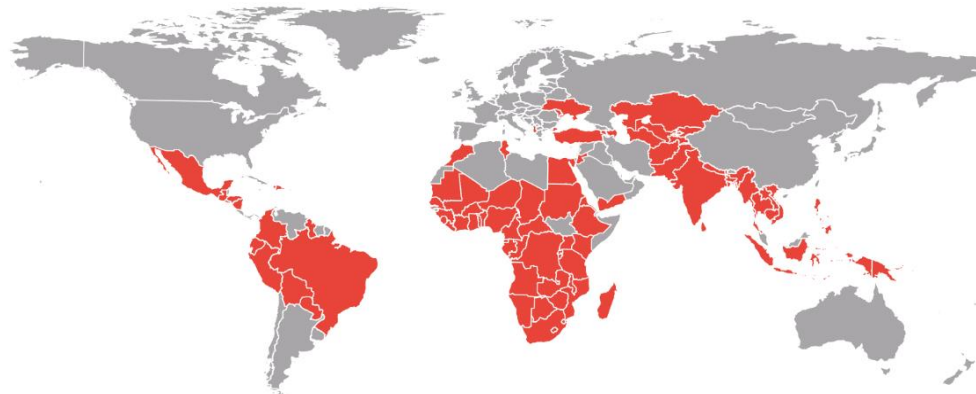
A report published by the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data³ recommends that similar surveys should be conducted every two to three years to track the Sustainable Development Goals.

Where are surveys carried out?

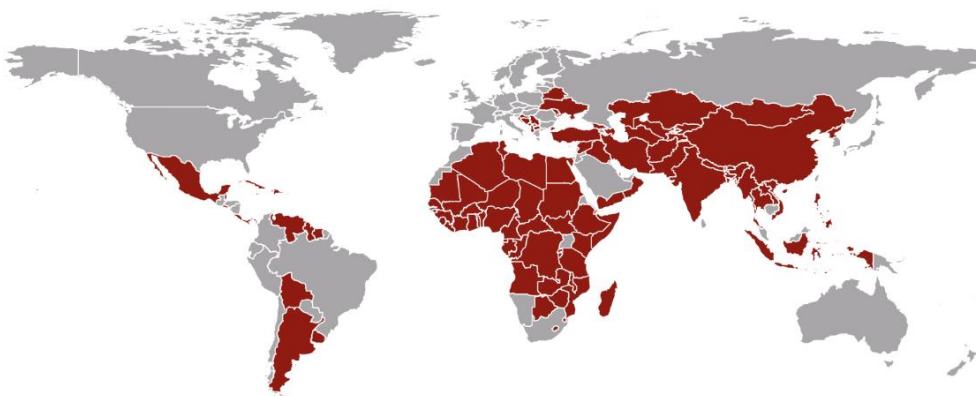
Of the 130 countries that have carried out one of the three main household surveys, 67 have conducted more than one survey and 19 have carried out all three.

Figure 1: Countries that have carried out household surveys

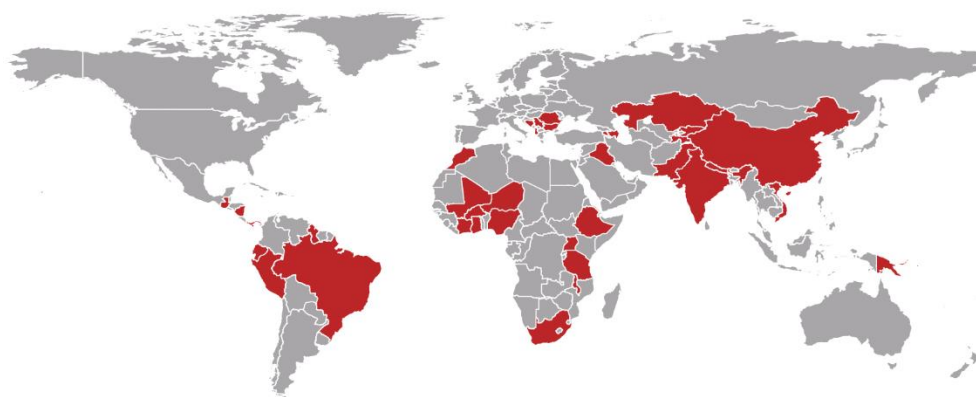
DHSs, 1995–2016



MICSs, 1985–2016



LSMSs, 1995–2016



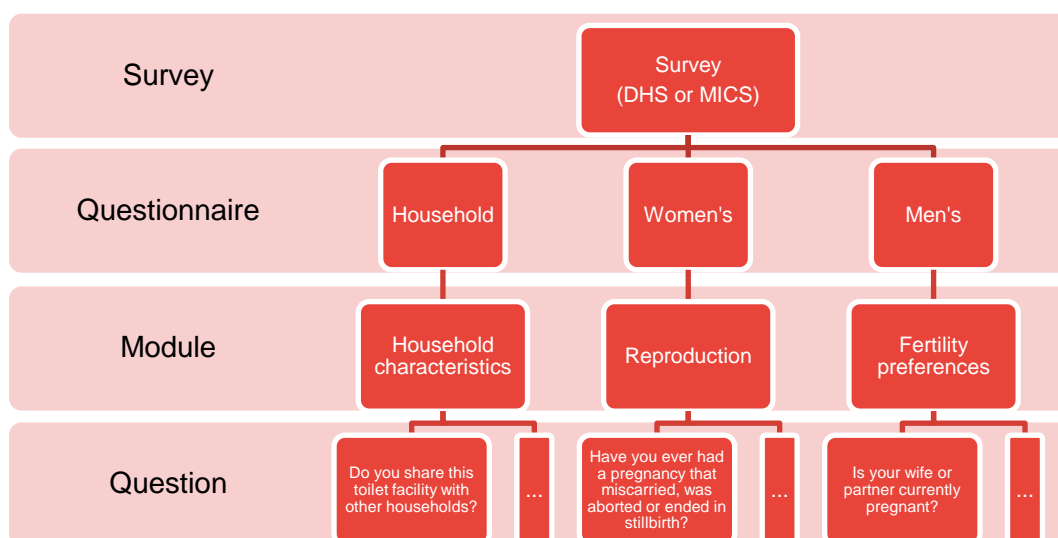
Source: Development Initiatives based on Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS), Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) and Living Standards Measurement Studies (LSMS).

Notes: Country borders do not necessarily reflect Development Initiatives' position

What areas do they cover?

The household surveys are made up of a number of questionnaires, each of which is divided into modules that contain questions on a similar topic or theme. For DHS and MICS, there are different questionnaires for the household, women and men and questionnaires that measure biological well-being by measuring height, weight and other factors. Most standard DHS and MICS include a minimum of household and women's surveys. Countries choose which modules to include to meet their needs. DHS and MICS also have some specialised modules and surveys that focus on specific populations or specific issues (such as malaria or HIV and AIDS).

Figure 2: Survey architecture



How do the surveys compare?

Historically each survey had a purposeful origin: DHS monitored world fertility and contraception prevalence while MICS captured the status of children. Although each household survey contains unique, useful modules, as the surveys have evolved and worked together to harmonise common practices and associated tools – and due to country data needs – they have begun to resemble each other.

Previous research carried out by Development Initiatives found that two-thirds of the questions in the DHS and MICS surveys, the most widely used, are either identical or similar enough to be practically comparable;⁴ 77% of all MICS questions can be found in DHS, and 66% of all DHS questions can be found in MICS.

Table 1: DHS and MICS question matches across questionnaires

Questions	Questionnaire						Total	
	Women		Men		Household		MICS	DHS
	MICS	DHS	MICS	DHS	MICS	DHS		
Total number of questions in questionnaire	283	327	111	164	69	53	463	544
Exact or close matches with counterpart	189	178	78	78	49	43	316	299
All matches with counterpart	225	217	82	96	51	48	358	361
% of all matches with counterpart	80%	66%	74%	59%	74%	91%	77%	66%

Source: Analysis carried out by Development Initiatives as part of the Joined-up Data Standards project – see the discussion paper: [Household surveys: do competing standards serve country needs?](#)⁵ Based on analysis between DHS-VII and MICS5.

However, data users needing to pull this data together for comparative analysis still face challenges. Although questions are duplicated across surveys, each survey follows its own coding standards for variables meaning duplicated questions cannot easily be matched. As a result, merging or comparing across datasets from different surveys to make a continuous data trend is both labour intensive and costly. Additionally, not only is the data coded differently between DHS and MICS, but data structures are substantially different between versions and rounds of the same survey.

In March 2015, the UN Statistical Commission endorsed establishing an [Intersecretariat Working Group on Household Surveys](#) to ‘foster coordination and harmonisation of household survey activities’.⁶

What is the average sample size of the surveys?

There is considerable variation in the size of surveys. India’s 2015–16 DHS will include about 600,000 households while Samoa’s 2009 DHS includes 1,947 households. However, sample size can also vary within a country. Uganda’s four DHS surveys since 2010 have surveyed between 4,500 and 20,000 households. The sample size of a survey is determined by two dimensions. First, the number of subnational domains required for disaggregated reporting. Second, a calculation that works out the number of households required in each domain sample to reach the target population. What appears at first to be counterintuitive is that the sample size required for any country is not related to the total population of the country but rather to the number of domains (subnational divisions) chosen.

How much does a household survey cost?

The cost of a survey depends on many factors such as the sample size of surveyed population; size of the survey (number of modules); population density; income level; and level of technical assistance required, which often depends on the statistical capacity of a given country.

Research from the Sustainable Development Solutions Network⁷ estimated that among 77 of the countries receiving the most aid, the average cost per survey was US\$1.6 million per DHS, US\$1.0 million per MICS and US\$1.7 million per LSMS-type survey.

What are the data limitations?

To adequately sample the population, these surveys require accurate, current census information about the underlying population. Many countries do not have current census data and rely on biased information for sampling. Sampling also limits the extent to which data can be disaggregated. Most DHS and MICS surveys are only designed to represent a few subnational areas, limiting the ability of data users to provide rich disaggregated data beyond those levels.

Timeliness is another concern with these surveys. Analysing and cleaning the data can take up to two years after the survey has been completed. This could lead to the data being outdated before it is used extensively.

What is not included in surveys?

By definition, household surveys include data on households. The definition of households can vary widely but this generally excludes people living on the street, in refugee or internally-displaced persons camps, in institutions such as prisons or orphanages,⁸ and nomadic people.

In their current form, DHS and MICS are designed to focus on women of reproductive age (15–49) and children under 5. This means that relatively few questions are produced with these surveys for children between the ages of 5 and 15. Few questions are asked about men and few questions are asked about people older than 49.

Notes

¹ UNICEF. *A promise to children*. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/wsc/>

² Anderson, JE and Cleland, JG, 1984. The World Fertility Survey and Contraceptive Prevalence Surveys: A Comparison of Substantive Results. *Studies in Family Planning*. 15(1), pages 1–13.
https://www.jstor.org/stable/1965479?seq=1#fndtn-page_scan_tab_contents

³ Available at: <http://opendatawatch.com/knowledge-partnership/state-of-development-data-funding-2016/>

⁴ Development Initiatives and Publish What You Fund (Lisowska, B), 2016. 'Household surveys: do competing standards serve country needs?' Available at: <http://juds.joinedupdata.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/160628-Final-DP4-for-publication.pdf>

⁵ See note 4.

⁶ Inter-secretariat Group on Household Surveys, see: <https://unstats.un.org/iswghs/>

⁷ Sustainable Development Solutions Network, 2015. *Data for Development: A Needs Assessment for SDG Monitoring and Statistical Capacity Development*. Available at: <http://unsdsn.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Data-for-Development-Full-Report.pdf>

⁸ See Carr-Hill, R, 2013. Missing Millions and Measuring Development Progress. *World Development*.
<https://www.lidc.org.uk/sites/default/files/Missing%20millions.pdf>

Annex

Household surveys by country, showing most recent survey year

Country	MICS	DHS	LSMS
Afghanistan	2010–11	2015	
Albania	2005	2008–09	2005
Algeria	2012–13		
Angola	2001	2015–16	
Argentina	2011–12		
Armenia		2015–16	1996
Azerbaijan	2000	2006	1995
Bangladesh	2012–13	2014	
Barbados	2012		
Belarus	2012		
Belize	2015–16		
Benin	2014	2011–12	
Bhutan	2010		
Bolivia	2000	2008	
Bosnia and Herzegovina	2011–12		2004
Botswana	2000	1998	
Brazil		1996	1997
Bulgaria			2007
Burkina Faso	2006	2014	2014
Burundi	2005	2012	
Cambodia		2014	
Cameroon	2014	2011	
Cape Verde		2005	
Central African Republic	2010	1994–95	
Chad	2010	2014–15	
China	1995		1995
Colombia		2015	
Comoros	2000	2012	
Democratic Republic of the Congo	2010	2013–14	
Congo	2014–15	2011–12	
Costa Rica	2011		
Côte d'Ivoire	2016	2016	1988
Croatia	1996		
Cuba	2014		
North Korea	2009		
Djibouti	2006		
Dominican Republic	2014	2013	
Ecuador		1987	1998
Egypt	2013–14	2015	
El Salvador	2014	1985	

Country	MICS	DHS	LSMS
Equatorial Guinea	2000	2011	
Eritrea		2002	
Ethiopia	1995	2016	2013
Gabon	1996	2012	
Gambia	2010	2013	
Georgia	2005		
Ghana	2011	2016	2009
Guatemala		2014–15	2000
Guinea	1996	2016	
Guinea-Bissau	2014		
Guyana	2014	2009	1992
Haiti		2016	
Honduras		2011–12	
India	2000	2015–16	1997
Indonesia	2011	2016	
Iran	2000		
Iraq	2011		2012
Jordan		2012	
Jamaica	2011		2000
Kazakhstan	2015	1999	1996
Kenya	2013–14	2000	
Kosovo	2013–14		
Kyrgyzstan	2014	2012	1998
Laos	2011–12	2011–12	
Lebanon	2011		
Lesotho	2000	2014	
Liberia	1995	2016	
Libya	2003		
Macedonia	2011		
Madagascar	2000	2016	
Malawi	2013–14	2015–16	2013
Maldives	2001	2016	
Mali	2009–10	2015	2014
Mauritania	2011	2003–04	
Mexico	2015	1987	
Moldova	2012	2005	
Mongolia	2013–14		
Montenegro	2013		
Morocco		2003–04	1991
Mozambique	2008	2015	
Myanmar	2009–10	2015–16	
Namibia		2013	
Nepal	2014	2016	2010
Nicaragua		2001	2005
Niger	2000	2012	2014
Nigeria	2011	2015	2012
Oman	2014		
Pakistan	2011	2012–13	1991
Palestine		2014	
Panama	1996		2008

Country	MICS	DHS	LSMS
Papua New Guinea		2016–17	1996
Paraguay		1990	
Peru		2014	1994
Philippines	1999	2013	
Qatar	2012		
Romania			1994
Rwanda	2000	2014–15	
Russia			
Saint Lucia	2012		
Samoa		2009	
São Tomé and Príncipe	2014	2014	
Senegal	2000	2016	
Serbia	2014		2007
Sierra Leone	2010	2016	
Somalia	2006		
South Africa		2016	1993
South Sudan	2010		
Sri Lanka		2006–07	
Sudan	2014	1989–90	
Suriname	2010		
Swaziland	2014	2006–07	
Syria	2006		
Tajikistan	2005	2012	2009
Tanzania	1996	2015–16	2010
Thailand	2015–16	1987	
Timor-Leste		2016	2007
Togo	2010	2013/14	
Trinidad and Tobago	2006	1987	
Tunisia	2011–12	1988	
Turkey	1995	2003	
Turkmenistan	2015–16	2000	
Uganda		2016	2013
Ukraine	2012	2007	
Uruguay	2012–13		
Uzbekistan	2006	2002	
Vanuatu	2007–08		
Venezuela	2000		
Viet Nam	2013–14	2005	2004
Yemen	2006	2013	
Zambia	1999	2013–14	
Zimbabwe	2014	2015	

Notes: years denote those when completed national surveys became available, unless an ongoing survey is the first to be carried out. More recent subnational surveys are not included.

Development Initiatives (DI) is an independent international development organisation working on the use of data to drive poverty eradication and sustainable development. Our vision is a world without poverty that invests in human security and where everyone shares the benefits of opportunity and growth.

We work to ensure that decisions about the allocation of finance and resources result in an end to poverty, increase the resilience of the world's most vulnerable people, and ensure no one is left behind.

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