



Establishing an intersectional approach to data at your National Statistics Institute

What is involved in defining your institution's approach to intersectionality?



Colombia's Department for National Statistics (DANE, for its acronym in Spanish) and the United Kingdom's Office for National Statistics (ONS) are both founding Champions of the Inclusive Data Charter (IDC), a global multi-stakeholder network launched in 2018. The IDC works to advance the availability and use of inclusive and disaggregated data so that governments and organizations better understand, address, and monitor the needs of marginalized people and ensure no one is left behind.

The Intersectional Approaches to Inclusive and Disaggregated Data series

Different aspects of a person's identity – such as their ethnicities, gender, religion, disability, or sexual orientation – can influence the amount or type of discrimination or exclusion a person faces. 'Intersecting inequality' refers to when aspects of a person's identity overlap and worsen the discrimination or exclusion they experience. People who face intersecting inequalities are the most likely to be left behind by development.

The IDC is a global multi-stakeholder network that advances the availability and use of inclusive and disaggregated data so that governments and organizations better understand, address, and monitor the needs of marginalized people and ensure no one is left behind. The Intersectional Approaches to Inclusive and Disaggregated Data series contributes resources and practical insights to help practitioners in their work to resolve intersecting inequalities. Developing institutional guidelines for intersectional data practice.

The role of a country's national statistics institute is to inform the public and its government, to improve general life across the country. This is achieved through recording, measuring, and analyzing many aspects of society, giving policymakers the information they need to make evidence-based decisions.

So, as societies change, how do statistics institutes and their data practices need to change with them? The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) outline ways in which countries should change – in that countries have committed to becoming more equitable and inclusive places for increasingly diverse populations to live by 2030.

Intersectional approaches to data are an effective way to understand and address how national statistics offices should change to respond to the diverse needs of today's societies and become more inclusive towards their citizens. We show in this case study, the different steps that Colombia's Department for National Statistics (DANE)¹, and the United Kingdom's Office for National Statistics (ONS) have taken to establish intersectional approaches to data in their respective institutions.

By reading this document, national statistics institutes should be able to select strategies to establish an intersectional approach to data that would work for their institute.

This case study covers:

- **Do we need intersectional approaches to data?**
- **What is involved in establishing intersectional approaches to data at your institute?**
- **Developing Institutional Guidelines for Intersectional Data Practice: DANE Colombia's experience researching and developing their institutional guidelines on differential and intersectional approaches.**
- **Cross-cutting Strategies to Address Intersectional Issues: Pathways to Develop Intersectional Engagement at the UK's ONS.**

1 Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística (DANE)

Do we need intersectional approaches to data?

There is an abundance of terms to describe intersectionality-related issues: social inclusion, inclusive growth, differential approaches, social protection, equality, and equity are a few examples. Navigating these terms and their meanings, or understanding what's different about intersectionality, can be challenging.

For statistics, the notion of **interlinkages** may be easily confused with intersectionality. Interlinkages analyze how things are joined or connected together (Inter-Agency and Expert Group (IAEG)-SDG, 2020). In the case of the SDGs, all 17 of these aims are interdependent and indivisible. This means that to achieve one, we must achieve the others simultaneously. Interlinkages add a **layer** to statistical analyses that is not possible when looking at one goal or layer in isolation.

In contrast, **intersectional** approaches to data attend to marginalized people and include, but go beyond, analysis of multiple factors. Intersectionality is a lens for looking at the entire data value chain. It highlights pervasive social inequality by identifying issues, such as institutional classism, racism, or sexism, but also looks at them together,

along with individual experience or outcomes. Interlinkages often remain a useful tool to identify discrimination and social inequality. For instance:

- The Inter-Agency Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators has been mandated to identify interlinkages that are essential for policymaking (IAEG-SDG, 2020).
- The Government of Canada's GBA+ approach to improve gender inclusion is identified in their examples.

Intersectional approaches to data also prompt national statistics offices to examine institutions and ask: who is working alongside us? And how are marginalized groups supported to engage in this work?



Key messages

In the case studies below, you will notice how DANE and ONS have taken different approaches to establishing intersectionality at their institutes. Here, we provide an overview of the key headline messages to consider when developing a strategy appropriate for your institute, including:

- **Tackle issues of importance to your country:** expert review and task forces, policy roadmaps, and partnerships with academic institutions and civil society organizations can help to outline what intersectional issues are national priorities, and how these might be incorporated into your institution's strategic and operational plans.
- **Draw on multi-disciplinary and cross-sectoral expertise:** intersectional approaches require critical and reflective questions about: context, data collection processes, how analysis is done, and how it's interpreted. Inviting different types of experts to inform your approaches can help establish how data can be used to support marginalized groups.
- **Consult and listen to your citizens:** Intersectional approaches emphasize putting the voices of the most marginalized at the center. Developing ways to find and listen to these voices is crucial.
- **Developing responsibilities and/or guidelines for disaggregated data:** National census and periodic surveys should contain categories sufficient to represent the diversity of citizens. Stratified sampling techniques should be used (for surveys other than census).
- **Be inclusive in your approach to workforce, talent management, and organizational culture:** when work environments become more diverse and inclusive, it makes it easier for the work to become more inclusive as well.



Developing institutional guidelines for intersectional data practice

DANE Colombia's experience researching and developing their institutional guidelines on differential and intersectional approaches

DANE is responsible for the planning, compilation, analysis, and dissemination of official statistics for the country.

DANE's mission is to plan, implement, and evaluate rigorous processes for the production and communication of statistical information at the national level. These processes comply with international standards and make use of innovative technology (DANE, n.d.). DANE's work serves as the basis for public and private decision-making and contributes to promoting equitable, productive, and legal systems within the country.

Colombia is a multicultural and multilingual country home to: Afro-descendants (9.34%), Indigenous Peoples (4.4%), Romani (0.0006%), and European descendants.² Colombia has 115 Indigenous Peoples or ethnic groups who speak 65 different languages. This is in addition to Spanish, two Creole Afro-descendant languages spoken by Raizal people, and Palenqueros and Romani spoken by Roma peoples (DANE, 20017). In 2017, 'campesinos' (or peasant farmers) were constituted as a population group with a distinct cultural identity (DANE, 2020b).³ Supporting such diverse populations to thrive is complex, and through its 'Pact for Equity,' the government has outlined

extensive policy change to reduce social and economic inequality throughout the country (Zamudio, 2019).

One such example of complexity is that, in a recent study examining the position of female workers before and during the COVID-19 pandemic, almost one million jobs in the care sector held by women were lost (DANE, 2020a). It seems that paid care activities were substituted with unpaid ones. When the 2020 study asked participants to reflect on their daily routine in the past seven days, 39.6% of women said they felt more burdened with domestic work, compared to 20.0% of men, when considered against their routines prior to the pandemic (DANE, 2020a). Changes like these are reflective of underlying inequality in gender relations in Colombia, and DANE seeks to uncover unequal outcomes like these to inform the government's response.

In 2015, DANE established an internal working group focused on developing its approach to Gender Statistics. The group aimed to establish a gender inclusive approach across all stages of statistics production. In 2017, a new National Statistical Plan was developed, recognizing the need to generate guidelines on the inclusion of differential and intersectional approaches in the statistical production process.

2 Data retrieved from Colombia's 2018 Census at www.dane.gov.co/index.php/estadisticas-por-tema/demografia-y-poblacion/censo-nacional-de-poblacion-y-vivenda-2018

3 The translation of 'campesino' into English is peasant farmer, where "the peasant is defined as an intercultural 'subject,' who identifies [themselves] as such; vitally involved in direct work with the land and nature, immersed in forms of social organization based on unpaid family and community work or on the sale of their labor power" (translated from the Spanish definition in ICANH, 2018, p.7).

By 2018, coinciding with the government’s equity pact, the Director of DANE, Juan Daniel Oviedo, established the category of diversity and inclusion as one of the top three priorities in the general strategy of the department. They found that their work in gender inclusion could be expanded to support diversity work across wider population characteristics.

In 2019, the five IDC principles helped inspire and inform the establishment of a working group to strengthen the statistical systems’ ability to mainstream differential and intersectional approach to statistics at DANE. The group decided to create a Guide for the Inclusion of a Differential and Intersectional Approach in the Production of National Statistics as the core part of this work.

From DANE’s perspective, a **differential approach** acknowledges the need for an analytic perspective designed specifically to understand marginalized groups. This is due to it not always possible to generate statistics about marginalized populations in mainstream operations. To DANE, **intersectionality**, therefore focuses specifically on analyzing multiple factors of a person’s identity simultaneously as a means to better understand inequality and discrimination within and between marginalized groups and wider populations.

Guideline Sections	Brief Description
Conceptual framework	This explains how DANE has structured the guide, and what they mean by ‘life-cycle’, ‘disability’, ‘ethnicity’, ‘gender perspective’, and ‘farmers’. This includes the specific questions and variables needed at a minimum for adequate data disaggregation.
Specific frameworks	DANE includes international agreements and national legislation to justify and promote the inclusion of these perspectives in data processes.
The state of differential and intersectional approaches in national statistical production	This section comments on the approach taken to implement the differential and intersectional approach across different stages of national statistical production. Specific challenges and strengths are identified.
Guidelines	Here, DANE provides explanations and examples of how to apply concepts in practice across the eight phases of the statistical production process, and in general.

Table 1: Main sections of DANE’s guidelines on the differential and intersectional approach

This case study chronicles the practical steps DANE's Differential and Intersectional Approach Group (GEDI) took to create the guidelines and directives around intersectionality for their institute.

What were the steps involved in creating their guidelines?

Weekly roundtable discussion

Intersectionality, along with related concepts centered on diversity and inclusion was a new area for most staff. Setting aside time to read, engage with the concepts, and discuss them in a team was a good first step. GEDI sought help from their statistical concepts division to select relevant key concepts for consideration.

Multi-disciplinary expert consultation

DANE invited experts with multi-disciplinary backgrounds, such as anthropologists, psychologists, and gender experts. Such discussions with outside experts helped DANE to identify the most relevant dimensions they needed to consider in their guide. More importantly, these discussions helped them to evaluate concepts and develop a capacity for critical reflection on the issues.

Selection of relevant dimensions and review of international standards and measures

Equipped with this knowledge and a critical lens, DANE then reviewed the full range of international standards, measures, and practice related to intersectionality. Through this review, they evaluated and gained a sense of the practices and measures that should be adopted in Colombia.

Production of the guide

DANE was in turn able to develop a detailed outline of what needed to be included in their guide. DANE split up sections amongst the GEDI team and completed drafts independently, for review by the rest of the team.

Consultation and review

The Guide was then reviewed widely in a three-stage consultation process: 1) international law and intersectionality experts; 2) DANE staff; and 3) wider public consultation. This consultation period was an essential way to clarify the writing and structure of the guide for broader consumption.

Sharing and on-going education

The Guide was launched November, 2020, in an event co-hosted by the IDC. The team plans to develop a series of follow-on events and training sessions to facilitate uptake and use of the Guide in the future.

Working through complex problems that crop up throughout the process of developing the guide

Some ideas and principles of intersectional approaches to data are difficult to translate to the context of statistical production. For instance, intersectional approaches emphasize centering the voices of marginalized people in data processes. This means actively listening to – and recognizing – an individual’s lived experience. It also means deciding who should be listened to, and how they should be included in statistical production. There are no set methods to do this in statistics.

As this area is emerging, DANE has needed to find ways to work through such complex problems themselves, and found the following four things useful:

1. The incorporation of multi-disciplinary and collaborative construction process of the guide, motivated by the five core principles of the IDC, has facilitated careful consideration of the issues at play.
2. DANE has carried out extensive discussions and negotiations with ethnic groups, to agree on the basic questions to be included with ethnic perspectives in questionnaires, and to be allowed to enter in special territories to collect information.
3. DANE has involved government departments, experts, and civil society groups in their subsequent consultations. These rich discussions have provided good justification for their choices.
4. DANE is committed to periodically reviewing and updating the document containing the guidelines, viewing it as a living document to be updated as they learn from experience. They also plan to form longer-term partnerships with key civil society groups as a means of carrying forward these negotiations.

Cross-cutting strategies to address intersectional issues

Pathways to develop intersectional engagement at the UK’s Office for National Statistics (ONS)

The United Kingdom’s ONS is the largest independent producer of official statistics in the UK, whose mission is to initiate “high quality data and analysis to inform the UK, improve lives and build the future” (UKSA, 2020, p.10).

ONS aims to serve the public good, by building public trust through its impartial activities. It emphasizes public understanding of the insights and evidence generated

through its work, and its positive impact on quality of life for all residents throughout the UK.

ONS states that their statistics and workforce “reflect the experiences of everyone in our society so that everyone counts, and is counted, and no one is forgotten” (UKSA, 2020, p.13). This mission combines with the nine protected characteristics of the Equalities Act: age; disability; gender reassignment;

marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; and sexual orientation. Together, these commitments allow the development of appropriate intersectional data gathering and reporting.

ONS is also committed to inclusivity within the organization in terms of the staff it employs and how they are managed. They “champion an inclusive and welcoming culture and an empathetic and kind management style, with equality of esteem and opportunity and relationships build on trust and flexibility, the right learning opportunities and a desire for change” (UKSA, 2020, p.8).

This case study illustrates how ONS is incorporating intersectionality in its work: via its data systems, data in research, programs, impact activities, and overall practice.

The creation of ‘ONS Centres’ of significant policy interest

There are five new cross-cutting ‘ONS Centres’, created to work collaboratively across the organization.⁴ These also work with government departments, academics and other partners, and convene to move beyond statistics production: to facilitate more effective gathering and linking of data, along with targeted research activities to maximize impact. Additionally, some ‘ONS Centres’ experiment with different ways of developing intersectional approaches to data.

The Centre for Equalities and Inclusion is exploring how “protected characteristic groups are affected by current social and policy issues and how multiple characteristics come together to shape people’s experiences” (ONS, n.d., n.p.). It conducted an equalities data audit in 2018, which constituted a first step towards understanding what existing data was available, and what new opportunities and needs were present for sourcing, analyzing and presenting equalities data.

To evaluate the data sources and coverage, Centre for Equalities and Inclusion organized the resources into six domains, based on the Measurement Framework for Equality and Human Rights (EHRC, 2017). These were health, education, justice and personal security, living standards, work, and participation.

A wide range of stakeholders were consulted to identify necessary improvements through a working group. A second round of data auditing was then completed to examine the underlying data sets. The working group reexamined the data, specifically for indications of socio-economic group membership, along with people at higher risk of harm, abuse, discrimination, or disadvantage.

⁴ These are: Centre for Ageing and Demography, Centre for Crime and Justice, Centre for Equalities and Inclusion and Centre for International Migration, Centre for Subnational Analysis. See: www.ons.gov.uk/aboutus/whatwedo/programmesandprojects/onscentres

How to inspect a data source in an equalities data audit

You can use something as simple as a spreadsheet to crowdsource and gather all the data sources that your institute produces and uses. This can document and analyze the following:

- Which identity factors (protected characteristics in the UK) are included in the data.
- Which organization/team/unit is responsible for the data.
- A link to the data source.
- The theme the data relates to.
- Geographical coverage of the data.
- Date of most recent publication.
- How often the data is released.
- Time period the data is available within.

You can also consider implementing a rating system to assess the potential to use the dataset to analyze intersectional inequality. This system would gauge for indications of socio-economic group membership, also highlighting people at higher risk of harm, abuse, discrimination, or disadvantage).

Excellent	Includes all relevant identity factors and indicators of socio-economic group membership, with the potential to identify people at higher risk of harm, abuse, discrimination, or disadvantage.
Good	Data set contains adequate information related to identity factors and indicators of socio-economic group membership, with the potential to identify people at higher risk of harm, abuse, discrimination, or disadvantage.
Fair	Needs major revisions in methodology, data preparation, or storage in order to include adequate information related to identity factors.
Poor	Data set should be decommissioned or replaced, and is nearing the end of its operational life due to a severe omission related to identity factors.
Not applicable	No foreseeable requirement to include such information.
Not appropriate	Information is protected or legislated, or too risky (in terms of personal identification) to include.

Table 1 Sample rating system for intersectional assessment

A key learning from the Centre for Equalities and Inclusion's 2018 analysis was that this intersectional framing was useful for evaluating equalities data. Namely, it demonstrated that the information related to the protected characteristics – socio-economic group, people at higher risk of harm, abuse, discrimination or disadvantage, and geographical analysis – should all be taken together.

Since 2018, the Centre for Equalities and Inclusion has been experimenting with ways to operationalize the above insight. For instance, its work has included research to test methods to produce population estimates by group and religion (ONS, 2019), along with mixed-methods research on the impact of COVID-19 on people with disabilities (ONS, 2020).

Meanwhile, the Centre for Subnational Analysis focuses on statistical analyses for local and regional areas, and frequently engages and consults local government representatives and staff (local authorities in the UK) to establish localized data needs.

With intersectional data, local authorities may wish to tackle an issue, such as 'youth unemployment', but perhaps do not know where to start.

Through collaboration, the Centre establishes what data is available, and proposes breakdowns and analyses to respond to the localized issues and target services. Local authorities across the UK have varied capacities to engage with ONS and respond to their citizens, which can limit participation and the success of this strategy.

Both these ONS Centres have noted the lack of adequate information about relevant protected characteristics in the available data. While both may spend time experimenting and trialing different methods and data sources to achieve their goals, they still find it challenging. These types of innovative collaborations and cross-cutting entities need more inclusive data in order to work. The next section shows how they are addressing this issue.

Revising practice to make everyone count

To make it possible to perform intersectional analysis – often at local or granular levels – standard statistics instruments need to be adapted to be able to ‘make everyone count, and count everyone.’

The Census occurs every ten years, allowing time to test and reflect on changes methodically. Examples of such reflection include:

1. The addition of an optional gender identity question to the census, to follow the sex question, was proposed and tested in 2019 (ONS, n.d.).
2. A series of public consultations has been conducted, to understand how to include the Roma ethnic group in the Census (ONS, n.d.), along with the new inclusion of a non-private household category.
3. Postcards, social media assets, and other collateral have been developed in a variety of languages. So, along with working directly with civil society groups, they sought to find hard to reach and excluded people through multiple avenues to raise awareness about the Census, and how and when to fill it in.

O nacionalno ginipe si ekh unikalno rodipe
savo kerdol pe sako ekh 10 berś ande
Anglija thaj Uels.

Kana tu san kotor lestar, tu ka
żutisares te informirin pe decizije save
ka keren efekto pe kiri komuna.

census 2021



Figure 2: Census promotional material in Romani

Beyond the Census, the UK Statistics Authority has also created a new Inclusive Data Taskforce to critically appraise intersectional issues across institutions. This Taskforce includes stakeholders from central and local government, academia, civil society, think tanks, and businesses. In March 2021, they ran a wide public consultation to

collect views on how ONS should progress this work. The recommendations put forward by the Taskforce are likely to influence what policy areas of focus the ONS will tackle, and how they will be expected to integrate the recommendations into their work plan.



Key recommendations

Selecting strategies to establish an intersectional approach at your institute

- **Take a principled approach:**
Both DANE, through the government's Pact for Equity and the National Statistical Plan, and ONS, under the UK Statistics Authority's Strategic Plan, have adopted commitments to addressing social and economic inequality in their countries, and to ensuring that statistics production contributes to these aims. Ensure that your institute has established commitments towards social inclusion, and made them clear.
- **Be collaborative and multidisciplinary:**
Both DANE and ONS are developing new ways to bring in outside and multi-disciplinary expertise and knowledge. They have taken significant steps to develop their own institutional capacity for intersectional approaches and to understand what is needed in their country, by drawing on multi-disciplinary and cross-sectoral perspectives. Consider how you plan to build organizational capacity in this area, and who might be valuable to collaborate with.
- **Invest in stakeholder engagement:**
Staff in the Centre for Subnational Analysis spend approximately half their time on stakeholder engagement alone. The processes adopted by DANE and ONS to consult with citizens and experts on intersectional issues take time because these issues are complex and challenging to grapple with. Ensure that you are planning enough time and resources to consult citizens and experts effectively.
- **Embed inclusivity in your organization's culture:**
Intersectional approaches to data 'start at home,' by addressing who is doing the statistical production. Strategies to establish intersectional approaches at your institute need to look at who you employ, and the barriers to promotion different employees face. This is not just about revising the work you produce.



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