



June 3, 2015
Volume 2, Issue 6

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GAINING A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF INCOME INEQUALITY

By Martine Zaïda, OECD Statistics Directorate communications coordinator

Statistics on income inequality are regularly produced by researchers and statistical offices around the world, and often make news headlines.

What remains unclear are how much inequality people perceive and what degree of inequality they regard as 'ideal' or 'acceptable'. The latter (i.e., preferences for how income and other valuable resources are distributed) has a long history in social sciences (Bénabou and Tirole, 2006; Osberg and Smeeding, 2006), whereas the former (i.e., to what extent people have a good appreciation of income

distributions in their country and of their position in it) has received less attention although it is—arguably—just as important.



Research based on data from the 2009 wave of the International Social Survey Programme on social inequality shows people systematically misperceive the level of income inequality in their own country, although often in different directions (Nieheues, 2014).

For example, while people living in Hungary, Slovenia and the Czech and Slovak Republics overestimate the income inequality in their country, those living in the Nordic countries seem to be aware they are living in a relatively equal society. Meanwhile, people living in the United States substantially underestimate the extent of income inequality.

The issue of people's (mis)perception of income inequality also has attracted the interest of national statistical agencies. In 2011, the French National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies (INSEE) launched a survey asking respondents to position themselves on the income scale. The results showed that, while for 45% of respondents there was little discrepancy between perceptions and realities, most poor people (three out of five) overestimated their position and most rich people (four out of five) underestimated it.

Similarly, a survey conducted by TNS Gallup in Finland showed that, while most people's idea of 'low income' corresponds quite closely to that used by Statistics Finland, the respondents' own income influenced their perception; to wit, the higher their income, the higher their view of what 'low' and 'high' income is.

An infographic titled "What's your share of the pie?" in a blue serif font. In the top right corner, there are links for "English", "Français", "Español", and "Italiano". The main text reads: "When you think about your household's income, do you feel rich, poor, or just average? Most of us have no idea – or the wrong idea – of how we compare with the rest of the population. But here, in 10 clicks, you can find out how many households are better or worse off than yours, and see how your ideal world compares." Below this is a link: "Click here to learn more about the methodology used to build this tool." A blue arrow button labeled "Get Started" points to a list of three steps: 1. Tell us about you, 2. Tell us about your ideal world, and 3. In reality... The graphic features a stylized globe with a person standing on it, and a smaller globe floating above. The OECD logo and tagline "BETTER POLICIES FOR BETTER LIVES" are in the bottom left corner.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) new [Compare your income](#) web-tool allows users from different OECD countries to compare perceptions and realities by looking at where they fit in their country's income distribution. The tool, which is similar to those available in a number of countries, is based on the most recent data from the [OECD Income Distribution Database](#).

With the objective of better understanding the public's perceptions of income inequality, *Compare your income* will gather information allowing the OECD to do different types of analysis on whether people have a good appreciation of income distribution in their country and how they position themselves within that distribution.

In order to collect sufficient information, OECD needs as many people as possible to use *Compare your income*. The organization invites you to share this new web-tool with your colleagues, friends and family. Now you can find out what's your share of the pie!

The information collected by this tool is completely anonymous and confidential. For more information about the OECD's work on income inequality, go to the [OECD Income Distribution Database](#) or send an email to wellbeing@oecd.org.

THE WORLD OF STATISTICS ACTIVITIES CALENDAR

Following are The World of Statistics participating organization-sponsored events and activities around the world scheduled for June. [Click here](#) to see the complete 2015 calendar. Remember to submit your organization's events for the calendar by [using this convenient form](#).

- **June 1-5, 2015** — [6th International Workshop on Compositional Data Analysis \(CoDaWork '15\)](#), Universitat de Girona, L'Escala, Girona, Spain
- **June 5, 2015** — [2015 Annual Meeting: Big Data and Statistics](#), Wisconsin Chapter of the American Statistical Association, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, USA
- **June 5-7, 2015** — [1st International Conference on Research in Health Care](#); University of Athens Medical School (1st Pediatrics Department, 1st Psychiatry Department), Athens University School of Economics & Business, Ionian Center for the Arts & Culture; Athens, Greece
- **June 7-13, 2015** — [Methods in Cancer Biostatistics Workshop: Clinical Trial Designs for Targeted Agents](#), American Association for Cancer Research, Lake Tahoe, California, USA
- **June 10, 2015** — [BP Statistical Review of World Energy 2015](#), BP, London, United Kingdom
- **June 10-12, 2015** — [32nd Quality and Productivity Research Conference: Creativity and Innovation for a Connected World](#), Quality and Productivity Section of the American Statistical Association, Raleigh, North Carolina, USA
- **June 10-13, 2015** — [Interface 2015: Data Science](#), The Interface Foundation of North America, Morgantown, West Virginia, USA
- **June 13, 2015** — [XI Statistical Meeting](#), CONRE-3, São Paulo, Brazil
- **June 14-17, 2015** — [43rd Annual Meeting of the Statistical Society of Canada](#), Statistical Society of Canada, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada
- **June 14-17, 2015** — [Joint 24th ICSA Applied Statistics Symposium and 13th Graybill Conference](#); International Chinese Statistical Association and Colorado State University Department of Statistics; Fort Collins, Colorado, USA

- **June 16-17, 2015** — [Exploring and Visualising Geographic Information for Social Scientists](#), Advanced Quantitative Methods Network, Edinburgh, Scotland, United Kingdom
- **June 22-23, 2015** — [International Conference Turning Data Into Knowledge: New Opportunities for Statistics Education](#), University of Lisbon and University of Évora, Lisbon, Portugal
- **June 25-27, 2015** — [Fifth International Institute of Mathematical Statistics-Finance, Insurance, Probability and Statistics Workshop](#), Rutgers University and Columbia University, New Brunswick, New Jersey, USA
- **June 29-July 1, 2015** — [Fourth International Symposium on Biopharmaceutical Statistics](#), International Society for Biopharmaceutical Statistics and Drug Information Association China, Beijing, China

PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATION NEWS & EVENTS

Following is the latest news and information from statistical organizations participating in The World of Statistics:

Switzerland—The recently published book [Dada x Statistics](#) is a journey through the past 100 years of the city of Zurich. It is based on the life of Dadaists around the year 1916, a time that was statistically Dadaist illuminated. The book also documents the exhibition “Dada x Statistics”, which was held October 25, 2013 to February 2, 2014 at the Cabaret Voltaire, and shows the history of Dada and the development of the city of Zurich from 1913 to 2025.



That Statistics City Zurich, the oldest municipal statistics office in Switzerland, and the Cabaret Voltaire jointly staged a statistics-focused exhibition may be unusual, but it should not be surprising. Both have similar long histories. And, the two institutions are literally a stone’s throw away from each other. So, what could be more natural than the two organizations jointly implementing a project?

Dada x Statistics is published exclusively in German. You can get it in the following versions:

- [eBook](#)
- [PDF](#)
- [Printed copy](#)

Russia—The [1st Open Russian Statistical Congress](#) will be held October 20-22 in Novosibirsk. The congress is the first large-scale event of the Russian Association of Statisticians held in conjunction with the Federal State Statistics Service and Novosibirsk State University of Economics and Management. Its goal is to promote statistical knowledge and the profession in the country, consolidate the Russian statistical community and position Russian statistics in the world. Congress organizers say the event will bring together prominent Russian and foreign scientists and practitioners in the field of statistics, and all who are interested in statistics. The ORSC is timed to be conducted during World Statistics Day, which the United Nations declared will be staged October 20 this year. To learn more about the ORSC, [visit the conference website](#).

United Kingdom—You can join a live webcast marking the launch of the 64th annual BP Statistical Review of World Energy at 10 a.m. (BST) June 10. During this online event, BP chief executive Bob Dudley and Spencer Dale, group chief economist, will discuss the following questions and more:

- What changes to global oil production and consumption drove the sharp fall in oil prices in 2014?
- How did slower economic growth in China and other emerging markets impact energy consumption?
- How has continuing strong growth in U.S. shale oil and gas production altered its importance as an energy producer?
- In the run-up to the United Nations climate change conference in Paris, where are CO₂ emissions rising and falling?
- Did the U.S. remain the world's leader in renewable energy use?

For answers to these questions and much more, join the live webcast by [registering online](#).



United Kingdom—The [IACSS 10th International Symposium on Computer Science in Sports](#) will be held September 9-11 at Loughborough University in Leicestershire. The university is well known for its research in sport, exercise and health sciences and it is an excellent venue for hosting the symposium. Loughborough was named University of the Year for Sport by [The Times Good University Guide 2014](#). The [International Association of Computer Science in Sport](#)—the event sponsor—is inviting interested

individuals to submit papers to present at the meeting. The deadline for submission is June 10. Accepted papers will be included in the conference proceedings published by Springer in its *Advances in Intelligent Systems and Computing* series. Selected papers also will be invited for inclusion in the IACSS journal. Further details about the submission process and registration information are available on [the event website](#).

International—Craig Mallinckrodt, a research fellow at Lilly Pharmaceuticals, will present a free research and development professional statisticians' forum webinar Thursday, June 4 at 2 p.m. (BST). PSF meetings provide a forum for professional statisticians to share professional experiences and discuss professional development.

The free, telephone-based virtual meeting for professional statisticians—holders of CStat and GradStat status—will examine a conceptual, technical and practical framework for missing data in longitudinal clinical studies, which are critical skills and important habits for statisticians. Presentation slides can be downloaded [here](#) and [here](#). To join the voice part of the webinar, use the following dial-in instructions:

- Phone number: +44 (0) 330 336 6002
- Passcode: 476 766 1144

If you are located outside of the United Kingdom, please click [here](#) for a local rate number to use.

Go to the following web address and then select the option “Enter as a guest” to access the visual parts of the webinar: <https://rss-uk.globalmeet.com/RSS>.

United States—Barry D. Nussbaum, chief statistician at the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), was elected the 112th president of the American Statistical Association (ASA) by the membership. Nussbaum will serve a one-year term as president-elect on the ASA Board of Directors starting January 1, 2016, and will become ASA president January 1, 2017. ASA members also elected Katherine B. Ensor, Rice University professor of statistics, as an ASA vice president. She will begin her three-year term on the board January 1, 2016. [Click here to read the complete ASA election results](#).



Promoting the Practice and Profession of Statistics

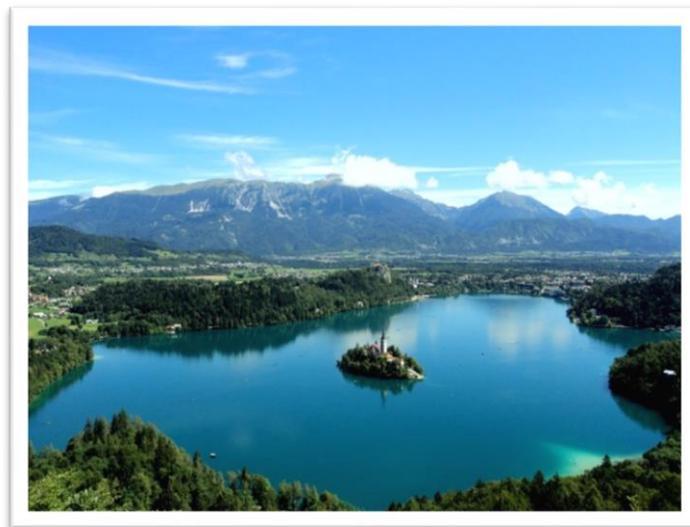
Canada—The International Symposium in Statistics (ISS) 2015 on Advances in Parametric and Semiparametric Analysis of Multivariate, Time Series, Spatial-temporal, and Familial-longitudinal Data will be held July 6-8 at Memorial University in St. John's. Meeting attendees will discuss the methodological advances and challenges in the analysis of continuous and discrete correlated data both in parametric and semi-parametric setup. The main topics of discussion will be:

- Multi-dimensional data analysis in continuous setup
- Multivariate analysis for longitudinal categorical data
- Time series with financial and environment applications
- Spatial-temporal data analysis
- Familial longitudinal data analysis in semi-parametric setup

Additionally, discussions will look at challenges in analysis when data may contain measurement errors, missing values and/or outliers, among other topics. The scientific program will include keynote, special invited, invited, and contributed paper sessions.

[Click here for more information and to register for the event.](#)

Slovenia—The [12th Applied Statistics 2015](#) international conference, organized by the [Statistical Society of Slovenia](#) and the [University of Ljubljana](#) in cooperation with the [Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia](#), will be held September 20-23 at [Hotel Ribno](#) in Bled, which located near magnificent [Lake Bled](#). The annual conference of methodologists and statisticians was established in 1982.



Beautiful Lake Bled in Slovenia, near the host site for the 12th Applied Statistics 2015 conference.

The conference's main goal is to provide an opportunity for researchers in statistics, data analysts and other professionals from various statistical and related fields to come together, present their research, and learn from each other. The four-day program will consist of invited paper presentations and contributed paper sections from diverse topics, and will close with a workshop. Topics to be presented include the following:

- | | |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| • Biostatistics and Bioinformatics | • Modeling and Simulation |
| • Data Collection | • Network Analysis |
| • Data Mining | • Sampling Techniques |
| • Design of experiments | • Social Science Methodology |

- Econometrics
- Mathematical Statistics
- Measurement
- Statistical Applications
- Statistics Education
- Actuarial and Financial Statistics
- Other Areas of Statistics

Besides new or improved statistical methods, cross-discipline and applied paper submissions are especially welcome.

[Go to the event website for program, travel and registration information.](#)

United States—The American Association for the Advancement of Science recently spotlighted an article about careers in biostatistics in its member e-newsletter. In the article titled, “Careers in Biostatistics: Where Big Data and Bioscience Meet”, the author writes: “With a projected growth of as much as [27 percent](#) by the year 2022, biostatistics touches on many realms of science, with an unlimited number of applications and job functions in private industries, government labs and academia. It attracts those who want to apply a love of math to a career with a direct impact on public health.” [Click here to read the full article.](#)

Portugal—[PORDATA](#), the statistical database promoted by the [Francisco Manuel dos Santos Foundation](#), is celebrating its 5th anniversary this year. [Several special activities](#) are being held to celebrate.

The exhibition *PORDATA VIVA, The Power of Data*, was inaugurated April 23 in the Pavilion of Knowledge, Ciência Viva, in Lisbon. This is an unprecedented, dynamic and interactive exhibition, directed to students, teachers and citizens of all ages, in which the statistics are the motto. Open to the public until December, it is available in Portuguese and English. [PORDATA](#)



The exhibition conveys the following main messages:

- Statistical data can be beautiful
- Statistical data have rhythms and they also transmit emotions
- Statistical data are not abstract figures
- Statistical data can also be incorporated into landscapes
- Statistical data help to shape reality
- Statistical data are not equal for all
- Statistical data tell stories about us

- Statistical data debunk preconceived ideas that do not withstand scrutiny
- Statistical data signal changes
- Statistical data are dynamic

More information about the exhibition is available [here](#). A video of the opening is available [here](#) (in Portuguese).

United States—[Interface 2015](#)—the 45th Symposium on the Interface between Computing Science and Statistics—will be held later this month in Morgantown, West Virginia. Themed “Data Science”, the June 10-13 event is sponsored by Interface, a membership society of computational scientists, statisticians, mathematicians and individuals from related discipline areas interested in the interface between computing science and statistics. Interests include topics such as computational statistics, statistical software, exploratory data analysis, data mining, pattern recognition, scientific visualization and related fields. The symposium brings academia, government and industry together to advance Big Data, analytics and data science. [Learn more about Interface 2015 and register at its website.](#)

International—A great way to promote statistical literacy and get your work published is to contribute content to [Significance magazine](#) and/or [its website](#). [Click here for details about how to get involved.](#)



NATIONAL STATISTICAL ORGANIZATION: NEWS & EVENTS

Following is the latest news and information from national statistical organizations participating in The World of Statistics and other national statistical agencies:

India—The term of T. C. A. Anant, the chief statistician and secretary of the ministry of statistics and programme implementation (MoSPI), has been extended by the government until January. He was to step down June 29. Anant has been the country’s chief statistician since June 2010. He succeeded Pronab Sen, who was appointed the first chief statistician of India February 21, 2007.

The post assumes importance since the methodology of computing gross domestic product (GDP) has undergone a sea change, which after implementation India has been projected as the fastest-growing large economy for 2015-16. Anant was previously a professor of economics at the Delhi School of Economics, and a member of the advisory committee on regulations under the Competition Commission of India.

The Chief Statistician of India position specifically was created to head the National Statistical Office after the establishment of the National Statistical Commission. It was recommended by a commission, chaired by C. Rangarajan, to review the Indian statistical system.



India Chief Statistician T. C. A. Anant

Australia—The country’s federal government has announced it will earmark \$250 million over five years to upgrade aging information technology (IT) systems at the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). “The ABS currently maintains more than 500 systems through our many business areas, and this investment will allow us to move to an efficient enterprise-wide approach,” Australian Statistician David Kalisch said. Some of the agency’s most critical IT infrastructure components are more than 30 years old.

The funding will allow the creation of new mobile applications and online portals to access ABS statistics and make possible the “introduction of a trusted whole of Government data integration capability for policy research, analysis and program evaluation to drive productivity in the public and private sectors,” the ABS explained in an outline of the funding package. The ABS is also eyeing new methods for collecting statistics, such as the use of mobile devices.

Solomon Islands—The National Statistics Office in the Ministry of Finance and Treasury is coordinating the formulation of the National Statistics Development Strategy (NSDS), a 20-year plan to oversee the development of statistics and build capacity in Solomon Islands’ ministries.

Speaking at the launching of the development strategy McKinnie Dentana, the undersecretary for the economics division of the ministry of finance and treasury, said: “Statistics can be used to measure the Democratic Coalition for Change government’s progress in achieving its objectives such as working toward food security and poverty alleviation and ensuring a healthy, literate and contented population; generating jobs and increased employment opportunities for the growing population; and achieving high economic growth, wealth and social well-being for all Solomon Islanders.”

Dentana stated the current national statistical system is not fully responsive in terms of supplying statistics users the information they need. “The range of statistics produced does not provide the information we need to monitor the economy. One such example is the need for a national Consumer Price Index for effective fiscal and monetary policies. At the moment the Honiara Price Index is the only data we have with which to measure inflation.”

Government Statistician Douglas Kimi told key stakeholders and development partners the NSDS 2015-2035 project, although overdue, is timely in its efforts to begin a sector-wide structural reform process to revitalise and strengthen the Solomon Islands' official statistical system. "Reinvigorating the linkages between the system and key socio-economic development policies will lead to improved service delivery and improved livelihoods of all Solomon Islanders."

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade representative Kirsten Hawke saluted the work of the National Statistics Office and further reinforced the need for collaboration between producers and users of statistics in Solomon Islands.

After the launch, representatives from more than 20 government ministries and other agencies participated in a workshop to discuss a vision for the future of the national statistical system. Participants envisage a national system that will be vibrant, sustainable and well-coordinated and will provide statistics that are responsive to the needs of the Solomon Islands.

Malaysia—An executive talk session was held April 13 as part of the 26th annual General Meeting of the Statistician Association of the Department of Statistics Malaysia. The session was officiated by Chief Statistician of Malaysia Datuk Dr. Abdul Rahman Hasan. Lim Seng Gim of the Ministry of Finance Malaysia delivered the talk, which was titled, "Oil Price Uncertainties: Impact on GDP Growth and Government Financial Position". Lim addressed several issues related to oil price fluctuations and the influence these price swings have on the national economy. Approximately 170 statisticians participated in the one-hour event. Following Lim's presentation, several thought-provoking questions were raised and answered by the presenter and participants as well.



Lim speaks to 170 statisticians from the Department of Statistics Malaysia.

JOIN THE WORLD OF STATISTICS

If your organization or an organization you know of isn't yet participating in The World of Statistics, encourage them to join today. Joining is easy; just ask a representative of the group to go to www.worldofstatistics.org and click on the "Join" icon on the top right-hand side of the homepage to become an official participating organization in The World of Statistics. Participation is valuable and is absolutely free!

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