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The Royal Statistical Society announces its Statistics of the Decade

The Royal Statistical Society (RSS) is pleased to announce its International and UK Statistics of the Decade (2010-19):

Winner - International Statistic of the Decade

8.4 million

The estimated accumulated deforestation of the Amazon rainforest, over the past decade, is equivalent to around 8.4 million football pitches.

Sources: [Brazil's National Institute for Space Research \(INPE\)](#)
[International Football Association Board \(FIFA\)](#)

This calculation is based on deforestation monitoring results from Brazil's National Institute for Space Research (INPE) and FIFA's regulations on pitch dimensions.

Forestry and biodiversity loss have been huge global issues and the judging panel felt this statistic would be particularly effective in helping people to visualise these problems. Since 2010, mile upon mile of rainforest has been replaced with a wide range of commercial developments, including cattle ranching, which is responsible for millions of tonnes of carbon emissions each year. This statistic, while only giving a snapshot of the issue, succeeds in providing an insight into the dramatic change to the landscape that has occurred over the last ten years.

Professor Jennifer Rogers, chair of the judging panel and RSS Vice-President for External Affairs, commented: "Irreplaceable rainforests like the Amazon are shrinking at an alarming rate and this statistic gives a very powerful visual of a hugely important environmental issue. Much has been discussed regarding the environment in the last few years and the judging panel felt this statistic was highly effective in capturing one of the decade's worst examples of environmental degradation."

Winner - UK Statistic of the Decade

0.3%

The estimated average annual increase in UK productivity in the decade or so since the financial crisis.

Source: [Office for National Statistics \(ONS\)](#)

The judging panel chose this statistic as it represents a sharp contrast to the pre-crisis period (1997-2007), when productivity growth (output per hour worked) averaged around 2% per year. It means that the UK has experienced its worst decade for productivity growth since the early 1800s. Output per hour would now be

more than a fifth higher if UK productivity had remained on its pre-2008 trend. Although productivity growth has also slowed in other advanced economies, the slowdown in the UK has been particularly marked.

In the panel's view, this is a highly important statistic as its knock-on effects have been extremely serious in terms of government revenues, UK businesses' competitiveness and employee pay. Throughout the post-war period, successive generations have enjoyed, overall, better living standards than their parents as productivity has risen. But near-zero productivity growth since the financial crisis means this process has largely ground to a halt over the past decade.

Hetan Shah, RSS's Executive Director, said: "Most people won't have paid attention to a dull sounding number on productivity. But we think it is probably the most important UK statistic of the last decade as productivity is the single biggest key to our shared prosperity. There's a strong argument to say that if the UK could lift its productivity we would be less out of sorts with ourselves as a nation, as we would have more money in our pockets and more money for government to spend on public services. With the election over, the RSS hopes that by naming 0.3% as our UK Statistic of the Decade we can draw the new Government's attention to solving this critical issue."

Dr Gemma Tetlow, Chief Economist at the Institute for Government and member of the judging panel, added: "This statistic shows the scale of change since the financial crisis of the late 'noughties'. The past decade has been the worst period for UK productivity growth since the early 19th century. It'll be a big surprise to many, while its ramifications for living standards have been huge."

Highly Commended – UK Statistics of the Decade

27%

Over one in four (3.5 million) young adults (those aged 20-34) are now estimated to live with their parents.

Source: [Office for National Statistics](#)

The judges chose this statistic, published recently, as it captures one of the biggest concerns in the UK over the last decade - housing affordability. The figure for male young adults is particularly high, with just under a third (32%) living with their parents.

In 2009, 23% (2.8 million) of 20-34 year-olds lived with their parents.

This surge in young adults living with their parents has led to the coining of the term the 'boomerang generation' - those who leave then return home after university or college as they are unable to afford soaring rents or need to save for longer, to put down a deposit on a home of their own.

Mark Easton, BBC Home Editor and member of the judging panel, said: "This statistic not only reflects the frustration of many young people who struggle to afford a home of their own, but also the postponement of plans for parents who had imagined a return to being a couple again."

30.6%

Women now hold 30.6% of all board positions in the UK's 350 biggest listed companies - up from just 9.5% in early 2011.

Source: [FTSE Women Leaders](#)

The judges chose this figure as the last decade has seen a concerted and successful effort to increase the number of women in the boardrooms of UK plc. The '30% Club', formed by Helena Morrissey in 2010, was a key driver of this and targeted improvements in FTSE100 companies - with its focus subsequently shifting to the FTSE350.

Further improvements are still needed, and the judges considered persuasive nominations about the gender pay gap and the very small number of female chief executives at Britain's biggest listed companies. But this figure was their final choice.

Dame Jil Matheson, former UK National Statistician and member of the judging panel, said: "We obviously have a long way to go in achieving gender equality, but the panel liked this statistic as it captures some of the progress that has been made."

Highly Commended – International Statistics of the Decade

165 million

The estimated increase in the number of Sports Utility Vehicles (SUVs) globally – from around 35 million to 200 million since 2010.

Source: [International Energy Agency \(IEA\)](#)

The fast-growing popularity of SUVs is significant as they tend to consume more fuel and generate higher emissions than standard cars, as they're generally heavier and less aerodynamic. The growing prevalence of SUVs is more than offsetting all the emissions savings being made by other car-owners switching to electric vehicles. Members of the judging panel were particularly struck by this statistic as it highlights that for change to happen, discussion cannot be focussed alone on encouraging people to buy alternatively-fuelled vehicles.

19%

According to the latest statistics, published in 2019, the global age-standardised death rate from air pollution fell by 19% over the period 2007-17.

Source: [Our World in Data](#)

This positive progress is not confined to the ten year period covered by this commended statistic as, since 1990, the number of deaths globally due to air pollution, per 100,000 people, has nearly halved. This decline has been primarily driven by improvements in indoor air quality.

While whether we are doing enough to curb pollution remains a fiercely contested topic, the panel felt this statistic was interesting in shining a light on a positive

development. While many may think that air quality is getting worse, the number of deaths caused by air pollution has actually fallen.

ENDS

Notes to editors:

- The Royal Statistical Society (RSS), founded in 1834, is one of the world's most distinguished and renowned statistical societies. It is a learned society for statistics, a professional body for statisticians and a charity which promotes statistics, data and evidence for the public good. Today the RSS has around 10,000 members around the world.
- Statistics of the Decade is a new initiative in which the RSS has sought figures which capture the spirit of some of the biggest issues of the last ten years.
- **The judges for the Statistics of the Decade were:**
 - Professor Jennifer Rogers (chair) - Head of Statistical Research at PHASTAR and RSS Vice-President for External Affairs
 - Professor Sir David Spiegelhalter - statistician and ex-RSS president
 - Dr Gemma Tetlow - Chief Economist, Institute for Government
 - Dame Jil Matheson - former UK National Statistician
 - Kelly Beaver - Managing Director of Public Affairs, Ipsos MORI
 - Professor Liberty Vittert - statistician and Visiting Scholar, Harvard University
 - Mark Easton - BBC Home Editor
 - Mona Chalabi - Data Editor, Guardian US
 - Professor Roland Geyer - environmental statistician, University of California, Santa Barbara.
- Follow the hashtag #StatsoftheDecade.