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Second Edition of the Road Map on statistics for Sustainable Development Goals

Conference of European Statisticians Road Map on statistics for Sustainable Development Goals – 2nd edition

Prepared by the Steering Group on statistics for Sustainable Development Goals

Summary

The second edition of the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) "Road Map on statistics for SDGs" has been developed following the request from the Conference in 2018. It has been prepared by the CES Steering Group (co-chaired by Poland and Sweden) and experts from countries.

The second edition of the Road Map follows up from the widely used first edition (2017) taking into account the developments in this area. It provides guidance to maintain robust SDG monitoring frameworks and meet the new challenges including those caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. It covers a range of possible solutions that can be adapted to specific needs of different NSOs.

The current document presents and excerpt of the Road Map, prepared for translation purposes. It includes the key messages, executive summary, introduction, and Sections 1 and 3 from the Road Map.

The full text is available on the CES plenary session website at https://unece.org/statistics/events/CES2021, and includes in addition nine sections focusing on different aspects of the work on statistics for SDGs. Each section concludes with recommendations to NSOs. The Road Map also includes Frequently Asked Questions based on the authors' experience with questions that they have been asked, and a glossary of terms to help with the understanding of the Road Map. Examples of approaches used by countries are provided in 'Country case studies accompanying the Roadmap', available on the CES plenary session website in English only.

The draft "Road map on Statistics for SDGs" was electronically consulted with all CES members and other stakeholders during March-April 2021. Summary of the feedback form the consultation will be provided in document ECE/CES/2021/6/Add.1. Subject to a positive outcome of the consultation, the 2021 CES plenary session will be asked to endorse the Road Map.

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I. Executive summary

1.   In June 2017, the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) endorsed the first edition of the Road Map on statistics for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Road Map was intended as a guide for the CES members, outlining a strategy for NSOs to measure progress towards SDGs. NSOs made use of the Road Map by establishing new information architecture for follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda. In some countries the Road Map was important as a tool to support dialogue with policymakers, especially to explain the new obligations for NSOs and the need for statistical capacity development.

2.   Since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, countries have made considerable progress in the implementation of SDGs, including putting in place national monitoring systems. The structures and mechanisms of global and regional monitoring were developed. At the same time, NSOs still face many challenges in the area of statistics for SDGs.

3.   Recognizing the current needs, the CES 2018 plenary session asked the Steering Group on Statistics for SDGs[1] to prepare a second edition of the Road Map (Road Map 2.0) to address issues essential for the statistical community.

4.   The Road Map 2.0 provides guidance and a strategy on how to implement a system for producing and disseminating data on SDGs. It sets out the activities associated with statistics for SDGs by describing what needs to be done, who the main actors are, their roles in monitoring SDGs, and the opportunities for cooperation. This guidance includes best practices, concrete actions, priorities and recommendations, but is not a set of rules. It covers a range of possible solutions that can be adapted to specific needs of different NSOs. It also helps NSOs explain and communicate their role in achieving SDGs. The Road Map 2.0 also serves as a resource for national policymakers, international organizations and anyone involved in the implementation and monitoring of SDGs.

5.   The Road Map 2.0 has built on experiences and lessons learned with the implementation of the first Road Map. It brings together the collective experience of various stakeholders, from global to sub-national level of SDG monitoring. It is in line with the activities of other groups working on statistics for SDGs, including the Inter-agency and Expert Group on SDG indicators (IAEG-SDGs).

6.   As the Road Map 2.0 targets a wider audience than NSOs alone, a number of "key messages" have been prepared to draw the attention of various stakeholders. The Road Map 2.0 consists of nine substantive sections, focusing on topics that are important for effective measurement, reporting and communication of SDG indicators. A brief description of each section is presented below. Each section concludes with recommendations for NSOs. The subsequent annexes include country case studies, a glossary of terms used and frequently asked questions.

A. Use of statistics for Sustainable Development Goals (Section 1)

7.   Section 1 of the Road Map 2.0 explains the role of official statistics for SDG follow-up. It highlights the value of official statistics and their importance for tracking progress at various levels. Some reflections concerning limitations of official statistics are also addressed in the section.

8.   Special attention is given to various ways of using SDG statistics at global, regional and national level. The 2030 Agenda emphasizes that the SDG indicators are used in many

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[1] The Steering Group on statistics for SDGs was set up by the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) Bureau in October 2015 to coordinate and guide the work on the development of official statistics for monitoring Sustainable Development Goals under CES. Members: Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Kyrgyzstan, Montenegro, Netherlands, Poland (co-Chair), Russian Federation, Switzerland, Sweden (co-Chair), Turkey, United Kingdom, United States of America, CIS-STAT, Eurostat, OECD, UNECE Statistical Division (Secretariat). In addition, the following countries and organizations contributed to the second edition of the Road Map: Albania, Armenia, Austria, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Spain, Ukraine, PARIS21 and UNESCO.

ways, and that communication needs to target individual user groups appropriately. To illustrate the diversity of needs and presentation methods, the section also includes some practical examples of use of SDG data in terms of purpose, type and source of data.

B. Quality assurance of Sustainable Development Goals indicators (Section 2)

9. Section 2 highlights the importance of quality assurance of SDG indicators. It explains why we need to reflect on the accuracy of SDG statistics and why communication to users matters.

10. The UN National Quality Assurance Framework (NQAF) principles provide a framework to support quality assurance mechanisms. Examples of other existing quality schemes that can be helpful are also listed.

11. Some NSOs use non-official statistics to improve SDG monitoring. The quality assurance of data provided by other national data producers may be less straightforward and result in responsibility dilemmas. The section addresses some concerns on this issue.

12. Section 2 also underlines the role of metadata, highlighting key aspects to be included and how to communicate metadata effectively.

C. National coordination mechanisms (Section 3)

13. Section 3 discusses the role of NSOs in implementing SDGs against the background of existing underlying differences between statistical systems due to both internal and external factors. The section examines factors that may impact NSO's role in the coordination and production of data for SDGs, from institutional set-up, legislation, organizational and technical capacity to those related to the political environment.

14. Ensuring data for SDG monitoring requires extensive analysis of information available at national level. NSSs vary greatly, and there are different national data producers in countries. Section 3 describes different forms of collaboration between national data producers.

D. Reporting on global Sustainable Development Goals indicators (Section 4)

15. The follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda rely essentially on the systematic provision of data for global monitoring. Section 4 looks at how data flows are organized between national, regional and global levels and how this could be optimized. The section comprises four parts: (a) examining the global data-flows framework, (b) identification of national data providers, (c) different processes and methods of data transmission, and (d) validation of national data.

16. The complexity of the different data flows together with organizational involvement and governance of custodian agencies contribute to the overall exercise of reporting data for SDG indicators. Various models used for national reporting on global SDG indicators are discussed.

17. This section also describes the benefits of National Reporting and Dissemination Platforms (NRDPs) as well as more technical aspects of data transmission such as Application Programming Interfaces (APIs), Statistical Data and Metadata eXchange (SDMX) and the development of tools such as the Data Lab.

18. An important element of global reporting is data validation. Quality assurance at the international level requires a process of harmonization of the data provided by countries. To improve comparability, custodian agencies may need to adjust the data. While both NSOs and custodian agencies agree on the value and necessity of data validation, there is an ongoing discussion on how to proceed with non-validated country data.

E. Beyond global monitoring (Section 5)

19.   In line with the 2030 Agenda's call for SDG implementation and monitoring in regions and countries, Section 5 of the Road Map focuses on tracking progress towards SDGs beyond global level. It offers an overview of existing SDG frameworks at the regional level, including the EU set of SDG indicators, the OECD mechanism for measuring distance from SDGs, the CIS-STAT approach to monitoring progress in the CIS region and the UNECE framework for tracking SDG implementation.

20.   Section 5 also deals with SDG monitoring at the national level. It provides detailed guidance on developing a national SDG framework and presents different approaches to this process. It also refers to subnational and thematic initiatives on tracking SDGs, including SDG frameworks for specific groups of stakeholders, such as local governments and the private sector.

F. Leave no one behind (Section 6)

21.   The 2030 Agenda emphasizes that SDGs and targets should be realised for all people, regardless of location, age, income, gender, ethnicity, religion and (dis)ability to leave no one behind (LNOB).

22.   Section 6 of the Road Map explores the different aspects of measuring LNOB groups – data sources, data disaggregation, collaboration with civil society and organizations outside NSOs. This section also looks at the challenges involved in measuring the SDG indicators concerned. A number of practical examples are included in the annex on best practices and case studies.

23.   Section 6 also highlights the need to recognize and communicate the value of data to ensure that no one is left behind and stresses the importance of adherence to statistical disclosure and official data protection regulations to protect individuals and entities.

G. Communication of statistics for Sustainable Development Goals (Section 7)

24.   Section 7 discusses the challenges of effective communication of SDG statistics and proposes principles that can be useful when presenting data to the broader public.

25.   The section highlights the importance of clear lines of responsibility for SDG monitoring within NSOs. It suggests that a special unit or team within an NSO be set up to focus solely on monitoring SDGs and also recommends ensuring commitment of leaders. Another crucial element is identifying target audiences: NSOs should be aware that they are aiming at different kinds of users, experts (e.g. statisticians, the scientific community) as well as casual users (e.g. media, general public). Additionally, the Road Map 2.0 recommends that NSOs describe SDGs in a way that appeals to the audience, but that is also informative and grounded in statistics. This can be achieved by evidence-based storytelling supported by various resources.

H. Voluntary national reviews (Section 8)

26.   Section 8 discusses Voluntary national reviews (VNRs) and the role of NSOs in this process. The Road Map 2.0 suggests that NSOs should be involved in the process of preparation of VNRs and cooperate with the institution responsible for it.

27.   This section presents two tools created by UN that can be helpful during the preparation of VNRs: The Secretary-General's reporting guidelines for VNRs and the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) handbook.

28.   The section presents best practices and approaches to drafting statistical annexes. It also points out some compulsory elements of the annex and recommends studying existing VNRs for inspiration.

I.   Capacity development for Sustainable Development Goals statistics (Section 9)

29.   The final section (9) of the Road Map is dedicated to capacity development for SDG statistics within as well as beyond NSOs. The section provides an overview of steps taken and progress in capacity development in official statistics for SDGs and discusses the new approaches to capacity development. The section also lists the main sources of donor support in statistics.

30.   The section examines methods and tools for capacity development including peer reviews, technical assistance and study visits, training and workshops, participation in meetings, long-term partnerships and twinning projects.

II.   Introduction

A.   Mandate

31.   The document Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development[2], adopted in September 2015 by all UN Member States, included 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 associated targets. SDGs constitute a policy framework for actions at national, regional and global levels. Accurate data are critical to assess progress towards achieving SDGs at various levels.

32.   Official statistics play a key role in providing evidence for the follow-up and review of SDGs and the related targets. In addition, two of the targets focus specifically on improving official statistics, namely:

33.   Target 17.18: "By 2020, enhance capacity building support to developing countries, including for least developed countries and small island developing States, to increase significantly the availability of high-quality, timely and reliable data disaggregated by income, gender, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, geographic location and other characteristics relevant in national contexts."

34.   Target 17.19: "By 2030, build on existing initiatives to develop measurements of progress on sustainable development that complement gross domestic product, and support statistical capacity-building in developing countries."

35.   The Conference of European Statisticians (CES) approved the first edition of the *Road Map on Statistics for SDGs*[3] in June 2017. The Road Map was prepared by a Steering Group on Statistics for SDGs (set up by the CES Bureau in October 2015). The Road Map has been widely used by countries, international organizations and other stakeholders and has helped to establish a system for measuring progress towards SDGs. It has been published in English and Russian (some countries have also translated it into their national languages, e.g. Spanish and Serbian).

36.   The 2018 and 2019 CES plenary sessions requested the Steering Group to prepare a second edition of the Road Map to continue to provide vision and guidance to countries on statistics for SDGs.

B.   Objectives and approach

37.   The second edition of the Road Map (Road Map 2.0) aims to continue to guide the CES work on statistics for SDGs. In the first five years of implementation of the 2030 Agenda, processes for providing statistics for SDGs have evolved at global, regional and national levels. Many challenges remain and new ones continue to emerge, requiring new approaches and solutions.

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[2] https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld
[3] https://www.unece.org/index.php?id=47510

38.   As indicated in the first edition of the Road Map, the publication was intended to be a living document. The CES Steering Group on Statistics for SDGs committed to update it, taking into account relevant developments including the work of the Inter-agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators (IAEG-SDGs), the High-level Group for Partnership, Coordination and Capacity Building for the 2030 Agenda (HLG-PCCB), and the Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century (PARIS21). The Road Map 2.0 fulfils the relevant requirements.

39.   The Road Map 2.0 focuses on issues relating to SDG monitoring that are examined by various stakeholders at international and national level. It provides a framework for NSOs and other institutions involved in data reporting, assessing progress towards SDGs and communicating information on SDGs.

40.   The contents of the Road Map 2.0 are largely based on those presented in the first edition of the Road Map, building up more refined descriptions of topics commonly raised during international meetings. Additionally, special attention is given to the statistics needed to address the "leave no one behind" commitment; and to quality assurance of SDG indicators.

41.   To attract the attention of various stakeholders to the reflections contained in the Road Map 2.0, key messages have been pulled from all chapters and presented as a separate part of the document. The Road Map 2.0 also includes national case studies that add value by providing practical experiences and serving as inspiration.

42.   Like the previous edition, the Road Map 2.0 provides recommendations for NSOs as they strive to meet the challenge to deliver data on global SDG indicators and to support the review and follow-up of progress towards SDGs at national level.

C.   Extraordinary circumstances due to Covid-19

43.   Work on the Road Map 2.0 coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic affects not only SDGs per se, but also the monitoring process. This made it necessary to take into account the impact of COVID-19 on issues raised in the document.

44.   Since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, statistical institutions have been organizing processes to monitor and evaluate progress towards SDGs. Substantial progress has been made to implement the IAEG-SDGs global indicator framework. NSOs have been adapting their systems to the new requirements of global and national SDG indicators. The ensuing rich package of achievements and remaining challenges was a solid foundation for further development, but it was heavily impacted by the COVID-19 crisis. Five years of enhancing the statistical capacity for SDGs was unexpectedly interrupted by the global pandemic, and we now need to adjust our strategy.

45.   COVID-19 has a massive effect on statistical systems and NSOs. Many NSOs are struggling to compile even basic statistics. At the same time, governments and other stakeholders are looking for data to measure the COVID-19 impact on their societies, environment and economies. NSOs have had to combine an increased demand for timely and disaggregated data with the necessity to reorganize work and adjust statistical production processes.

46.   The Road Map 2.0 provides a glimpse of the challenges involved in producing and providing data for SDGs after the global COVID-19 crisis. Assessing the pandemic's impact on SDGs and its effects on official statistics will only be possible in the future. At the time of writing, a range of initial consequences can be discussed.

47.   Some considerations addressing the effects of COVID-19 are included in the Road Map 2.0. Section 6 'Leave no one behind' presenting data challenges for vulnerable groups.

III.   Use of statistics for Sustainable Development Goals

48.   A wide range of stakeholders, from high-level decision makers and politicians to businesses, civil society and the public, use information generated by statistics to make

choices and take decisions. The 2030 Agenda reiterates and reinforces the rising demand for data and statistics in its call for a follow-up that is evidence based and builds on high-quality data.

A.   Statistics in the context of Sustainable Development Goals

49.   The use of statistics to follow up the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development has two major aims – to support evidence-based decision-making for sustainable development and ensuring no one is left behind, and to hold decision makers accountable for the commitments made when signing the 2030 Agenda.

50.   Statistics are produced and disseminated by a multitude of private and public organizations and enterprises for a wide variety of areas. Why then, do we need a specific SDG follow-up? The answer is: because often statistics used to monitor SDGs are primarily produced for other purposes.

51.   The added value of this for users of SDG statistics is the cross-cutting viewpoint these statistics give of sustainable development when they are pulled together and made available as a package. Since sustainable development touches most aspects of everyday life, this makes for a framework with a communicative force that should not be underestimated. The interlinkages between indicators bridging the social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainable development give the indicator framework a power that can help bridge different policy fields and support more integrated analysis[4]. SDG statistics can also help uncover underlying systemic disadvantages that vulnerable population groups are facing. This aspect is further elaborated in Section 6, on the principle of leaving no one behind.

52.   Compiling and maintaining a useful follow-up of such a far-reaching subject as sustainable development requires cooperation, collaboration and coordination. It involves knowledge about users' needs and user groups, policy priorities and national, regional and global statistical ecosystems. All these issues are elaborated on in the sections of Road Map 2.0.

53.   Using statistics in the follow-up of the implementation of the Agenda will also have the added benefit of making it more concrete. Communicated effectively, statistics for SDGs will be a reminder to policymakers and to the public of the commitments made by our governments.

54.   For the follow-up to be useful and have the desired effects on implementation of sustainable development, it is imperative that the statistics used are accurate, understood and trusted by the users.

1.   The comparative advantage of official statistics[5]

55.   In its Resolution (A/RES/71/313), the UN General Assembly stressed that official statistics and data from national statistical systems constitute the basis needed for the SDG global indicator framework. It also stressed the role of NSO as the coordinator of NSS.

56.   The term "official statistics" can have different connotations in different countries depending on the national legislative framework. Throughout this road map the term is used loosely to mean statistics produced and disseminated by government agencies. Official statistics, regardless of the specific definitions that may apply in different countries, have specific characteristics. They are:

- typically produced under solid institutional and legal frameworks including mandates for data collection,

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[4] https://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/51st-session/documents/BG-Item3a-Interlinkages-Workstream-E.pdf
[5] The content of this section is pulled from the publication *Recommendations for promoting, measuring and communicating the value of official statistics* (UNECE 2018)

- produced under the application of strong data confidentiality protection regimes,

- consistent over long periods of time

- produced with the sole aim of generating reliable and accurate information.[6]

57.   Private data providers may offer data that seem more attractive, because they are faster and more up to date for instance. But the value of official statistics is in the underlying legal and institutional framework that ensures the compilation of high-quality, unbiased and independent statistics that are not subject to inappropriate influence. These, and other aspects are formulated in the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics[7], that all NSOs have committed to adhere to.

58.   In a world where huge amounts of data are being generated all the time, and where many people can look up almost anything they want, whenever and wherever they want, official statistics stand out as a unique source of impartial and trustworthy information[8].

59.   Statistics are produced to be used and to have an impact on society by providing more openness and transparency and ensuring confidentiality and equal access to information as part of human rights. A society that uses official statistics should be a society with more empowered people, better policies, more effective and accountable decision-making, greater participation and stronger democratic mechanisms.

2.   Stepping out of the comfort zone

60.   Countries can also use non-official data and statistics in the SDG follow-up, for example to fill gaps in the official statistics system or to provide context (e.g. civil society data on vulnerable groups).

61.   If governments use non-official data and statistics, some safeguards need to be in place: a certain quality standard can be established and NSO can be tasked with assessing the quality of the statistics used. Section 2 on quality of SDG statistics provides more information on the practices and processes that can be put in place to ensure that the quality of the SDG statistics is fit for purpose.

62.   In some cases, civil society organizations produce so-called "shadow indicators" (and even a "shadow report" for the High-level Political Forum (HLPF)). These indicators have both advantages and disadvantages. For example, the UK and Canada use civil society data and recognize their added value of shedding light on areas where official data may not be available, while clearly indicating the source and the fact that they are not official statistics.

B.   How are Sustainable Development Goals statistics used?

63.   SDG indicators are used in a number of ways: to present a global overview of sustainable development progress in relation to the goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda; to illustrate the state of play or progress in a region or country; or as a basis for more thorough analyses of the challenges involved in achieving the goals. They can also be used to compare progress in different countries, subregions or regions, and to shed light on the situation for vulnerable groups. There are thus different kinds of users of SDG statistics, and communication must target these user groups accordingly. Section 7 on communication also looks at this aspect. The present section presents an overview of some practical examples of SDG data uses.[9]

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[6] The definition used is from the publication *Recommendations for Promoting, Measuring and Communicating the value of official statistics* (UNECE 2018)

[7] https://unece.org/statistics/fundamental-principles-official-statistics

[8] The UN General Assembly in its Resolution (A/RES/71/313) stressed that official statistics and data from national statistical systems constitute the basis needed for the SDG global indicator framework. It also stresses the role of NSOs as the coordinator of the national statistical system.

[9] More practical uses of SDG data can be found on the UNECE SDG Knowledge hub at https://w3.unece.org/sdghub/.

1. Tracking global progress

64. Both public and private organizations are monitoring the progress towards the goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda. The IAEG-SDGs global indicator framework or approximations of this framework are most commonly used in this regard. One reason for this is the fact that comparability across countries is a key quality dimension for monitoring global progress. Official international statistics used for global tracking are often based on nationally produced official statistics. Official statistics adhere to international standards (and are therefore typically easier to harmonize for comparability), are produced under strict confidentiality regimes, are based on scientific principles and under the rule of professional independence[10], and are therefore in many cases preferable.

65. Global monitoring primarily constitutes observing the progress and identifying challenges with regard to regions and subject areas where more action needs to be taken. This can then help to prioritize areas for special attention and action, and to allocate resources.

A. Annual SDG Progress Report and Progress Chart

66. The Secretary General's Sustainable Development Progress Report[11] describes the progress achieved worldwide towards the 2030 Agenda. It is based on data and analysis of global aggregate statistics available in the SDG Indicators Global Database[12], which is hosted and maintained by the UN Statistics Division (UNSD) and contains available national statistics for the global SDG indicators. The report is produced primarily with a view to inform the HLPF process. It is prepared by UNSD in collaboration with the custodian agencies, i.e. the agencies responsible for the individual indicators concerning the thematic areas they deal with. See Section 4 for more information on custodian agencies and their role.

67. In addition to the follow-up and review process, UNSD, in collaboration with other international organizations, prepared the first SDG Progress Chart in 2019. This presents a snapshot of progress made at the global and regional levels towards selected targets under all goals of the 2030 Agenda, based on a limited number of indicators. The progress chart provides an overview of global and regional trends towards the achievement of SDGs and helps readers to visualize where we are and the rate of progress, based on some of the indicators. As more data become available, the methodology used for the progress chart will be revised and updated.

B. The Global Sustainable Development Report

68. The Global Sustainable Development Report[13] (GSDR) is prepared by an independent group of scientists. The first report was published in 2019 to inform the SDG summit in New York in September 2019[14].

69. GSDR is distinct from, and complementary to, the annual Sustainable Development Goals Progress Report prepared by the Secretary General. It does not produce new evidence; rather it capitalizes on existing knowledge across disciplines, through an "assessment of assessments". It highlights state-of-the-art knowledge for transformations towards sustainable development and identifies concrete areas where rapid, transformational change is possible. The report draws upon numerous sources of knowledge, among them the Secretary General's SDG Progress Report, but also scientific articles and special reports.

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[10] However, sometimes the use of non-governmental data and statistics can be motivated. It could be sometimes more effective to use global monitoring data or sometimes non-governmental data can be perceived as more independent.

[11] https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/progress-report/

[12] https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/indicators/database/

[13] https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/globalsdreport/2019

[14] The SDG Summit in 2019 was the first High-level Political Forum (HLPF) on Sustainable Development under the auspices of the General Assembly https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgsummit.

C.   *Global thematic reports*

70.   The custodian agencies often have specific sections on their websites dedicated to SDGs where they release different types of indicator-based products, such as publications and reports, dashboards, manuals or working documents with thematic content. Below is a table presenting a few examples of such websites and reports.

Table 1
Examples of websites and reports with thematic content

Custodian agency and website on SDGs	Publication and link	Main characteristics
WHO https://www.who.int/sdg/en/	World Health Statistics 2018: Monitoring health for SDGs https://www.who.int/gho/publications/world_health_statistics/2018/en/	Annual snapshot of the state of the world's health. The 2018 edition contains the latest available data for 36 health-related SDG indicators. WHO has also elaborated some infographics on the SDG Health Price Tag.
UNEP https://www.unenvironment.org/unga/our-position/unep-sustainable-development-goals-summit	Measuring Progress Towards achieving the environmental dimension of SDGs https://wedocs.unep.org	The data in this report and its statistical annex are based on data included in the Environment Live Global Database (UNEP 2019b) which is an exact match with the data in the Global SDG Indicators Database plus some additional indicators and SDG disaggregation.
FAO http://www.fao.org/sustainable-development-goals/en/	FAO and SDGs. Indicators: Measuring up to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development http://www.fao.org/policy-support/resources/resources-details/en/c/854006/	Flagship publications that include both a storyline and statistical annexes on relevant SDG indicators under FAO custodianship

D.   *The Sustainable Development Report[15]*

71.   The Sustainable Development Report (formally: SDG Index report) is produced annually by teams of independent experts at the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) and the Bertelsmann Stiftung. It presents an SDG index and dashboard for all countries of the world thus giving a visual representation of countries' performance on SDGs to identify priorities for action. It is not an official SDG monitoring tool but is presented as a complementary perspective to the official UN reports and databases. SDSN and the Bertelsmann Stiftung use publicly available data published by official data providers (including World Bank, WHO, ILO) as well as other organizations including research centres and NGOs to construct the index and compile the dashboards. The list of indicators is limited to 100 and differs from the Global SDG indicator list.

72.   The Sustainable Development Report exemplifies the use of statistics to produce rankings of countries. It is important to note that rankings are very powerful communicative tools that could, potentially, lead to increased recognition of the 2030 Agenda and to increased overall knowledge about the general challenges across the world. However, an index is often difficult for users to interpret and often lacks depth and transparency.

[15] https://dashboards.sdgindex.org/

Sometimes it is not clear whether a shift in the ranking is caused by actual progress or is the effect of, for example, a new data source becoming available in a country. The issue of rankings is further elaborated in a subsection on non-official SDG progress assessments in Section 7 of this Road Map, on communication.

2. Regional follow-up

73.   Several regional groupings report on progress towards the goals of the 2030 Agenda. Most of them use the IAEG-SDGs global indicator framework, or an approximation of the framework, to ensure comparability between countries. Harmonized indicators available at the regional level that are more suited to a goal or target in a particular regional context are sometimes used instead of a global indicator. A regional follow-up will often be aimed at existing regional policy frameworks but framed in the 2030 Agenda context.

A. *UNECE platform for SDG statistics*

74.   The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) has launched a regional platform[16] with three components: a knowledge hub, a dashboard of indicators and a database. The knowledge hub and the database are mainly aimed at statisticians and other professionals interested in methodologies, indicator comparability and analyses, while the dashboard is aimed at the public and policymakers. The UNECE database contains statistics for the IAEG-SDGs global indicators that are relevant to the region, but it will be developed further to eventually contain more national statistics with regional relevance. More information on this platform is available in Section 5 (Beyond global monitoring).

B. *Progress towards SDGs in Latin America and the Caribbean*

75.   The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) has released its Four-year progress report on the progress and regional challenges of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Latin America and the Caribbean[17]. Published about four years after the approval of the 2030 Agenda, this report gives an overview of the achievements in the region as regards SDGs on the one hand, balanced by the challenges and problems on the other.

C. *Regional platform in the ESCAP region*

76.   In the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) region, the global list of UN indicators has been complemented with indicators taken from other international organizations, to create a regional platform. The Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report 2019 elaborated by ESCAP analyses SDG trends as well as data availability for monitoring progress in Asia and the Pacific and the five subregions. It is a key resource for all stakeholders involved in prioritization, planning, implementation and follow-up of the 2030 Agenda in Asia and the Pacific. It also presents dashboards for ESCAP and its subregions.

D. *Sustainable development in the European Union[18]*

77.   Eurostat is in charge of monitoring SDGs in the European Union (EU). It uses a European set of around 100 SDG indicators of which almost two thirds are aligned with the global IAEG indicators. All of them are based on statistics already collected and found in European databases and offer data for EU countries. Eurostat has dedicated a section of its website to SDGs, comprising a database with EU indicators broken down by Member States, an annual report on the situation in the EU with respect to the achievement of SDGs and a number of interactive informative visuals such as "SDGs & me[19]", "Discover the progress of

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[16] https://w3.unece.org/sdghub/

[17] https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/44552/S1900432_en.pdf?sequence=7&isAllowed=y

[18] https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/sdi

[19] Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and me - 2020 edition (europa.eu)

SDGs in the EU[20]" and "Compare your country[21]". The choice of indicators for EU monitoring is based on existing EU policy frameworks and on the availability of good quality data.

E.   *Distance to targets for the OECD countries*

78.   The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has developed and produced three reports, in 2016, 2017 and 2019, on distances to targets for the OECD countries. The reports aim to assist Member States with their national implementation of the 2030 Agenda. It provides a high-level overview of strengths and weaknesses in performance across SDGs and the 5Ps of the 2030 Agenda: People (goals 1 to 5), Planet (goals 6 and 12 to 15), Prosperity (goals 7 to 11), Peace (goal 16) and Partnership (goal 17). It aims to help countries navigate SDGs' complexity and identify priorities within the broad 2030 Agenda.

79.   The report follows the IAEG-SDGs global indicator framework but also uses proxy indicators and OECD data to complement the indicators available in the UN SDG database to maximize coverage and comparability between countries. OECD has developed a methodology that evaluates the distance countries need to cover to meet each target.

3.   Use of SDG statistics at the national level

80.   At the national level countries have taken different decisions on how to follow up sustainable development in the context of the 2030 Agenda. The different perspectives taken depend on a number of issues, but important common factors seem to be previous experience of follow-up on sustainable development strategies and the degree of decentralization and coordination within NSS (see Section 3 on coordination of national mechanisms and Section 5 on development of national indicators).

A.   *National indicators*

81.   At national level, SDG indicators are used to monitor the progress of countries towards the 2030 Agenda and to assess the impact of the adopted measures. In this sense SDG indicators have to be relevant to national contexts and communicable to users. Therefore, the global and regional indicators are often complemented with national and subnational indicators. Under the commitment of "leaving no one behind", national follow-up can often provide better breakdowns by territories, sex, age and vulnerable groups, among other things. This way, data will show the national, subnational and local performance by target and goal and will allow priorities for action to be identified. Countries have also developed national indicator lists based on relevance to their specific context and availability of official statistics. A more thorough account of the use of national indicators can be found in Section 5 (Beyond global indicators).

B.   *Follow-up of national sustainable development strategy*

82.   In countries which had already adopted a sustainable development strategy, it is not unusual for that strategy to be remapped to SDGs and for a previously developed indicator list to be adopted to follow up this strategy and thus be used as the national follow-up of the 2030 Agenda. This indicator list may overlap with the IAEG-SDGs global indicator framework to some extent. Finland is one of the countries to use this approach. Other countries also later adopted national strategies aligned with the 2030 Agenda, adding national indicators to the global ones to monitor these.

C.   *Use of national reporting platforms*

83.   Many countries have developed national reporting platforms (NRPs) to facilitate and enhance the usefulness of SDG statistics.

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[20] Key findings - Sustainable development indicators - Eurostat (europa.eu)
[21] Indicators - Sustainable development indicators - Eurostat (europa.eu)

84.   National reporting platforms (NRPs) can serve three main purposes: as a data collection portal where various producers can update their information; as a production database of global, regional, national and subnational SDG indicators; and as a dissemination portal that allows users to find SDG country data through a single entry point. An NRP can be considered from a dual perspective: as a way to use SDG statistics and, at the same time, as a way of promoting the use of statistics by presenting them in a user-friendly way via a single-entry point.

85.   Many NSOs have already developed or are building NRPs with data, tables, graphics and visual tools. A list including links to national NRPs is available on the UNECE knowledge hub[22].

86.   An NRP can also constitute the national mechanism for providing data to custodian agencies. This topic is further detailed in Section 4 Reporting global indicators.

D.   *Voluntary national reviews*

87.   Countries are free to choose how and when they present their VNR to HLPF. However, the reviews should be rigorous and based on evidence, informed by country-led evaluations and data which is high-quality, accessible, timely, reliable and disaggregated by income, sex, age, race, ethnicity, migration status, disability and geographic location and other characteristics relevant in national contexts. Countries are also encouraged to structure their VNRs according to common reporting guidelines[23] prepared by UNDESA which include the preparation of a statistical annex. These annexes should typically include national representations of the available IAEG global indicators, complemented with national indicators. More information and practical examples on preparing VNRs are provided in Section 8 Voluntary national reviews (VNRs).

E.   *Beyond indicators*

88.   Indicators are by definition a means of indicating what is happening. To complement the use of indicators for policy development, more detailed statistical data sets often need to be used and analysed in the context of the 2030 Agenda. Specific impact studies can also be performed: economic studies, for example, are often necessary to analyse data and evaluate the impact of these policies, all other things being equal. Examples of use of statistics beyond indicators are provided in Addendum 1 Country case studies.

89.   The follow-up of the 2030 Agenda can include information from sources other than data and statistics. But a lack of high-quality statistics in the follow-up will leave the door open to non-verifiable interpretations and ineffective policy development. There are reasons not to use high-quality data and statistics, the main one being that they are not available. Many statistical systems in the world are underfunded and lack the capacity to provide official statistics to the extent needed to provide policymakers with solid evidence for accountable decision-making. Further reasons for not using official statistics are that they are not detailed enough or timely enough, or a lack of knowledge about what is available, where to find it and how to use it. As statistical literacy is often low among users, the statistics that are available can also be difficult to understand and interpret.

90.   Therefore, the availability of data is not enough to ensure that they are used. More support is needed to build capacity for data analysis and use (e.g. by increasing statistical literacy, including statistics in school curricula, etc.). The UNECE Regional Forum on SDGs in 2019 concluded that "To make data the lifeblood of decision-making, capacities for use and analysis should be increased by improving accessibility, promoting open data culture, and engaging NSOs and decision makers together in analytical processes. Intermediaries between data producers and policymakers are needed to make full use of the potential of data, in particular looking at dimensions of equity."

91.   Use of high-quality official statistics can be advanced by support for building capacity within statistical systems to develop, produce and – not least – communicate statistics.

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[22] https://statswiki.unece.org/display/SFSDG/Summary+of+Progress+in+UNECE+countries
[23] https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/17346Updated_Voluntary_Guidelines.pdf

Section 9 of this Road Map outlines the challenges and opportunities involved in capacity development for SDG statistics and beyond. Section 7 examines communication as a means for reaching the goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda.

C. Summary of uses of different kinds of statistics and data in the context of the 2030 Agenda

92. As evident in the previous sections of this chapter, not all data are fit for every purpose. In many cases, official statistics are the preferred source of information, but other data may be more suitable for use in other cases e.g. maps to show transboundary pollution. A clear understanding of where and when different kinds of data are needed can help in the discussions about where capacity needs to be built and where to allocate resources.

Table 2
Uses of different of statistics and data in the context of the 2030 Agenda

Type of use	Aim	Specific requirements	Type of data to use, sources
Global overview and international comparisons E.g. the global SDG report based on global indicators or the SDSN Sustainable development report.	To see overall progress and pinpoint regions or subject areas left behind to raise financial or policy support	Internationally comparable statistics.	Internationally harmonised statistics, e.g. global SDG indicators or other internationally comparable statistics. Country-level data, regional aggregates.
Shareable content E.g. indicators, weather symbols, videos, visual pieces, interactive charts.	To illustrate interesting developments in a simple way. To attract the attention of time-poor users who may be inclined to share interesting developments, quick facts or short news articles on their social media platforms.	Easy to understand, visually attractive, factual but not complicated. Users often are not concerned about the data source or quality dimensions; therefore, the use of quality assured statistics or official statistics is preferred so as to safeguard trust in statistics.	National or international official and/or quality assured statistics.
Progress assessments E.g. key indicators, weather symbols, arrows, 'odometers'.	To show change, to be used as an input to policies, evidence for decision making and for accountability.	Carefully chosen to reflect different aspects of development. Comparability over time very important.	National or international official and/or quality assured statistics. Time series.
Country profiles/national assessments E.g. country reports, national data platforms.	To analyse the situation or progress in a country or in a subject area.	High accuracy and coherence. Context is important. For analysis of national situation, international comparability is often	National official and/or quality assured statistics. Time series.

Type of use	Aim	Specific requirements	Type of data to use, sources
		not of great importance.	
In-depth analysis E.g. thematic reports, research reports.	To make an in-depth analysis or research into specific subject areas.	High accuracy and coherence.	Official statistics and research data. Specialised surveys or data collections. Analysis providing context around the data.
Assessments of the principle that no one should be left behind E.g. thematic reports.	Identify groups left behind and the situation for vulnerable groups.	Disaggregated data or data on specific vulnerable groups. If time-series are not available, one-off data may be used.	Official statistics, register data, modelled data (small area estimates). Research data, CSOs, citizen-generated data, qualitative data. Analysis providing context around the data.
Basis for policy action at local level	To address issues of importance in the local context	Spatially disaggregated data.	Official statistics at detailed level, administrative data, private-sector data, big data.
Basis for response in emergency situations	Identifying groups that are affected by an emergency situation for emergency relief, recovery, etc.	Operative data on where people are located, damages etc. During an emergency, timeliness is of utmost importance.	Official statistics, administrative data, big data (e.g. mobile phones, satellite images), geo tagged data etc. Registers and linked data.
Environmental monitoring E.g. on air pollution (particulate matter concentrations), water pollution, water levels, etc.	To safeguard public health and environment.	Scientifically approved methods.	Data from monitoring stations, official statistics can be used as background data.

D.   Recommendations to National Statistical Offices

93.   Statistical offices should carefully consider the purpose and potential uses of a particular statistical product and make sure the sources and communication tools match the requirements associated with the potential uses.

IV.   National coordination mechanisms

A.   The role of National Statistical Offices

94.   NSOs play a key role in measuring the achievement of SDGs. Indeed, the annual progress report on SDGs prepared by the UN Secretary General is based on global indicators and data produced primarily by NSSs. And while it is agreed that national statistics are fundamental to measurement and monitoring of progress of the 2030 Agenda, NSOs – as one of the producers of these statistics within NSS – can play different roles based on a number of internal factors and external dynamics. For some countries the role may be formalised in budget documents, government announcements, legislation etc., while for other countries, the role may not be formalised for SDGs specifically, but rather based on standard practice.

95.   In addition, many countries use various other reporting and monitoring mechanisms to present information including data and statistics to measure progress towards SDGs. These include VNRs prepared by countries for presentation at the annual UN HLPF, and other country-specific progress reporting activities and initiatives such as SDG progress reports, data hubs and other data visualization tools.

B.   Factors that may influence the coordination role of national statistical offices

96.   Given the various reporting mechanisms, it is important to understand the factors that may impact the type of role an NSO has in the coordination and compilation of data and statistics for reporting on SDGs and that this role can differ between national and international SDG implementation and monitoring activities.

Figure
Role of national statistical offices for SDGs
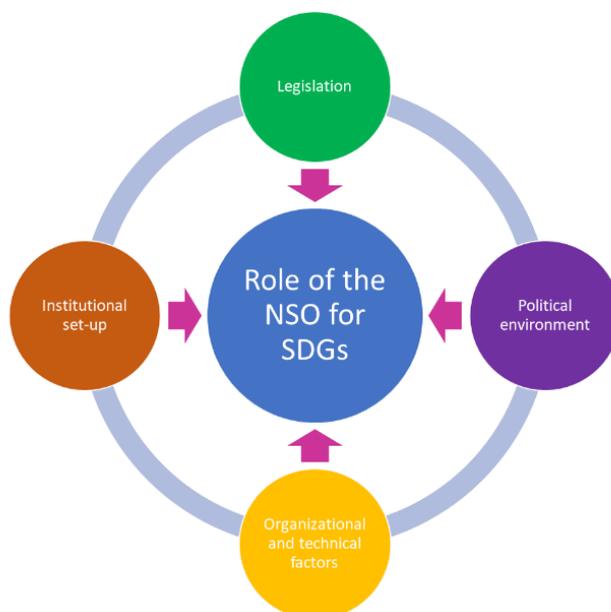
97.   The first factor that may impact the coordination role of NSOs is the institutional set-up of NSS. For instance, in a decentralized NSS, NSO may report only on data compiled and produced by NSO itself and the other NSS entities would report the SDG indicators using data and statistics produced within their organisations.

98.   Legislation may also determine the role of NSO in coordination. For instance, NSO may have the authority to report on all statistical matters, thus it would have the de facto role as the coordinator for reporting on SDG statistical indicators.

99.   Not surprisingly, both organizational and technical factors can also influence coordination of national mechanisms on SDG reporting. More specifically, NSO may not have the organizational capacity needed to take on the enormous coordination role related to SDG monitoring, particularly if this includes non-traditional data sources such as earth observation, citizen science data and big data.

100.   A final factor that can influence what coordination activities an NSO will undertake is the political environment. In some countries, NSOs are given a specific role for SDGs by the government. For example, NSOs can be tasked with compiling data and statistics for SDGs, but not be given a role in disseminating or monitoring this information.

C.   Coordination and collaboration of data producers

101.   The varying modalities of reporting on SDG indicators make it necessary for individual countries to ensure coordination and collaboration of national data producers. On the one hand, this coordination can facilitate a common position in addressing data requests, on the other hand it can ensure a common knowledge of existing data requests and work in a relevant field to avoid duplication of effort.

102.   With the establishment of national SDG focal points by UNSD, the coordination of national replies to the data requests has become easier. Although NSO staff members are often appointed as national SDG focal points, this is not always sufficient to ensure a smooth national coordination. Visible support of the appointment by NSO in matters relating to the SDG data will show other data producers what the role of NSO is and give them a clear point of reference. Achieving such visibility will require resources and a constant follow-up on national SDG arrangements, but it will pay off in various situations and will certainly increase awareness and recognition of NSO's coordinating role.

103.   NSSs vary greatly and there may be different national data producers in individual countries: government agencies, municipalities, academia, civil society etc. One thing they all have in common is the need to ensure that the data they produce for the purposes of the SDG follow-up comply with international statistical standards (see Section 2 on quality assurance of SDG indicators).

104.   Coordination and collaboration of data producers relate to both national and international aspects of reporting SDG data. Reporting for national needs, for example for an NRP or for a specific SDG follow-up product, may be seen as rather straightforward, but is nevertheless multidimensional. For example, the organization responsible for the production of SDG statistics for national requirements (usually NSO) may collect data produced by other entities and validate these prior to publishing. In other cases, NSO can play a pivotal role in promoting understanding of SDG reporting and monitoring both nationally and globally. For instance, NSO can help to assess fitness for purpose of data more broadly, identify vulnerable groups (and thus potential disaggregation) specific to the country, establish the quality (and validity) of the data provided, and identify which indicators can be developed or repurposed to report on national SDG priorities.

105.   Coordination and collaboration for reporting SDG data for global purposes is very challenging, as the diversity of data and information required is enormous. In addition, the numerous patterns of global data flows and different approaches of data collection by custodian agencies make this an even more complex task.

106.   Obviously, for some indicators (those produced by NSO) cooperation with other organizations is not necessary. Where cooperation is warranted, for the purpose of this road map three forms of cooperation between national data producers can be distinguished:

107.   First, NSOs and other data producers may share responsibility for producing and/or validating data for a certain indicator. In this case NSO will usually reach out to the relevant data producer. Following a subsequent dialogue, the data in question are produced/validated and transmitted to the custodian agency.

108.   An important – but somehow not often discussed – aspect of coordination with other data producers is the early stage in which this should take place, i.e. when the indicator

methodology is being adopted. This adoption can take place in various working groups and be a part of an agenda that does not necessarily strictly relate to SDGs.

109. Coordinating at this stage is very challenging. NSO may not be aware of such working groups, and country representatives in these working groups may be experts in other areas than SDGs and hence have limited knowledge of the processes and set-up around SDG reporting. This can result in conclusions that are difficult to work with from a statistical point of view. One way to manage this is communication within and across organizations. For example, each actor can appoint an organizational SDG focal point to facilitate communication across and within organizations.

110. Creation of interdepartmental working groups at various levels can also facilitate this. This modus operandi will also enable NSO to scale up national initiatives and its accumulation of knowledge to connect with international standards and SDG frameworks. This in turn may help improve the compilation of new statistics, adaptation of other data providers' legislation to the SDG indicators framework, update of statistical capacity development plans, etc.

111. In the second form of cooperation, a data producer other than NSO produces and/or validates the data for a global indicator. If this non-NSO is the sole data producer for a certain global indicator, the data can either be transmitted via NSO or NSO can be put in copy for the transmission. It is important, however, to ensure that NSO is notified of such transmissions, as they may be discussed in various for a where NSOs participate.

112. The third cooperation mechanism concerns coordination of questionnaires for non-statistical indicators requiring involvement of various national stakeholders. If replying to a questionnaire for a non-statistical indicator requires simultaneous involvement of different stakeholders, it should be clarified which institution is responsible for coordinating the transmission of the completed questionnaire to the custodian agency. NSOs can play a leading role in such clarification, even in cases where they have no expertise in the subject matter of the non-statistical indicator.

D. Recommendations for national statistical offices

(a) If not already done, appoint an SDG focal point and communicate this to UNSD, custodian agencies and other government departments and ministries;

(b) Appoint an SDG focal point in each involved agency to allow NSO to have a single point of entry for that organization to facilitate efficient coordination between players;

(c) To avoid confusion and duplication, stipulate your own explicit role within the government on reporting and monitoring SDGs in relevant government documentation (budgets, legislation etc.);

(d) Establish and define roles and responsibilities related to the validation of statistical indicators and data flows for SDGs;

(e) Create a working group with members from all data-producing ministries to facilitate communication and collaboration;

(f) Enhance your visibility vis-à-vis your role on reporting to ensure a streamlined process.

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