

Case study for Road Map on Statistics for SDGs 2.0
Germany: Policy follow up on off-track SDG indicators

Description

The German Sustainable Development Strategy (GSDS) is the national implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Its predecessor was launched in 2002 and has been updated regularly since then. In 2016, the GSDS and the corresponding indicator set were aligned with the 17 SDGs and the fundamental principles of the 2030 Agenda. Since this comprehensive revision, the indicator set consists of at least one indicator per goal (in total: 63 indicators in 2016, 66 indicators in 2018 and 75 indicators in 2021). In the GSDS, the 17 goals are divided in several postulates, that are comparable with the targets of 2030 Agenda.

Every two years since 2006, the Federal Statistical Office has published an indicator report to monitor the national SDG indicators on behalf of the Federal Government. The report is prepared in a professionally independent way and shows Germany's progress towards the SDGs. In the indicator report, each indicator is visualized in a chart at first. Then a three-partitioned text with detailed information on the indicator follows (1. definition, 2. (political) intention and target, 3. content and development of the indicator).

A core element of the indicator report is the weather symbol – from sunshine to thunderstorm – that illustrates, in a simple and easy-to-understand way, how far an indicator has moved on the politically desired path towards its target. There are four possible weather symbols that can be assigned according to their trend. These symbols are neither a political appraisal nor a forecast. The trend assessment is based on a moving average of the mostly last six data points.

The first and best weather condition “sunshine” is assigned if, according to the current indicator development, the target will be approximately achieved (on-track). If the indicator is on track, but slightly misses the target, then this shows a “sun with a cloud”. If the distance to the target is likely to be very large, then this symbolizes a “cloud”, and if the indicator is in a completely wrong direction, then “thunderstorm” is assigned (off-track). Weather symbols for the previous years are also listed in the appendix of the indicator report and allow an assessment of how stable the “weather condition” has been so far. Nevertheless, the weather symbols are only a first impression and do not replace the explanatory texts with their background information.

In early 2017, the Federal Government commissioned the German Council for Sustainable Development to organize a peer review, an international expert report on the GSDS. The international peer review group consisted of the chair Helen Clark (former Prime Minister of New Zealand, former UNDP Administrator) and experts from Mexico, Belgium, Switzerland, China, South Africa, the Netherlands, France, Norway, Great Britain and Canada. The peers developed 11 recommendations. In their fifth recommendation they asked the Federal Government to “strengthen the executive's central coordination capacities and address off-track indicators promptly”. The review and its report may contribute to “exchange of best practices and mutual learning” as requested by the 2030 Agenda.

The so-called off-track indicators are indicators where the politically determined target will most likely be missed (weather symbols cloud and thunderstorm). As of the last indicator report 2021, 25 of the 75 national SDG indicators were off-track (weather symbol cloud: 18 indicators; thunderstorm: 7 indicators). In comparison,

41 indicators had a positive development (weather symbol sunshine: 30 indicators; sun with cloud: 11 indicators); while nine indicators could not be assessed because of a lack of data availability at that time.

The updated GSDS of the Federal Government as well as the indicator report of the Federal Statistical Office were published in March 2021. As part of the preparation of the update of the National Sustainable Development Strategy, the Federal Government conducted an open citizens' dialogue in autumn 2020. The results of the citizens' dialogue have been incorporated into the strategy.

Advantages

The indicator progress assessment developed by the Federal Statistical Office using weather symbols is widely accepted and serves as the basis for categorizing the national SDG indicators into on- and off-track indicators. Political actions have already taken place on this basis. In December 2019, the State Secretaries' Committee on Sustainable Development adopted a report on "strengthen the implementation of the targets of the German Sustainable Development Strategy" that lists previous and further planned policy measures for every off-track indicator.

Challenges

The weather symbols do not provide any information whether the indicators are suitable for measuring the postulates.

Future steps

Evaluation of the process of the last indicator report.

More information

Federal Statistical Office of Germany (Destatis)

Contact e-mail address:
sdg-indicators@destatis.de

Webpage:

https://www.destatis.de/EN/Themes/Society-Environment/Sustainable-Development-Indicators/_node.html

National Reporting Platform (NRP) for the indicators of the German National Sustainable Development Strategy (GSDS):
www.dns-indicators.de

National Reporting Platform (NRP) regarding the global SDG indicators:
www.sdg-indicators.de

Indicator Report 2021:

<https://www.destatis.de/EN/Themes/Society-Environment/Sustainable-Development-Indicators/Publications/Downloads/indicator-report-0230002219004.pdf>

Federal Government of Germany

Webpage:

<https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-en/issues/sustainability>

German Sustainable Development Strategy, update 2021:

<https://www.bundesregierung.de/resource/blob/974430/1940716/6a4acf041217d39bac6a81cce971381f/2021-07-26-gsds-en-data.pdf?download=1>

German Council for Sustainable Development

Webpage:

<https://www.nachhaltigkeitsrat.de/en/>

The 2018 Peer Review on the German Sustainability Strategy:

https://www.nachhaltigkeitsrat.de/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/2018_Peer_Review_of_German_Sustainability_Strategy_BITV.pdf