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## **Economic Commission for Europe**

### **Conference of European Statisticians**

#### **Seventieth plenary session**

Geneva, 20-22 June 2022

Item 7 (a) of the provisional agenda

#### **Programme of work of the Statistics subprogramme of the**

#### **United Nations Economic Commission for Europe;**

#### **Reports on the work of the Conference of European Statisticians, its Bureau and Teams of Specialists**

## **Implementation of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Statistical Programme 2022**

### **Addendum**

### **Report of the 6<sup>th</sup> Expert Meeting on Statistics for Sustainable Development Goals<sup>1</sup>**

### **Note by the Secretariat**

#### *Summary*

The document presents the key outcomes of the Expert Meeting on Statistics for Sustainable Development Goals, organized in hybrid format on 5 – 6 May 2022.

The report is submitted to the Conference of European Statisticians for information.

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<sup>1</sup> This document was submitted late for processing since clearance in finalizing this document took longer than anticipated.



## I. Attendance

1. The Expert Meeting was attended by experts from Albania, Argentina, Armenia, Austria, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Czechia, Denmark, Ecuador, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Mexico, Montenegro, Mongolia, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Türkiye, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America and Uzbekistan.
2. The meeting was also attended by representatives from Eurostat, European Environment Agency (EEA), UNICEF, United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), United Nations Special Coordinator for The Middle East Peace Process (UNSCO), United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and Pacific (ESCAP), United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process (UNSCO), Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), Eurasian Economic Commission (EEC), European Free Trade Association (EFTA), the Interstate Statistical Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS-STAT) and the World Bank.
3. The meeting was also attended by the representatives of academia (University of Coimbra, Portugal) and several independent experts.

## II. Organization of the meeting

4. The 2022 Expert Meeting on Statistics for SDGs was held on 5 – 6 May, in a hybrid format, in English only.
5. The following topics were discussed at the meeting:
  - (a) Information on activities and groups related to statistics for SDGs;
  - (b) Communication – progress measurement;
  - (c) Data from non-traditional sources (including non-official statistics and their quality);
  - (d) Data discrepancies.
6. Renata Bielak (Poland) and Sara Frankl (Sweden) chaired the meeting.
7. All documents and video recordings of the sessions are available at: <https://unece.org/info/Statistics/events/362757>.

## III. Summary of the discussions

### A. Introductory session: information on activities and groups related to statistics for Sustainable Development Goals, 5 May 10:00 – 12:30

8. The Expert Meeting started with an introductory and information session. Participants were informed about the progress of work under the Steering Group: Task Team on Data Transmission (TTDT), Task Team on Capacity Development (TTCD) and ad-hoc Task Team on Communication and Promotion kit of the Road Map on Statistics for SDGs. The session also informed participants of the latest developments and progress of related international, regional and national initiatives: Inter-Agency and Expert Group on SDG indicators (IAEG-SDGs), the High-level Group on Partnership, Coordination and Capacity-Building for statistics for the 2030 Agenda (HLG-PCCB), 2022 Regional Forum on Sustainable

Development, and the *UNECE Nexus Report on Measuring and Monitoring progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals*<sup>2</sup>.

9. The Steering Group on Statistics for SDGs and the Task Teams with the support of the Secretariat will continue to provide guidance for implementing the recommendations of the recently published second edition of the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) *Road Map on statistics for SDGs* and the UNECE nexus report *Measuring and monitoring the progress towards the SDGs*.

10. The Task Team on Data Transmission (TTDT) will organise a pilot on data transmission to help countries to post national data and metadata on the SDGs Data Lab. The TTDT will act as facilitators and provide support to countries participating in the exercise. Countries are invited to volunteer to participate in the pilot (please inform the Secretariat: send an e-mail to: [tiina.luige@un.org](mailto:tiina.luige@un.org)).

11. The Task Team on Capacity Development (TTCD) will organise the piloting of the matrix for capacity development – a tool for assessing the capacity development needs and offer, from both beneficiary and donor perspective.

12. TTCD will take into account the results of the piloting exercise and the experience of other CES task teams and steering groups to update the matrix on capacity development. It should become a generic tool and could be linked with the risk management maturity model<sup>3</sup>.

13. The Steering Group and Secretariat will consider developing an online version of the *Road Map on Statistics on SDGs*<sup>4</sup> and will promote widely the guidance and its implementation.

14. The ad-hoc Task Team<sup>5</sup> on Communication and Promotion of the Road Map 2.0 will share the promotional materials (video and information kit that can be used as online resources and hard copies) on the UNECE Knowledge Hub on SDGs<sup>6</sup> under the Guidelines and Tools<sup>7</sup> category. The Secretariat will provide the wiki platform and support. Countries are invited to make reference to the *Road Map on Statistics for SDGs* and use the promotional materials among relevant stakeholders.

15. The Office for National Statistics of the United Kingdom gave an overview of automation tools for data transmission, used in some UNECE countries, and presented the UK experience in using the SDMX tool for uploading data and metadata into the SDG Data Lab.

16. Statistics Norway presented a taxonomy for the classification of indicators relevant for the Sustainable Development Goals<sup>8</sup>, organised in three dimensions: goals, user perspective, and quality. These three overarching dimensions present a clear and logical structure to the taxonomy and cover all the relevant elements in other classification systems. By applying the taxonomy, users in different sectors or at different geographical levels have the possibility to clarify and compare the uses and usability of SDG indicators.

17. The Steering Group will follow up on the interest in taxonomy on SDGs and is considering organisation of a workshop or a seminar on the topic.

## **B. Session 1. Communication - progress measurement, 5 May, 14:00-17:00**

18. The session was organized by Lieneke Hoeksma (Netherlands) and Övünç Uysal (European Environment Agency). It emphasised that tracking progress against the SDGs and

<sup>2</sup> <https://unece.org/unece-and-sdgs/publications/measuring-and-monitoring-progress-towards-sustainable-development-goals>

<sup>3</sup> <https://statswiki.unece.org/display/GORM/8.+Risk+management+maturity+model>

<sup>4</sup> <https://unece.org/statistics/publications/CES-roadmap-sdg-2>

<sup>5</sup> Albania, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, United Kingdom and UNECE

<sup>6</sup> Knowledge Hub on SDGs

<sup>7</sup> <https://statswiki.unece.org/display/SFSDG/CES+Road+Map+on+Statistics+for+Sustainable+Development+Goals%2C+second+edition+-+communication+kit>

<sup>8</sup> [https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2022-05/BG0\\_7\\_Taxonomy%20Statistics%20Norway.pdf](https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2022-05/BG0_7_Taxonomy%20Statistics%20Norway.pdf)

targets becomes a critical component of the monitoring and reporting on the 2030 Agenda. Efforts in this aspect can support communication of the SDGs to the public and to policymakers. It is the latter who must understand the urgency of the Agenda and incorporate it in their policy plans and development programmes to achieve the SDGs. Additionally, progress measurement should be a balancing act between facilitating communication and being mindful of the risk of losing any relevant information when trying to communicate complexity with single index results. The session showcased examples from country and international organisations perspective. The session consisted of two parts: national and regional/international perspectives.

19. Spain reviewed the different methodological approaches developed by United Nations and Eurostat to build an index for assessing the progress achieved towards the Agenda 2030 goals. The United Nations and AMPI methods have been implemented to calculate two composite indices of the progress towards the SDGs. However, before releasing the index as experimental statistics, further work and consideration is necessary. Composite indices are useful since they summarise in one index a wide set of phenomena, but they should be complemented with more detailed data at goal and target level, to have a complete overview of the situation.

20. Ukraine demonstrated the application of ESCAP methodology to assess SDG progress at thematic and subnational levels. The methodology permits combining national and global SDG indicators for a clearer picture of progress towards 2030 targets at the national, sub-national and thematic levels. At the same time, not all national targets and indicators are relevant at sub-national level – thus a careful “localisation” of SDGs was made. Subnational targets can be set using the champion area approach and in consultation with subject-matter experts. As more data become available, the progress assessment methodology is helpful in tracking areas that have made significant progress and identifying those that might be left behind.

21. UK presented the use of Open SDGs tools for reporting progress. Following an earlier user survey, ONS carried out user research to better understand user communication and information needs. The aim of the research was to learn what users need from ONS data and website, and to incorporate the findings in the new design of the open SDG platform. Reporting progress was mentioned as one of the functions that would be useful in the UK SDG Platform.

22. A relevant prerequisite for efficient communication is data availability. UNESCAP made a review on data gaps and data sources for SDG indicators in countries of Asia and the Pacific. Although the availability improved over years, the situation remains fragile for some indicators/sources. Developing and adjusting the data sources would improve data availability and ultimately would help better reveal progress towards the SDGs. The results of the review will be made public on UNESCAP webpage.

23. Regional dimension is important to measure and monitor progress towards the Agenda 2030. UNECE developed data and communication products to support the follow up on the progress for the countries of the region: Knowledge Hub on SDGs<sup>9</sup>, SDG database<sup>10</sup>, SDG dashboard<sup>11</sup> and annual progress reports<sup>12</sup>. Analysis of progress and data availability helps better communicate the achievement of SDG indicators in the region, but also to identify data availability issues that need to be addressed.

24. UNIDO presented the latest data tools and their application to track regional progress on achieving the SDG-9 industry-related targets and indicators. UNIDO developed an Industrial Analytics Platform (IAP) to foster dialogue with Member States and other stakeholders on inclusive and sustainable industrial development. The IAP is a data-driven knowledge platform that provides new insights into industrial development around the world. The central tool of the IAP consists of the SDG-9 Industry Tracker that helps monitor

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<sup>9</sup> <https://w3.unece.org/sdghub/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://w3.unece.org/SDG/en/Contents>

<sup>11</sup> <https://w3.unece.org/SDG/en>

<sup>12</sup> <https://w3.unece.org/sdg2022/> Halfway to 2030: How Many Targets Will Be Achieved in the UNECE Region? 2022 progress report

countries' performance and progress towards SDG-9 industry-related targets based on the global indicator framework. In 2022, new data tools have been launched to bring timely data on current trends in the world manufacturing production and exports.

25. The session concluded that communication is key to inform all users on the progress made towards achieving the SDGs, but also to point out areas where most action is necessary for policy intervention. Indices are important tools to emphasise the problematic issues, but, for a better understanding, they should be complemented by more details and context. Understanding user types and their needs help statisticians better compile, design and communicate their products.

### **C. Session 2. Data from non-traditional sources (including non-official statistics and their quality), 6 May, 10:00-12:30**

26. The session was organized by Maciej Truszczynski (Denmark). It focused on data from non-traditional sources including non-official statistics and their quality. Non-traditional data is frequently mentioned as possible means to support the monitoring of the 2030 Agenda, as it could improve timeliness and level of detail of indicators. However, at a closer scrutiny, there more progress is needed before non-traditional data sources can be widely incorporated into the production of the SDGs and into regular statistics. Different countries conduct various initiatives and pilot projects to improve the use of non-traditional data sources. Currently, geospatial data and mobile phone data seem to be the best candidates to be introduced in the production of statistics for the SDGs.

27. The session presented different perspectives on the use of non-traditional data sources for production of statistics, particularly the SDGs. It was divided into two parts: general discussion on the use of non-traditional data sources for monitoring the SDGs and the current international landscape, and quality assurance and assessment of non-traditional data sources.

28. Türkiye presented the national coordination mechanism of implementation and monitoring of Agenda 2030. They presented also experience on using the geospatial data for producing SDG indicators: in particular, 11.2.1. Proportion of population that has convenient access to public transport, 11.3.1. Ratio of land consumption rate to population growth rate and 11.7.1. Average share of the built-up area of cities that is open space for public use for all. Producing data for these indicators requires several stages of careful planning, methodological work and combining different data and maps.

29. Taking into account decreasing response rates in household surveys, Sweden implemented a new survey design estimating the level of household/population consumption at product levels for the purpose of national accounts and CPI calculations. For the total sales they used cash registry data, Structural Business Surveys and data from other registers. Data from operators providing payment transfers (Payment Card terminals, Swish, Paypal, Klarna, and others) were used to estimate the households' purchases. However, for a better and more realistic picture, it would be necessary to combine the results with relevant sample surveys and conduct the sensitivity analysis. For CPI purposes, further consideration should be done on studying the relationship between weights, between indices, and between weights and indices.

30. UK presented the protocol and matrix to assess the quality of non-official data and statistics. The protocol for assessment of non-official sources is based on a model from Statistics Netherlands and was aligned with the UK Statistics Authority Code of Practice and Ethics Advisory Committee guidelines. It covers the assessment of SDG-specific statistical data sources but could be adapted to non-SDG context for wider use. It provides a numeric score for each source to aid decision for inclusion on the UK's SDG data site. Both, the protocol and the matrix are updated according to recent national developments.

31. Canada presented the experience in the evaluation of non-official data for SDG reporting using an existing tool, adapted to Canadian context. The legislative framework and established statistical processes allow Statistics Canada to partner with relevant stakeholders to review and fill the data gaps. 'Pass and fail' criteria are applied to determine on the suitability of a data source. As a further step, Statistics Canada intends to develop an

interactive online questionnaire that would allow the user to receive instant feedback and score on the quality of their data.

32. The session concluded that the interest in developing statistics from non-traditional data sources is increasing. Geospatial data start to be used in combination with ‘traditional’ data sources. With time, the non-traditional data sources can complement official statistics, as they can help to address current challenges in data collection. Quality assessment frameworks are applied to ‘non-traditional’ data sources to ensure their conformity to fundamental principles of official statistics. As follow up actions, the session recommended to continue investigation on how data from non-traditional sources can complement official statistics, and share experience on using data from non-traditional sources.

#### **D. Session 3. Data discrepancies, 6 May, 14:00 – 15:40**

33. The session was organized by Mary Smith (Ireland). It focused on the possible reasons, challenges and ways to follow up on data discrepancies. According to the agreed procedure, countries send SDG data to custodian agencies, which, in their turn, provide the data for the regional/global statistical databases. However, sometimes the data in national and international databases differ. The reasons for data discrepancies can be various, such as different sources, adjustments to national data by the custodian agencies to meet international standards, difficulty in measuring the indicators at national level, different definitions used, timeliness, etc. Partnerships between NSOs and other (relevant) organizations can help reduce data discrepancies in data harmonization and technical support.

34. Ireland presented a review of reasons for the differences in the full exports and imports Trade file sent by the Central Statistical Office (CSO) Trade division to Eurostat each month, and the more specific annual wood and paper products questionnaire that is submitted by the CSO Environment division to Eurostat and UNECE. The differences are based on the relatively few details of wood and paper products in the full Trade file compared with the specific focus on those products in the Joint Forest Sector Questionnaire. Data collections requiring very detailed coding performed by responding units need careful checking by statisticians for time series consistency especially for items of less details. A possible way to solve the differences in specific data requests would be a more rigorous check of microdata and time consistency. At the same time, it would require more resources and capacities from the CSO Ireland, and involvement of relevant international partners.

35. FAO reviewed the reasons, typologies, challenges and possible solutions when dealing with SDG data discrepancies from the perspective of a custodian agency. The presentation focused on data collection modalities, stressing that for most SDG indicators, data are collected directly from national institutions, through designated focal points, based on standard questionnaires or online platforms. For selected SDG indicators, FAO collects data directly from international/regional organizations (e.g. UNPD, IMF, ECLAC, etc.). In cases when the first two options are not possible, FAO seeks to generate country estimates, mostly based on national data sources, and validate the estimates with national authorities, following the IAEG-SDG guidelines.

36. The reasons that explain the discrepancies between national and international data could be the methodological differences – for definitions, data sources or compilation procedures, data revisions released at a later date (for the same reference periods) or the use of national proxies, not comparable at the international level. The discrepancies between national and international indicators are the main threat to international comparability, and undermine the credibility of both national and international statistical agencies. Possible solutions to address data discrepancies are the unambiguous worldwide commitment to report on global SDG indicators, strengthened coordination between countries and international agencies and developing national and international capacities to measure and report on SDG indicators.

37. A regional commission perspective on data discrepancies was presented by the UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA). The presentation showcased ESCWA efforts in compiling and disseminating the SDG data for the countries of the region and outlined data-related challenges on quality, availability, and data flows. The

discrepancies may occur because of different reasons: different reporting years, availability of data points and values between national and international sources and data quality. To support the countries in dealing with the SDG data discrepancies, ESCWA organised bilateral meetings with NSOs, webinars on SDG indicators, provided support to countries for the application of data tools (E-Handbook on SDG metadata, mapping of existing surveys and census in the region, SDMX, STATA, etc.) and identified the data differences and possible reconciliation measures.

38. The importance of a viable national coordination mechanism (nomination and update of national and institutional focal points, relevant national agencies and stakeholders and application of IAEG-SDG recommendations in producing the data for SDGs) was emphasised. A proposed way forward would be to continue the collaboration at the global and national levels, improve the quality and availability of data, enhance coordination – national and international – to improve data flows, reconcile discrepancies between sources and disseminate timely data at both national and global levels.

39. UNODC presented the SDG16 Survey initiative as a way to address the discrepancies between national and custodian agency data and as an instrument that countries can use to measure the survey-based indicators under Goal 16 in a comprehensive and comparable way. The SDG16 has one of the lowest data availability levels for all UN regions, and this instrument can address the issue in a cost-efficient way. The primary data for the Goal 16 come from two main sources: administrative data and population surveys. Given the specificity of indicators, the discrepancy reasons may vary: methodological differences, data coverage/under-coverage/overlapping of some phenomena, reporting timeframe, etc. To tackle the problem, the SDG16 Survey initiative (Questionnaire<sup>13</sup> and Implementation manual<sup>14</sup>) proposes that the indicators related to Goal 16 (i.e. on violence, corruption, discrimination, governance, access to justice, and human-trafficking) be measured in a modular way – attached to an existing household survey – or through a separate survey.

40. The session concluded that communication with stakeholders – both national and international – is key; the metadata are important - clear definitions and concepts allow proper comparability among countries and over time; aligning to global indicators frameworks (accordingly to internationally agreed methodologies) facilitate data compilation, communication and transmission. Investigating discrepancies can reveal errors and is thus a tool to increase quality. At the same time, other ways to address data discrepancies is the use of existing recommendations, tools and instruments and continuing the capacity building on their application.

#### IV. Future work

41. The next Expert Meeting will take place on 13-14 April 2023, with a possible back-to-back workshop (11-12 April) (workshop subject to availability of resources).

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<sup>13</sup> [https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/sdgs/SDG16\\_Survey\\_Initiative\\_-\\_Questionnaire.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/sdgs/SDG16_Survey_Initiative_-_Questionnaire.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> [https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/sdgs/SDG16\\_Survey\\_Initiative\\_-\\_Implementation\\_Manual.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/sdgs/SDG16_Survey_Initiative_-_Implementation_Manual.pdf)