# Economic and Social Council

## Economic Commission for Europe

Conference of European Statisticians

**Seventieth plenary session**
Geneva, 22-23 June 2023
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 2023

**Addendum**

**Report of the 7th Expert Meeting on Statistics for Sustainable Development Goals**

**Note by the Secretariat**

*Summary*

The document presents the key outcomes of the Expert Meeting on Statistics for Sustainable Development Goals, organized in-person on 12 – 13 April 2023.

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

Please recycle

# I. Attendance

1. The Expert Meeting was attended by experts from Armenia, Austria, Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Colombia, Croatia, Ecuador, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Malta, Montenegro, Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and United States of America.

2. The meeting was also attended by representatives from Eurostat, European Environment Agency (EEA), Joint Research Centre, United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, Office of the UN Resident Coordinator of Azerbaijan, Office of the UN Resident Coordinator of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Office of the UN Resident Coordinator of Kosovo, Office of the UN Resident Coordinator of Macedonia, Office of the UN Resident Coordinator of North Macedonia, Office of the UN Resident Coordinator of Serbia, United Nations Environment Management Group, Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), International Labour Organization (ILO), UNICEF, World Health Organization (WHO), Eurasian Economic Commission (EEC), and Interstate Statistical Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS-STAT).

3. The meeting was also attended by the representatives of academia (Geneva Graduate Institute) and the OneGoal Initiative for Governance.

# II. Organization of the meeting

4. The 2023 Expert Meeting on Statistics for SDGs was held on 12 – 13 April, with English-French-Russian interpretation.

5. The following topics were discussed at the meeting:

   (a) Information on activities and groups related to statistics for SDGs

   (b) Benefits from the SDG Data Lab

   (c) Shrinking resources and partnerships with policy makers

   (d) Data disaggregation

   (e) Expanding the SDGs monitoring with non-traditional data sources.

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/statistics/events/7th-expert-meeting-statistics-sustainable-development-goals.

# III. Summary of the discussions

## A. Session 1: Steering Group and related groups on SDG statistics – progress updates

8. The Expert Meeting started with a session informing participants of the latest developments and progress of international, regional and national initiatives related to statistics for SDGs.

9. Sara Frankl (Sweden, co-chair of the Steering Group on Statistics for SDGs) provided updates of the workplan of the Steering Group for Statistics on SDGs, which was developed in the last meeting of the Steering Group in October 2022. The workplan items are assigned different levels of priority based on interest expressed by Steering Group members. High priority workplan items are developing an SDG training course for young statisticians in NSOs, organizing webinars with policymakers, updating the information on the UNECE knowledge hub on statistics for SDGs, and working on the topic of non-traditional data

sources. There are also items that are considered permanent workplan items, such as the organization of the Expert Meeting on Statistics for SDGs, re-evaluating the workplan and promoting the products of the steering group.

10. One of the tasks under the high priority workplan item updating the knowledge hub, was to revise the country progress table to both better fit the recommendations in the 2nd edition of the Road Map for statistics on SDGs and current priorities as well as to ensure that information in the table is up to date. For that purpose, some interested members of the Steering Group revised the table and developed an online questionnaire to request information from countries.

11. As follow up of this work, the Steering Group will analyse the responses regarding the number of indicators in the global indicator framework for SDGs produced within the countries' National Statistical Systems.

12. The Communication Task Team (TTCOM) will further promote and facilitate the implementation and monitoring of the 2030 Agenda with adequate communication activities, materials and tools. The group aims to build a community beyond the geographical limits of the ECE region to gather and share experiences.

13. The Steering Group co-chairs Renata Bielak (Poland) and Sara Frankl (Sweden) provided updates on the work of the HLG-PCCB (High-level Group for Partnership, Coordination and Capacity-Building for statistics for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development) and the IAEG-SDGs (Inter-agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators) respectively.

14. The HLG-PCCB provides strategic leadership and guidance for the organization of the World Data Forum, which takes place in-person, with an option to participate online, from 24-27 April 2023 in Hangzhou, China. Following the results of a survey of NSOs to assess the status of financing and implementing the Cape Town Global Action Plan, HLG-PCCB has established a subgroup which works on the revision of the Action Plan. The aim is to simplify the framework and make the action plan more outward looking – the recommendations were discussed during the UN Statistical Commission in March 2023. In the second phase of the revision, a list of priority areas for the updated action plan will be identified.

15. The guiding principles, proposed by the IAEG-SDGs, for the 2025 comprehensive review of the global indicator framework were adopted by the Statistical Commission. In 2024, the IAEG-SDGs will develop criteria for the comprehensive review. The Task Teams of the IAEG-SDGs aim to make a proposal for a tourism statistics indicator, develop a process to incorporate possible proxy indicators in the indicator framework, and create a platform for capacity development and training.

16. Membership of both groups will rotate in 2023. UNECE will invite countries to express their interest to become/remain a member of the groups. The co-chairs highlighted the importance of active membership in the IAEG-SDGs to undertake the 2025 comprehensive review.

17. The 2023 UNECE progress report on SDGs was shortly presented. The report showed that progress in implementing the SDGs in the UNECE region is slowing: only 21 targets are on track to achieve the SDGs – compared to 26 in 2022.

## B. Session 2: Benefits from the Sustainable Development Goals Data Lab

18. The aim of this session, moderated by Live Rognerud (Norway), was to discuss the importance of investigating differences between custodian agency and national data and the use of the SDG Data Lab for that purpose.

19. The session started with a pre-recorded presentation by Otis Bath (formerly UK Office of National Statistics and co-chair of the Task Team on Data Transmission) providing a short introduction to the SDG data Lab. The Data Lab is a tool for data and metadata exchange of countries and the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD), as well as custodian agencies and the UNSD. For countries, the main use of the SDG data lab is to identify and analyze

differences between their national data and the data on the SDG global platform. The presentation also provided information on the UK experience in uploading a total of 35 indicators to the data lab.

20. Abdullah Gozalov (UNSD) provided an overview of the work of UNSD on the SDG data lab. As the SDG data lab is a component of the SDG global platform, UNSD is continuing to maintain it. It is, however, more difficult to find resources with the finalization of the UNSD and Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office of the United Kingdom (FCDO) project. The presentation highlighted the usefulness of comparing not only the data but also the metadata of national and custodian agency data, for which the data lab can be used. The biggest burden on countries to use the SDG data lab is to map their data to the global SDG Data Structure Definition (DSD). Besides being able to use the data lab, following the DSD also has additional advantages. Most importantly, it enables countries to use Open SDG, an open-source data dissemination and exchange platform that is supported by the UK Office of National Statistics.

21. Elena Kukharevich (Belarus) presented their experience with SDMX for SDGs. Belarus' National Reporting Platform is using a national DSD which has been developed in 2017. Belarus reported they have benefited from making data and metadata comparisons and are able to utilize their experience with SDMX for SDGs to map other datasets to their corresponding DSDs.

22. Co-chair of the Steering Group Sara Frankl gave a brief overview of the work of the Steering Group's Task Team on Data Transmission. The Task Team plans to organize a pilot study to assist countries in uploading data to the SDG data lab and to analyse discrepancies – an offer which has only been taken up by a small number of countries.

23. The session concluded that discrepancies between national and custodian agency data are still of interest and there is a need for continuous dialogue to detect and understand them. Metadata is key in understanding discrepancies and the SDG Data Lab is tool to investigate the reasons for discrepancies. The biggest obstacle to using the SDG Data Lab is, for many countries, to map and convert SDG indicator data and metadata to the SDMX format and the cost-benefit depends on other use-cases for converting SDG data to the SDMX format, such as for the country's National Reporting Platform.

## C. Session 3: Shrinking resources and partnerships with policymakers

24. The session, moderated by Carolina Santos (Portugal), aimed to identify approaches found by NSOs and policy makers to move forward with SDG implementation and monitoring in a context of resource scarcity.

25. The first set of presentations, provided by Kvetoslav Kmec (Ministry of Investments, Regional Development and Information, Slovakia) and Alan Cordina (Malta), showcased two examples of leveraging the SDGs to achieve overarching goals.

26. Slovakia's Vision and Development Strategy is focused on national SDG implementation and ties it to overall long-term strategic planning. For that purpose, six Integrated National Priorities of the Agenda 2030 – cross-cutting groups of interrelated SDGs - have been developed in close collaboration with a variety of stakeholders, which form, together with subnational priorities, the Integrated Vision and Development Strategy Slovakia 2030. To overcome silos in the public administration and overdependence on EU programming and funding, and to make long-term planning possible, it was necessary to engage with public administration at all levels, the private sector as well as civil society and academia.

27. Alan Cordina (Malta) provided an overview of their strategy to develop a decentralized National Statistical System (NSS) to cope with an ever-increasing demand for additional and more timely statistics. The core of the strategy to build up the NSS was to strengthen the NSOs coordination role for statistics on the Sustainable Development Goals. After identifying national data providers for various global SDGs indicators by contacting custodian agencies, a National Expert Group on Sustainable Development Indicators was established backed by Ministerial SDG Focal points, which has a series of responsibilities,

including identifying data gaps and creating a national indicator framework for Malta. The NSO stewards the work of the National Expert Group, for example, by managing the national data ecosystem and the development of quality assurance frameworks.

28. In both cases, a prerequisite for leveraging the SDGs was political interest, broad involvement across the public sector, and the public appeal of SDGs.

29. The second set of presentations were success stories in acquiring funding for SDG statistics in the Netherlands and Canada, which were presented by Bo Hoogerwerf (Netherlands) and Cara Williams (Canada).

30. In the Dutch case, funding has been increased by leveraging positive public reception of outputs on SDG statistics, as well as partnerships with policy makers. Funding was secured from two Ministries, from the Ministry of Economic Affairs for the development and monitoring of a Dutch national indicator framework and from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to report on the global indicator framework to fulfil the NSOs responsibilities described in UN resolution A/RES/71/313.

31. Statistics Canada has also been able to receive funding for work on a national indicator framework after policy makers decided that the SDGs would be implemented domestically. Funding has not been provided for additional data collection activities, and instead focused on identifying existing data for SDG reporting, strengthening the coordination role of the SDG team. In addition to working on the national indicator framework, Statistics Canada has received funding to develop a comprehensive statistical annex for the 2023 Voluntary National Review.

32. The session concluded that partnerships are key to responding to user demands (including from civil society) by reducing statistical burden and thus increasing the value and visibility of official statistics and that partnerships and resources are interconnected. Relevant resources are not only financial but can also take the form of human resources, political buy-in, access to new data sets, data integration and the ability to coordinate stakeholders.

33. The discussion also highlighted the importance of partnerships with policymakers for SDG statistics, as many questions around SDG targets and indicators are inherently strategic, including assigning priority to the measurement of indicators and deciding which indicators are relevant to the country.

34. Mapping needs and clearly illustrating potential gains while managing expectations is vital for successful partnerships and to gain trust to undertake innovative approaches.

35. The SDGs, in particular national indicator frameworks and Voluntary National Reviews, can be leveraged to achieve overarching goals and to secure resources. The importance of a strong statistical annex for VNRs to provide a realistic picture of national challenges, should be clearly communicated to policymakers.

## D. Session 4: Data disaggregation

36. This session, moderated by Mary Smyth-McCarthy (Ireland), highlighted the importance of data disaggregation to leave no one behind, discussed examples in the UNECE region, and identified important factors for successful data disaggregation undertakings.

37. Angela Feruzza (Italy) provided an overview of the Italian work on disaggregation of SDG statistics. The Italian National Strategy for Sustainable Development calls for generational, gender and geospatial disaggregation of SDG indicators to investigate inequalities in Italy. The geospatial disaggregation also forms the basis for integrated economic, social, environmental, and institutional domains. For that purpose, Istat uses geospatial and administrative data.

38. Elena Vosmirko (CIS-Stat) introduced the developments in the monitoring of SDGs in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) region. In 2022, CIS-Stat developed, in collaboration with NSOs, a list of 148 indicators for the region (a subset of the global indicators). An analysis showed that countries in the region are unable to provide data on

these SDG indicators on all levels of disaggregation in the global framework. Obtaining statistical data on vulnerable groups remains particularly difficult.

39. Siraj Mahmudlu (UNICEF) gave a presentation on data availability of global SDG indicators related to children in Europe and Central Asia. Using the SDG monitor by ETH Zürich, an analysis of the availability the series for 16 indicators for which UNICEF is co-custodian in the global SDG database was undertaken and revealed stark differences in data availability within the SDG region. The presentation showcased how Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys can be used to collect data on most of these indicators but also disaggregate on a sub-national level as well as for vulnerable groups to understand progress in groups that are the most disadvantaged.

40. Gular Fatali (UN Resident Coordinator Office Azerbaijan) provided a presentation on data availability and disaggregation in Azerbaijan, which has made significant progress since 2021. This is largely a result of cooperation between the Government of Azerbaijan and the Resident Coordinator Office, which formed a Joint UN-Government Taskforce on SDGs. One of the outputs of this new cooperation framework is the production of SDG indicators, which focuses on Data Disaggregation based on existing data as well as non-traditional data sources.

41. The session concluded that data disaggregation can help identify and highlight the situation for vulnerable groups. Policy buy-in can be created, in particular, by emphasizing the territorial level using geographically disaggregated data.

42. Looking at a specific theme, for example, statistics on children, can help in understanding what disaggregation is required. Partnerships with a variety of organisations, are a necessary resource for that purpose, for example, through forming focus groups.

43. Model-based disaggregation methods, for example, Small Area Estimation, can be a useful tool. Resources, such as guidelines and expertise, for example, from custodian agencies, should be utilized when undertaking such projects.

## E.    Session 5: Expanding the SDGs monitoring with non-traditional data sources

44. The session, chaired by Ovunc Uysal (European Environment Agency), introduced other frameworks for sustainability and wellbeing. It made a case for SDG statisticians to connect to the wider community working on the monitoring of wellbeing and sustainability, and embrace the use of innovative and experimental approaches to SDG monitoring.

45. Beate Hollweg (European Environment Agency) gave an overview of the work on sustainability reporting by companies. This includes reporting on the EU Sustainable Finance Framework, which is used to measure progress on the Sustainable Finance Agenda of the European Green Deal. The data sources are disclosures of activities from non-financial and financial corporations - using a taxonomy of activities that substantially contribute to environmental objectives, the environmental impact of the activities of corporations is evaluated. Also, part of sustainability reporting of corporations will be the European Sustainability Reporting, which includes five environmental and four social standards. The data will then be published on the company level.

46. Richard Heys (United Kingdom) presented the work of the UN Network of Economic Statisticians on Beyond GDP, which recognises the need for a wider-ranging set of complements to GDP and other traditional economic measurements to measure wellbeing – based on the UN Secretary General's "Our Common Agenda". The Network proposes to create a consistent system of systems – the Central Framework for Inclusive and Sustainable Wellbeing – which includes the System of National Accounts, the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting, and a System of Population and Social Accounts, that will be based on various extended SNA accounts, many of which have been developed for the work on the 2025 SNA, and other existing socio-economic accounts. Using this Central Framework, new composite indices, which provide a more comprehensive picture of the trade-offs involved in achieving economic welfare, people's wellbeing, and the environment, as well as a core set of wellbeing indicators linked to the SDGs, are planned to be developed.

47. Esther Sanye Mengual (Joint Research Centre, European Commission) presented the Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) to measure the environmental footprint of representative products over the whole supply chain and product life. Among many other uses, the LCA can also be used to understand the trade-offs between various environmental impacts (16 indicators) as well as understand the environmental impact of consumption and production in a region or country and even of individual consumers. The 16 impact categories can be mapped to eleven Sustainable Development Goals and can be used to monitor a subset of their targets. Work is also ongoing to develop a Life Cycle Assessment for social impacts.

48. Multiregional input-output tables, like the project presented by Stephan Moll (Eurostat), can also be used to produce footprint-type indicators for $CO_2$ emission. Based on SNA and SEEA data and using input-output tables, $CO_2$ emissions can be attributed to the consumption and production of goods and services, and where and in which industry the goods and services consumed in the EU are produced, and where and in which industry goods and services produced in the EU are consumed.

49. Víctor Andrés Arévalo Cabra (Colombia) presented an example of utilizing social network data to measure statistics related to discrimination, specifically indicators under goals 10 and 16. The data was web-scraped and analysed using supervised and unsupervised natural language processing models. A comparison of the results with the official statistics in the country showed that this type of social network data is not a feasible source for the production of official statistics for Colombia and should only be used to collect complementary information.

50. The session concluded that, especially in the SDG context, we need to break silos to stay connected to the global sustainability monitoring agenda. The indicator framework needs to connect better to the current sustainability agenda. A strong link will provide opportunities to increase collaboration with national subject matter experts and can improve reporting on SDGs. SDG statisticians should always be open to improvements, especially in identifying and implementing innovative and experimental approaches.

## IV. Future work

51. Discussions during the meeting led to the following ideas for the future work of the Steering Group and its Task Teams:

(a) Webinars with policymakers on specific themes, such as VNR preparation from a statistical perspective

(b) Connect with the wider statistical community working on sustainability and inclusive wellbeing.

(c) Greater involvement of subject matters expertise, for example in discussions on disaggregation.

(d) Explore issues around SDG indicator availability, national relevance of indicators, and use of proxy indicators.

52. The next Expert Meeting is planned to take place in the week of 8-12 April 2024 in Geneva (tbc).