

Official Statistics and sustainable development goals

The important role of statistical offices in measuring the implementation of the SDGs

An area of urgent statistical need

The [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) is a global action plan of the United Nations for the people, the planet, and for prosperity. In setting up the Agenda, the United Nations Member States have developed a road map to transforming the world for the better, that is, to a sustainable transformation of the society, the economy and the environment until 2030.

The total of 17 [Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs) aim to substantially improve the living conditions of all people now and in future generations and to protect the planet Earth.

But how to monitor whether a goal has been achieved and follow up the progress made? The monitoring is where statistics come into play: the United Nations Statistical Commission (UNSC) was tasked to develop, together with the national statistical offices, indicators for the goals and targets to be used in the review process to measure the progress made towards achieving the goals.

To support this work the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) published a [Road Map on Statistics for Sustainable Development Goals](#) (2017) to help guiding the work on statistics for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It outlines a strategy for CES members to follow in implementing the [CES Declaration on the Role of National Statistical Offices in Measuring and Monitoring the Sustainable Development Goals](#) adopted by the Conference in 2015. The Declaration:

- (a) Calls upon national governments to support national statistical offices in their key role in measuring and monitoring SDGs, and recognizes the importance of cooperation at local, national, regional and global levels in work related to statistics for SDGs, and
- (b) Emphasizes the importance of efficient coordination of monitoring SDGs at regional level between relevant international organizations and between international organizations and national statistical offices.

The Road Map gives recommendations to national statistical offices (NSOs) as they prepare to provide data on global SDG indicators to support the review and follow-up of progress towards SDGs. The mechanisms for the review and follow-up of SDGs at the policy level as well as the measurement and data provision at the statistical level are currently taking shape. The Road Map frames these ongoing developments ensuring that official statisticians are actively involved in these processes.

While the road map represents important step, further international work will be required to support its implementation. The CES Steering group (SG)¹ on SDGs will endeavor to take initiatives to help countries implementing the recommendations.

The Road Map includes six substantive sections with recommendations focusing on establishing mechanisms for national collaboration, assessing the readiness of countries to produce global SDG indicators, developing regional, national and sub-national indicators the mechanisms for providing data on SDG indicators, capacity building, and communicating statistics for SDGs.

¹ Co-chaired by Switzerland and United States. Members: Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Kyrgyzstan, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Poland, Republic of Moldova, Russian Federation, Sweden, Turkey, United Kingdom, Eurostat, OECD and UNECE.

The hope is that the recommendations and the on-going dialogue among NSOs and users of SDG-related statistics will result in improvements in this important domain. The CES has encouraged NSOs to familiarize themselves with the recommendations and to begin implementing them. The Road Map is a living document and will be updated by the SG to take into account developments related to statistics for SDGs, 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 \(PARIS21\)](#).

Important partners

The Road Map clearly makes the case for NSOs to have a central coordinating role for statistics on SDGs. The provision of statistics for SDGs to support the measurement and achievement of SDGs (or monitoring) is the task of statisticians. This concerns in particular the identification of appropriate data sources and methodologies to produce the statistics corresponding to SDG indicators. NSOs, as the SDGs statistics focal point, should closely cooperate with the SDGs national policy focal point. An effective SDG monitoring must be based on effective national collaboration mechanisms.

This requires the coordination of national communications, planning, and the preparation of detailed national road maps and/or plans of action to implement international standards in providing statistical SDG indicators. Close collaboration of NSOs with policy makers is essential for countries to meet the reporting requirements under the 2030 Agenda in accordance with national priorities.

Getting the picture right

The Road Map proposes that the first step towards an effective monitoring is the assessment of the readiness of countries to provide data on the SDG indicators. This is also a good basis for identifying data providers within a country.

NSOs will need to assess the availability of data for global indicators within their respective countries in close cooperation with relevant data producers and in consultation with civil society and international organizations.

An essential outcome of the assessment is the identification and assignment of responsibilities among national institutions for each indicator. This will have an impact on the further steps towards an effective SDG monitoring. This assessment should identify indicators that can be produced in the short, medium and long term. The next step is to identify within the region the countries having similar needs and how they can cooperate on planning, funding requests or partnerships. This will be the basis for coordinating national actions on issues related to statistical capacity building for SDGs.

Established strengths to build upon

A second step is the definition of indicators for the national level. The 2030 Agenda emphasizes that the SDGs and targets should be implemented at the national and sub-national levels. The implementation of these national strategies needs to be supported by national data. In addition, countries with significant regional differences may require indicators at sub-national level. Countries are in different situations vis-à-vis measurement of sustainable development and will build on

previous experiences to build an indicator data set. Here again the NSOs are called upon to engage with policy makers in the definition of the national indicator set.

Regarding the global reporting there are several possible mechanisms for providing data on SDG indicators and associated data flows.

Again it appears important to have NSOs acting as coordinating organizations for data on SDGs. NSOs should meet the following minimum requirements when providing data on SDG indicators: data for compiling the indicators should be taken from official statistics whenever possible; time series from at least 2015 onwards; and inclusion of basic metadata (e.g., definitions of indicators and data sources).

NSOs in several countries are currently developing National Reporting Platforms (NRPs) as one of the possible mechanisms for disseminating SDG indicator data. The Road Map recommends that the data available through NRPs should be comparable, transparent, timely and publicly accessible.

NSOs are well-positioned to plan and propose the data flow model(s) for use in their respective countries. NSOs should maintain and develop a clear system for managing SDG indicator statistics from all providers, so that investments in the system are useful to the country as a whole. NSOs should evaluate which data flow model(s) provide the most transparent and efficient transfer of the data from the national to the global level, avoiding duplication and considering their national circumstances.

Finally NSOs should develop a communication strategy making use of new dissemination means and tools to communicate with stakeholders in a transparent and open manner. NSOs should also engage with policy makers and engaging these actors in the process. Communication of statistics for SDGs should be ideally linked to a general communication strategy of SDGs in the country.

Quality should become the decisive factor when choosing a data source. That's where official statistics can stand out of the piles and piles of other data. National Statistical Offices (NSOs) produce official statistics and strive for accuracy, reliability and uncompromised objectivity using the best methods, as enshrined in the [Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics](#). NSOs should therefore work towards strengthening the brand of "official statistics" vis a vis other data producers by emphasizing the quality aspects of their data (main competitive advantage). The CES has recently endorsed the ["Recommendations on promoting, measuring and communicating the value of official statistics"](#) that gives guidance on this domain.

[A roadmap to better meet statistics for SDGs needs](#)

The goal of the Road Map is to guide NSOs on producing statistics for SDGs. To this end six main domains of recommendations have been made and a concrete timeline of activities put in place to support the recommendations on the short and medium term:

1. Establishing collaboration

(a) NSOs should inform all relevant national ministries and agencies of the SDG indicators and contribute to strengthening inter-agency cooperation to efficiently meet the challenges of SDGs. The establishment of a focal point in each ministry and agency can facilitate this process. Partnerships with academia and other partners can also be considered. NSOs should work in close collaboration with the national coordinating body on SDGs.

- (b) NSOs should consider ways to coordinate national communication and planning related to providing data and indicators on SDGs to achieve consistency in the work of national stakeholders, information exchange and discussion and implementation of international statistical methodology.
- (c) NSOs should serve as focal points at the national level to coordinate the provision of statistics for SDGs. NSOs can also provide a supporting (albeit technical) role to other government bodies charged with SDG policy-making.
- (d) NSOs, as the national coordinating body (or in collaboration with another such body) should prepare detailed national road maps or plans of action to implement international standards in providing data on statistical SDG indicators.
- (e) NSOs could organise meetings with main data users to improve understanding of their needs. These meetings could be a useful forum to engage business, civil society, and academia in the SDG process.
- (f) Countries should consider establishing technical thematic working groups (for example, on human rights and gender equality, social inclusion, economic growth and environment protection or separately on each target) to discuss issues related to measuring SDGs in these areas.

2. Readiness assessments

- (a) NSOs have an important coordinating role in conducting readiness assessments and reporting on global SDG indicators, although the exact nature of this role will vary with national circumstances.
- (b) A mapping of data providers of statistical (and non-statistical) indicators will be essential to assess data availability. Non-statistical indicators should be distinguished from statistical indicators. NSOs should focus efforts on statistical indicators. Other national data providers (in some cases, outside of the national statistical system) should be identified, taking into account the quality requirements of data.
- (c) A mapping of existing data flows from national data providers to international organizations should also be conducted, to the extent feasible. A list from SDG indicators custodian agencies of their national contacts would be very helpful for this purpose.
- (d) NSOs should identify circumstances in which they choose to rely on data producers outside the national statistical system, including international organizations, to provide national statistics for SDG global indicators. This will reduce duplication of effort. NSOs could consider adding quality assessments when using data from outside the statistical system.
- (e) NSOs should evaluate feasibility for disaggregation for each SDG indicator at the country level, if necessary in consultation with policy makers. These evaluations could include an estimate of the timeline by when each disaggregation could be made available.

3. National and sub-national indicators

- (a) If there is policy demand for national SDG indicators, NSOs should be proactive and identify indicators to measure the achievement of SDGs and targets in their countries, especially in priority policy areas, and in close cooperation with policymakers. If national sustainable development indicator set does not exist, the global set can be used as a starting point.

(b) National and sub-national statistical indicators for monitoring of SDGs (as well as global and regional indicators) should be provided in a transparent manner by NSOs.

4. Providing data on global SDG indicators

(a) Countries should determine the approach and data flow models at the national level for providing data on SDG indicators (whether centralised in one focal point or decentralised).

(b) NSOs should consider the development of NRPs for SDG indicators.

(c) NSOs should meet the following minimum requirements when providing data on SDG indicators:

- data for compiling the indicators should be taken from official statistics whenever possible;
- time series from at least 2015 onwards; and
- inclusion of basic metadata (e.g., definitions of indicators and data sources).

(d) NSOs should direct users to their websites to find national statistics and national metadata prepared for global SDG indicators. NSOs also should direct users to UNSD's website to find country-specific statistics and metadata that have been adjusted for international comparison.

(e) NSOs should maintain networks so that the development of the system for SDG indicators from all country providers can be understood and so that investments can be of use to the country as a whole.

(f) Special attention should be paid to ensure coherence of data reported at all levels and to provide the required metadata.

5. Capacity building

(a) First set of activities (country view): Countries should create, implement and maintain a long-term programme for statistical development (e.g. NSDS)

(b) Second set of activities (bilateral): Donors must know the NSDS for recipient countries to be able to ensure a coordinated support.

(c) Third set of activities (multilateral): Countries could share their experiences and new approaches at the regional level (in training sessions, workshops or conferences; for example, at the CES).

6. Communication

(a) NSOs should develop communication strategies for statistics on SDGs, as part of or as a complement to general communication strategies and define the groups that should be targeted by communication, both data providers (NSOs, academia, etc.) and data users (policy makers, civil society, private companies, etc.). Communication of statistics for SDGs should be ideally linked to a general communication strategy of SDGs in the country.

(b) NSOs should define what will be communicated, create information packages for different stakeholders and provide guidance to users.

- (c) NSOs should define how information will be communicated and assess available resources (financial, human and technical).
- (d) NSOs should assess existing dissemination platforms.
- (e) NSOs should set up a customer management system approach for inquiries and launch dedicated websites linked to relevant databases.

Not all of these recommendations will be equally relevant in all countries and all of them have implications for both the resources required by NSOs and the allocation of these resources across statistical domains.

To help NSOs implement those recommendations of greatest priority for them, the SG has developed a series of measures and tools. The SG is committed to update the Road Map and the accompanying activities as to support NSOs in producing statistics for SDGs.