Meeting Notes – 5th Communication Fortnight

SDG Events

16 November 2023

The TTCOM (AL, AT, BE, CA, DE, IE, IS, PL, PT, SE, SK, UNECE, UK, ZA) gathered for its 6th fortnight, devoted to SDG training. The meeting recording and transcript are available on Teams (restricted to members) whereas the meeting summary and additional materials will be made available on the UNECE Knowledge Hub on SDGs, under the Communication page. The results from the discussion are summarised below.

Kevin McCormack, currently a UNSD official developing the modernisation of the UN data tool and former Head of SDGs in the Irish Central Statistical Office, shared his experience in developing a set of SDG training materials. Kevin presented the structure of the “What are the SDGs?” training document, highlighting that it was first designed as a guide for self-support, which quickly turned into a supporting tool for SDG policy counterparts. The document follows a story-telling approach, narrating, in a succinct/self-explanatory way, the Sustainable Development journey which culminated in the SDGs and in the current statistical monitoring framework. The narrative goes back to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to contextualise the current development agenda, going through several relevant stages (e.g. MDG Report in 2015, Rio+20 Conference) to explain the present framework and zooming in on specific subjects pertaining to SDG monitoring (e.g. VNRs and IAE). The document focuses on the UN lens, by describing the global framework, while being flexible enough to potentially incorporate new inputs regarding national experiences and relevant international developments, such as the 2nd Roadmap on Statistics for SDGs.

The following key takeaways stood out from the discussion:

- **Consolidated “study notes” for several audiences** - The initial goal was to provide this document to the SDG policy leads/counterparts as study notes designed to promote literacy and setting the scene for SDGs awareness. However, this “study book” can serve many purposes and be addressed and tailored/adapted to the needs of diverse audiences (statisticians [newcomers and already working with SDGs], university students, etc.), since it is aimed at facilitating the understanding of SDGs. Statisticians should know the foundation of the data they are producing.

- **Comprehensive, flexible and live document** – It covers a wide range of relevant topics and has enough flexibility to incorporate new inputs and to enable a future customisation from users/readers. They can “pick and mix” the most relevant headings according to their needs and also build from it considering their experience. It is meant to be useful and adaptable, rather than imposing.

- **Value-added vis-à-vis other SDG materials** - The document is aimed at providing a robust and reliable source for SDG knowledge, guiding users through a journey, with a story-telling approach often lacking from extremely heavy/dense SDG documentation, incomprehensible and discouraging for inexperienced users. Socialising and democratising statistical communication through self-explanatory training materials is, in itself, a way of not leaving anyone behind. Notwithstanding, the lighter version of explanatory text can still meet the needs of more specialised users since it is substantiated by links (reliable sources). In addition, some other singular aspects should be highlighted, such as the VNR tables, compiling the number of VNRs provided (2016-2023) and VNRs classified by country and by year.
- **Shareable and reusable** – the near final draft of the document will likely be ready in the upcoming weeks. It will be shared with the group to further promote and guide the development and implementation of SDG training courses, which was highlighted as one of the most demanded/needed deliverables from the CES Steering Group on Statistics for SDGs. The document will also be included in an SDG training repository which, together with other relevant materials (e.g. Statistics Poland’s SDG training presentations), will be made available on the UNECE Knowledge Hub on SDGs, under the Communication page. The release in other dissemination outlets, as well the document’s official format and designation (e.g. Handbook/Journey/View) will be decided in due course by the UNSD.

- **SDGs are the talking data** – leveraging from the very powerful communication topic which are the SDGs, data and official statistics can become more visible and actionable, thus embodying the “Better Data Better Lives” motto of the 46th UN Statistical Commission. The public relations nature of these training materials can help advocate for the indispensable role that data and official statistics play in making the 2030 Agenda a reality. The Irish case of collaboration between the CSO and policy departments to develop SDG publications and the VNR showcased that, without official statistics, it would be impossible to portray the national progress towards the SDGs. This collaboration made sure that the view of the statistical office came through.

As a concluding remark, a quote by Steve MacFeely (WHO, Director of Data and Analytics) was recalled: “**Official statistics are not only for measuring the SDGs, but they are also there to define the Goals.**” Similarly, in the discussion, participants remarked that, without tangible measuring frameworks, policies and strategies cannot be translatable (nor translated) into reality. Therefore, materials such as training courses and guides, which help bridge the gap between the statistical world and the policy/decision-making one, are a step further in showing the defining nature of statistics in relation to the SDGs.

**AOB**

The Chairs recapped the outcomes of the DISSCOM and Steering Group meeting. In the DISSCOM meeting, the Fortnights’ initiative was praised and new networking opportunities were explored (e.g. Malgorzata Cwiek’s presentation [UNECE] about the lessons learned from focused interviews with journalists about reaching the public with climate change-related statistics). In the Annual meeting of the CES Steering Group, the above-mentioned output about training materials was further clarified. News about how this output will be materialised will be provided in due course.

The group was also informed about future topics to be developed in upcoming fortnights, such as data visualisation (private sector approach), interviews with journalists (UNECE), among others. A “Christmas fortnight” is also being prepared, of a more informal nature, gathering the group for a proper 2023 send off, after a year of remarkable achievements in “making progress in communicating progress”.

The next fortnight will likely be held on 7 December (topic tbd).

**Links**

[please insert your link for a noteworthy national practice]