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**Progress in implementing the Conference of European Statisticians Road Map
on statistics for Sustainable Development Goals**

Progress in implementation of the Conference of European Statisticians' Road Map on Statistics for Sustainable Development Goals

Note by the secretariat

Summary

The document summarizes progress in the implementation of the Conference of European Statisticians' (CES) *Road Map on Statistics for Sustainable Development Goals* (SDGs) since June 2017 when the Conference adopted the *Road Map,* and provides information on the activities of the CES Steering Group on statistics for SDGs and its subgroups.

The Conference is invited to comment on progress made and on a proposal to plan a second edition of the Road Map reflecting experiences gained in implementing its First Edition.

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I. Introduction

1. In response to *The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development[1]*, the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) adopted in 2015 a *Declaration on the Role of National Statistical Offices in Measuring and Monitoring the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)* and decided to launch work on a *Road Map on statistics for SDGs*. For this purpose, a Steering Group was set up in February 2016. The Steering Group includes Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Kyrgyzstan, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Poland (co-chair since January 2018), Republic of Moldova, Russian Federation, Sweden, Switzerland (co-chair), Turkey, United Kingdom, United States (co-chair until December 2017), Eurostat, OECD and UNECE (that also provides the secretariat for the Steering Group).

2. CES endorsed the *Road Map on Statistics for SDGs* in 2017. The Road Map has been published in English and Russian, and is available in Spanish. The Road Map outlines a strategy for CES members to follow in implementing the CES Declaration mentioned above. The Road Map includes a number of actions to be completed by the CES 2018 plenary session; therefore it is timely to review the progress made in its implementation.

3. The present note summarizes:

(a) The work of the Steering Group and its subgroups over 2017-2018;

(b) Progress in implementing the *CES Road Map on statistics for SDGs*; and

(c) Main outcomes of the Second UNECE Expert Meeting on Statistics for SDGs (18-19 April 2018) and its preceding workshop for EECCA countries (16-17 April 2018).

4. Information about the CES work and countries' progress in this area is available on the UNECE wiki "Statistics for SDGs" at: https://statswiki.unece.org/display/SFSDG/Statistics+for+SDGs+Home

II. Work of the CES Steering Group on statistics for Sustainable Development Goals and its subgroups

A. The Steering Group on statistics for SDGs

5. The CES Bureau set up the Steering Group (SG) on statistics for SDGs in February 2016[2] to prepare the *Road Map on statistics for SDGs* and follow up on its implementation.

6. According to its Terms of Reference, the Steering Group can identify concrete tasks or activities to support its work that could be undertaken by Task Forces or Task Teams. In the case of Task Forces, the Steering Group submits proposals for setting up a Task Force to the CES Bureau that takes the decision on establishing the group.

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[1] The report and the associated global development agenda are referred to henceforth as 'Agenda 2030'.

[2] All groups under CES are subsequently approved also by the UNECE Executive Committee (EXCOM). EXCOM approved the Terms of Reference for the Steering Group on statistics for SDGs in December 2017, giving it a mandate for five years (ECE/X/2017/L.14, Annex I).

7.   For concrete tasks with a shorter time horizon, the SG can set up Task Teams that work for a year or less.

8.   Currently, one Task Force and three task teams are set up under the SG:

   (a)   Task Force on National Reporting Platforms (NRPs);

   (b)   Task Team on data flows;

   (c)   Task Team on communication; and

   (d)   Task Team on capacity development.

9.   The Steering Group oversees the implementation of the CES Road Map and the activities of its Task Force and Task Teams. The Steering Group also organises annual Expert Meetings on statistics for SDGs (the most recent one took place in April 2018; see section IV).

B.   Task Force on National Reporting Platforms

10.   The Task Force on National Reporting Platforms (NRPs) (currently chaired by Sweden, previously by Poland) was established in 2016 to facilitate sharing of country experiences in using online platforms to provide statistics for SDGs. Over the past year, the Task Force has published two reports giving practical guidance to countries on data provision for SDG indicators: *National Reporting Platforms: A Practical Guide* (January 2018) and *National Mechanisms for Providing Data on Global SDG Indicators* (January 2018). In addition, the Task Force contributed to a UNSD *Workshop on NRPs* (January 2018)[3].

11.   The Task Force is currently preparing a third report that will provide extended practical guidance in planning and setting up an NRP, including achieving better interoperability across platforms. In addition, the group will describe best practices in denoting national SDG indicators and proxy global SDG indicators in national reporting platforms.

12.   The work of the Task Force has contributed to widespread use of such platforms as a means for NSOs to provide national statistics for global SDG indicators to a national audience and/or for global reporting purposes. Among the countries participating in the work of CES, 33 currently have or are preparing such platforms. The work of the group has also contributed to discussions of the use of national (and agency) reporting platforms at the 48th and 49th sessions of the UN Statistical Commission (UNSC), and to plans to prepare global guidance on the development and use of such platforms for SDG global reporting.

C.   Task Team on Data Flows

13.   The Task Team on Data Flows (co-chaired by France and Turkey) was established in 2017 to provide practical suggestions to support data flows for global SDG indicators. The Team conducted an observational pilot study involving countries and custodian agencies (agencies responsible for different SDG indicators) during summer 2017[4]. The

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[3] These materials can be found on the UNECE wiki at
https://statswiki.unece.org/display/SFSDG/Task+Force+on+National+Reporting+Platforms
[4] France, Russian Federation, Turkey, United Kingdom, United States, FAO, OECD, IMF, UNODC, UNEP and to some extent WHO participated in the pilot analysing data flows for 11 SDG indicators.
See: https://statswiki.unece.org/display/SFSDG/Task+Team+on+Data+Flows+for+SDGs.

pilot's practical recommendations (such as a list of focal point contacts for countries and agencies; an online schedule of global statistical production by custodian agencies; a review of online availability of global metadata; and a new approach to noting progress in validation of global statistics) informed discussions of global data flows. Several of these suggestions have been implemented at the global level and are reflected in the IAEG-SDG guidelines on global data flows as prepared for the 49th session of UNSC[5].

14.   The Team is currently preparing to launch a second pilot focusing on indicators for which global statistics are difficult for NSOs to validate, such as non-statistical indicators, indicators based on non-traditional data sources, or data modelled by custodian agencies. The results of this second pilot will inform the deliberations of the IAEG-SDG and the Coordinating Committee of Statistical Activities (CCSA) in their preparation of implementation guidance for global data flows to be presented at the 50th session of the UNSC. More information on the planned pilot is on the UNECE wiki[4]. Interested countries are welcome to participate in the second data flow pilot - please inform Jennifer Park (jennifer.park@un.org).

15.   Other tasks in the Team's 2018 work plan include initiating a survey of existing data flows in the region relevant to the global SDG indicators and preparation of an SDMX "quick start" guide which can be implemented on existing national platforms.

E.   Task Team on Communication

16.   The Task Team on Communication of SDG statistics (co-chaired by Russian Federation and United Kingdom) was established in March 2018 to provide practical guidance and tools in this area.[6] The Team aims to facilitate the sharing of communication experiences among countries to identify existing tools and best practices. Among its first tasks is developing suggestions on how to prepare statistical annexes in Voluntary National Reviews to the High-level Political Forum, drawing from country experiences to date. **Countries interested to participate in the Task Team on communication are welcome to contact the UNECE secretariat.**

D.   Task Team on Capacity Development

17.   The Task Team on statistical Capacity Development (co-chaired by Italy and Montenegro) was also established in March 2018. The aim of the Team is to develop an approach to SDG statistical capacity development for the UNECE region.[7] The Team plans to identify and develop resources, tools and guidance to assist NSOs in addressing their national capacity development priorities related to SDGs. Among its first planned tasks is a review of results from the HLG-PCCB/PARIS21 survey on SDG statistical capacity development for UNECE countries. Countries interested to participate in the Task Team on capacity development are welcome to contact the UNECE secretariat.

III.   Implementation of the Road Map

18.   The progress in implementing the Road Map is summarised below according to the chapters of the Road Map. Each chapter identifies an area of activities to be undertaken by

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[5] https://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/49th-session/documents/BG-Item-3a-IAEG-SDGs-DataFlowsGuidelines-E.pdf.

[6] https://statswiki.unece.org/display/SFSDG/Task+Group+on+Communication+of+Statistics

[7] https://statswiki.unece.org/display/SFSDG/Task+Group+on+Capacity+Development.

countries to ensure the provision of statistics for SDGs and includes actions by the Steering Group and recommendations to national statistical offices (and statistical systems).

19. The information is based on communications with countries and a survey in December 2016 on countries' initial plans, which was followed up in August 2017 and March 2018 on the actual implementation[8]. The findings were also presented at the Second Expert Meeting of Statistics for SDGs in April 2018.

A. Establishing national mechanisms for collaboration

20. The Road Map recommends that national statistical offices (NSOs) serve as the focal points at the national level to coordinate the provision of statistics for SDGs. NSOs should also contribute to strengthening inter-agency cooperation within countries, and consider ways to coordinate national communications on statistics for SDGs. In over 80 percent of UNECE countries, NSO is coordinating its work related to SDGs with national policy institutions responsible for SDGs. In more than half of the countries the role of NSO in provision of national statistics for SDGs has been determined. Establishing clear roles of relevant actors in this effort, especially the coordinating role of the NSO, is essential given the many entities (often 30 or more) at the national level that produce data for global SDG indicators.

21. The Road Map also urges countries to prepare national road maps (i.e., national work plans) as a way to organize and document a national strategy for providing statistics for SDGs. About 30 percent of countries in the region have prepared and 19 percent are planning to prepare a national road map or work plan on statistics for SDGs. Some of these are available at the UNECE wiki[9]. The Steering Group plans to develop a template for national road maps on statistics for SDGs, based on the experience of countries that have already developed a road map.

B. Assessing countries' readiness to provide data on SDG indicators

22. The Road Map urges countries to carry out a self-assessment of readiness to provide statistics for the global SDG indicators. This begins with a review of data providers and statistical producers contributing to the national system; an assessment of available data; an evaluation of data gaps; and identifying an approach to addressing these gaps in a short, medium and long term. The Steering Group prepared a self-assessment template for countries on availability of statistics for global indicators that may be helpful.

23. About 60 percent of UNECE countries have completed their national assessment, including all countries of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia. Another 15 percent of UNECE countries are currently preparing their assessments. The available country national assessment results are posted on the wiki[9].

C. Developing regional, national, and sub-national indicators

24. The 2030 Agenda foresees the possibility of developing regional and national SDG indicators, taking into account national circumstances and priorities. About 60 percent of UNECE countries have and 6 percent are planning to develop national SDG indicators.

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[8] https://statswiki.unece.org/display/SFSDG/National+Activities
[9] https://statswiki.unece.org/display/SFSDG/National+Activities

25.   Understanding which national indicators are commonly used among countries may be instructive if regional indicators are pursued in future. There are currently no plans to establish a set of SDG indicators for the whole UNECE region but there are indicators for parts of the region. Eurostat has developed an EU SDG indicator set and CIS-Stat has established SDG indicators for the CIS countries. OECD has carried out a pilot study on measuring distance to SDG targets based on data available in OECD databases.

D.   Providing data on global SDG indicators

26.   The Agenda 2030 calls for the follow-up and review of the implementation of the Agenda to be based on data produced by national statistical systems. The Road Map urged countries to begin providing national data, statistics and metadata for the global SDG indicators according to IAEG-SDG specifications while noting the volume and complexity of the task. The data flows among countries, custodian agencies and UNSD, and the ways how countries can verify the data that is available for them in international databases continue to evolve.

27.   A number of countries are using a National Reporting Platform to provide statistics for SDGs. An NRP can be a one-stop source for the country data on SDG indicators and an authoritative source of nationally provided data. About 40 percent of UNECE countries use and about 13 percent plan to use an NRP or similar method for providing national SDG statistics. Other countries make use of existing platforms or software already in use for other purposes. Links to existing NRPs are on the UNECE wiki[10]. Many are open source (i.e., free) and can be reused and customised by other countries to suit their needs.

E.   Communication of statistics for SDGs

28.   The Road Map urges NSOs to develop communication strategies for statistics on SDGs in complement to existing communication strategies. The target groups should be identified, their interests and needs assessed, and information packages developed to address these needs. The mechanism for communication should also be selected to best suit the nature of the message and the needs of the target group.

29.   The global progress towards SDGs is reviewed at the policy level by the High-level Political Forum (HLPF) taking place every year in July. One of the inputs to HLPF are the voluntary national reviews (VNR) by countries. A statistical annex which can accompany the review is an opportunity for statisticians to gain visibility at the highest political level. About 60 percent countries in the region have completed and 10 percent are currently preparing voluntary national reviews. Countries use different approaches for VNRs and these do not always include a statistical annex. There is little guidance for preparing statistical annexes. The topic was discussed at the April 2018 UNECE Expert Meeting on statistics for SDGs, and the participants asked for sharing experiences and developing best practices for the statistical annexes in VNRs.

F.   Building capacity for SDG statistics

30.   The Road Map urges countries to prepare long term development plans that reflect the needs for SDG statistics as well as broader national statistical capacity development goals. This includes an assessment of current data availability; an assessment of current statistical capacity; and development of concrete actions for statistical training and capacity

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[10] https://statswiki.unece.org/display/SFSDG/National+Activities

building. In these plans, countries may leverage existing institutional structures as well as explore strategic partnerships.

31. In statistics reported for UNECE region in the global SDG database maintained by UNSD, about 75 percent of UNECE countries can report statistics for 50 percent or more of Tier 1 indicators, and about 30 percent can report statistics for 50 percent or more of Tier 2 indicators. This is consistent with expected global reporting rates given the definition of Tier 1 indicators[11]. Across SDGs, global reporting is lower among environmental goals (such as SDG 13 'Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts').

32. The Task Team on statistical Capacity Development plans to analyse the data gaps, and conduct a regional assessment of national capacity needs and priorities based on the HLG-PCCB survey on statistical capacity development (carried out in winter 2017).

IV. Outcomes of the Second UNECE Expert Meeting on statistics for SDGs

33. The Second Expert Meeting on Statistics for SDGs took place 18-19 April 2018 in Geneva[12]. Forty-eight countries and nineteen agencies attended. Within the context of its agenda, the Expert Meeting discussed also the key outcomes of a Workshop on reporting and communicating statistics for SDGs held on 16-17 April 2018[13].

34. The Meeting proposed a number of concrete actions to advance the work on statistics for SDGs which are shortly summarized below. The Steering Group on statistics for SDGs will discuss the proposed actions at its meeting on 13-14 September 2018, and take them into account in developing the work plan of the SG and its subgroups for the next year.

A. National reporting of global SDG indicators

35. The CES Steering Group was asked to identify which global SDG indicators were clearly not statistical in nature (such as national conformance with global policy agreements) as well as those that cannot be calculated by the national statistical system (such as development assistance). Preparing such a list can guide countries in planning the work on statistics for SDGs.

B. Capacity development: gaps, regional priorities, and means

36. The session identified a number of tools that could help countries in assessing and prioritising their capacity development needs. Compiling a list of needed skills can help NSOs plan and adjust to emerging demands for national statistics. Sharing such lists between agencies would be helpful.

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[11] Tier 1 indicators are those for which an internationally agreed upon methodology has been established and for which at least 50 percent of the countries in a given region can provide, or at least 50 percent of the population in a given region can be represented by, the statistics.

[12] The report of the expert meeting is provided in document ECE/CES/2018/14/Add.21. All documents for the meeting are available at http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=47533.

[13] The report of the workshop is provided in document ECE/CES/2018/14/Add.20, and workshop materials are available at http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=47905.

37.   Mapping the available statistical capacity development resources in the UNECE region would be useful but can require a substantial effort and may become out of date quickly. Therefore, developing a tool for this purpose that could be maintained by the donors and recipients of capacity building themselves could be useful.

C.   Providing SDG statistics for global reporting

38.   The meeting welcomed the plans for a second data flow pilot to examine the indicators that are particularly challenging for NSOs to verify.

39.   Developing tools to support the validation process by countries of the globally harmonised data by custodian agencies would be useful, such as lists of country points of contact, and tools to note progress in verification.

40.   The information gathered by custodian agencies about non-compliance with international standards when harmonizing national statistics would be useful for planning statistical capacity development.

41.   Best practices for VNRs and (potentially) national progress reports may be helpful in effective communication with global and national policy makers. Providing webinars, case studies, and examples of "story telling" may be useful.

D.   The way forward: proposal for a second edition of the Road Map

42.   Results from the 2018 April survey show that the Road Map has been useful to most countries in the region. Considerable experience has been gained since the initial writing of the Road Map. Many countries have implemented the recommendations and used the tools developed under the CES Steering Group on statistics for SDGs.

43.   At the same time, the processes for providing statistics for SDGs continue to evolve. These developments should be reflected in the Road Map for it to remain an accurate source of guidance. Meeting participants recommended that a second edition of the Road Map should be planned to take into account new developments at national and international levels.

44.   It was decided to hold a third Expert Meeting during the week of 15 April 2019 to review progress made, share experiences, and discuss the new challenges in providing statistics for SDGs.

V.   Proposal to the Conference

45.   The Conference is invited to comment on progress in the area of statistics for SDGs and on the proposal to plan a second edition of the Road Map reflecting experiences gained in implementing its First Edition.