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Statistics for Sustainable Development Goals

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

Note by the secretariat

Summary

The document summarizes progress in implementing the Conference of European Statisticians' (CES) *Road Map on Statistics for Sustainable Development Goals* (SDGs). It provides information on the activities of the CES Steering Group on statistics for SDGs and its subgroups, the outcome of an Expert Meeting and workshop on this topic in April 2019, and preparation of a second edition of the Road Map (a draft outline is presented in the Annex). A proposal for a regional platform on statistics for SDGs is presented in document ECE/CES/2019/8/Add.1.

The Conference is invited to comment on progress made, the draft outline of the second edition of the Road Map, and the proposal for a platform on statistics for SDGs for the UNECE region (document ECE/CES/2019/8/Add.1).



I. Introduction

1. In response to the *Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development*¹, the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) adopted in 2015 a *Declaration on the Role of National Statistical Offices (NSOs) in Measuring and Monitoring the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)*. In 2017, CES endorsed a *Road Map on statistics for SDGs* that outlines a strategy for CES members to follow in implementing the CES Declaration. The Road Map has been published in English and Russian and is available in Spanish².

2. The work on statistics for SDGs under the Conference is led by a Steering Group set up in February 2016. The Steering Group is currently co-chaired by Poland and Sweden, and includes Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Kyrgyzstan, Montenegro, the Netherlands, Russian Federation, Switzerland, Turkey, United Kingdom, United States, Eurostat, OECD and UNECE (that also provides the secretariat for the Steering Group).

3. The present note summarizes:

(a) Work of the Steering Group and its subgroups since June 2018;

(b) Main outcomes of the Third UNECE Expert Meeting on Statistics for SDGs (15-16 April 2019) and a workshop for countries of Easter Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA), and South-East Europe (17-18 April 2019),

(c) Work on the second edition of the *Road Map on statistics for SDGs*, and

(d) Work on developing the UNECE regional platform on statistics for SDGs.

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 Conference of European Statisticians 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 2016³ 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.

7. Two groups, namely a Task Force on National Reporting Platforms and a Task Team on Data Flows have completed their work. Three Task Teams are currently working under the Steering Group:

(a) Task Team on communication;

(b) Task Team on capacity development; and

(c) Task Team on data transmission.

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

² <http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=47510>

³ 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).

8. The Steering Group also organizes annual Expert Meetings on statistics for SDGs (the most recent one took place in April 2019; see section IV).

B. Task Force on National Reporting Platforms – work completed

9. The Task Force on National Reporting Platforms has completed its work. The Task Force was chaired by Sweden (and previously by Poland), and included Belarus, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Mexico, Poland, Russian Federation, Sweden, Turkey, United Kingdom and United States. The aim of the Task Force was to facilitate sharing of country experiences in using online platforms to provide statistics for SDGs. The Task Force 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 National Reporting Platforms* (January 2018)⁴.

10. The work of the Task Force has provided support and guidance to countries in the development and use of 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, 35 currently have an NRP or a similar platform for SDG statistics. The work of the group has also contributed to discussions on the use of national (and agency) reporting platforms at the UN Statistical Commission (UNSC), and to global guidance on the development and use of such platforms for SDG global reporting.

C. Task Team on Data Flows – work completed

11. The Task Team on Data Flows has completed its work. The Task Team was co-chaired by France and Turkey, and included Denmark, Kazakhstan, Russian Federation, Sweden, United Kingdom and United States.

12. The Task Team conducted two observational pilot studies of data flows from countries to custodian agencies responsible for SDG indicators. Their aim was to explore methods to facilitate understanding and agreement between national statistical offices and custodian agencies regarding harmonized global statistics for SDGs. The two pilot studies resulted in concrete recommendations to improve the data flows.

13. The first pilot of data flows was undertaken in summer 2017. Five countries and six custodian agencies participated. The pilot's practical recommendations (such as a list of focal point contacts for countries and agencies; an online schedule of production of global SDG indicators 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 on global data flows. Several of these suggestions were implemented at the global level and were reflected in the IAEG-SDG guidelines on global data flows prepared for the 49th session of UN Statistical Commission (UNSC)⁵.

14. The second pilot was carried out in summer 2018. It focused mainly on the difficulty of validating data not produced by the national statistical system, such as data produced by custodian agencies through modelling, geospatial information, or other data sources generally outside of the purview of national official statistics. Thirty-seven countries and five custodian agencies participated in the pilot, analysing data flows for ten SDG indicators. The high number of countries participating in this voluntary pilot shows the importance that countries attach to validation of data that is published in international databases.

⁴ <https://statswiki.unece.org/display/SFSDG/Task+Force+on+National+Reporting+Platforms>

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

15. The outcome of the second pilot study contributed to the principles and best practices of data flows prepared by IAEG-SDGs and the Committee for Coordination of Statistical Activities (CCSA) that was endorsed by the 50th UN Statistical Commission. The recommendations concern maintenance of up-to-date lists of contact points, improving metadata, improving the data validation process, streamlining the timing of data collection and validation requests, etc. The outcome also contributed to greater clarity regarding data transmission and validation on a number of indicators, and to improving the coordination of data provision for the global SDG indicators. Following the two pilot studies, a number of countries in Africa and in ESCAP region carried out similar exercises.

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, identify existing tools and best practices, and develop suggestions on how to prepare statistical annexes in Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) to the High-level Political Forum (HLPF), drawing from country experiences to date.

17. The Task Team carried out a survey of country practices in communicating statistics for SDGs. Majority of NSOs have a task to communicate SDG data and metadata, and about one quarter have a communication strategy. Users are grouped according to their needs, including by using ‘personas’ to represent specific user groups. Nearly all NSOs communicate with policy makers and international agencies. About one quarter would like to communicate with new groups, such as academia, citizens, local governments and businesses. Websites, NRPs, conferences and publications were used as preferred communication methods, with the role of media and VNRs highlighted as powerful ways ensuring communication to a wide audience.

18. The Task Team is continuing its work to profile data users, develop guidance on preparing VNRs, and to update the communication tools of the Steering Group.

D. Task Team on Capacity Development

19. The Task Team on statistical Capacity Development (co-chaired by Italy and Montenegro) was established in March 2018 to develop an approach to SDG statistical capacity development for the UNECE region.⁷ The Team aims to identify and develop resources, tools and guidance to assist NSOs in addressing their national capacity development priorities related to SDGs.

20. The Task Team has developed a matrix combining the organisational structure of a national statistical office with the capacity development needs (based on the UNECE Statistical Capacity Development Strategy and the Paris21/HLG-PCCB questionnaire). The aim of the matrix is to provide a harmonised way of identifying and prioritising the needs for capacity development. This should be helpful for countries when discussing with donors, and with other stakeholders in the country to explain the NSO needs. The draft matrix is available on the UNECE public wiki on statistics for SDGs for wider consultation. It is planned to pilot test the matrix in a few countries.

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>.

III. Outcome of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe 2019 Expert Meeting and workshop on statistics for Sustainable Development Goals

21. The Third Expert Meeting on Statistics for SDGs took place 15-16 April 2019 in Geneva⁸. Forty-six countries and twenty international organizations attended.

22. The Expert Meeting discussed coordination of data flows for global SDG indicators, effective communication of SDG statistics, statistical capacity development for SDGs and beyond, and national SDG indicators. The meeting also considered plans for the second edition of the Road Map, and for further work of the Task Teams on data transmission, communication and capacity building.

23. Concerning the data flows from countries to custodian agencies responsible for global SDG indicators, the meeting emphasised the need for more transparency in communication and information on data sources, indicator calculation methodologies and metadata. The UN Statistical Commission has agreed on recommendations, guidelines and criteria for data flows. However, it is not always clear how they should be implemented. Coordinating and harmonising the data provision and validation is challenging. Participants stressed the need to find pragmatic solutions as the validation is a resource demanding exercise for both countries and Custodian Agencies, and to maintain an open dialogue. At the same time, work on data validation allows to improve data quality, and provides an opportunity to find solutions to the decades old problem of having different data for the same indicators available in countries and in databases of international organizations.

24. The meeting noted that communication is a common thread through all stages of production and provision of statistics for SDGs. It is important to keep the users in mind from the outset, as well as consider who are not using the data and why. It will be useful to present success stories as an inspiration on how to deal with the problems.

25. The meeting stressed that coordination of capacity development is a strategic issue and we should move beyond an ad-hoc approach. In some cases, donors are putting coordination as a prerequisite for agreeing to provide funds. How to carry out the coordination in practice has been discussed for a long time. In countries, NSO may be best placed to coordinate statistical capacity building due to their role as a coordinator of the statistical system. Some countries (e.g., Armenia, Kyrgyzstan) have set up special committees to coordinate the statistical capacity development in the country.

26. Currently the information on capacity development is collected through annual surveys to countries and donors (by Paris21, Eurostat/UNECE, World Bank). A challenge is to maintain comprehensive up-to-date information on who is providing what kind of capacity development and where. This should go beyond information sharing to allow donors to better coordinate their activities already in the planning phase. Ideally a platform would be needed for this purpose. However, it is difficult to find resources to maintain such a platform, and there should be some incentive for countries and donors to provide this information. The meeting called for developing concrete tools to coordinate capacity development, taking the current annual surveys as the starting point.

27. Most countries have decided to set up national SDG indicator sets in addition to the global indicators. Country approaches are different, depending on policy interest, legislative framework, structure of the national statistical system and the available resources. National SDG indicators can be a separate process from the global indicators and are not always under the responsibility of NSOs.

28. Countries are at different stages: some have already established national indicators, others are in the process, and others are considering whether to have them. Mapping the

⁸ The report of the expert meeting is provided in document ECE/CES/2019/14/Add.15. All documents for the meeting are available at <http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=48570>.

global SDG indicators to determine their relevance for the country can be a good starting point. Involvement of all stakeholders (private sector, civil society, academia, other government agencies) is needed. Good inter-institutional cooperation can be built up through the process if the other agencies feel ownership and the indicators meet their information needs. Countries may also use non-official statistics in SDG reporting to provide context (for example, civil society data on vulnerable groups). This must be clearly indicated for users and a certain quality level has to be established.

29. Back-to-back with the Expert Meeting, a workshop on statistics for SDGs for EECCA and South-east European countries was held on 17-18 April 2019⁹. The workshop focused on two main topics: use of geo-spatial data and methods for statistics for SDGs and data disaggregation.

30. The workshop highlighted the importance of geo-referencing of statistical data that would allow to link data from different subject-matter areas and to provide disaggregations according to regions. Countries emphasised the need for capacity building on use of geo-spatial data and methods and asked for the UNECE support in this respect.

31. The challenges faced in the production of statistics for SDGs are similar to the ones faced by any NSO in modernising its business architecture and production processes, using new data sources, and establishing partnerships with stakeholders. In this context, Agenda 2030 can support developing national statistical systems in countries and harmonising the concepts and definitions for better comparability and understanding of official statistics.

32. The next Expert Meeting and workshop on statistics for SDGs will take place on 21-24 April 2020 in Budapest, Hungary, kindly hosted by the Hungarian Central Statistical Office.

IV. Towards the second edition of the Road Map

33. Many countries have implemented the recommendations in the first edition of the *Road Map on statistics for SDGs* in 2017, and used the tools developed under the CES Steering Group on statistics for SDGs. At the same time, the processes for providing statistics for SDGs have evolved at global, regional and national levels. Many challenges remain and new ones emerge that require new solutions and approaches. These developments should be reflected in the updated Road Map to continue to provide vision and guidance.

34. In 2018, the Conference supported the proposal for a second edition of the Road Map, recommended to maintain it online as a living document, and requested the Steering Group to prepare a plan and timetable for its preparation.

35. The Steering Group has started preparations of the second edition of the Road Map. A proposed draft structure of the second edition is presented in the Annex. It comprises updated chapters from the first edition, and new parts, such as use of statistics for SDGs, involvement of private sector and civil society, use of non-traditional sources (geospatial data, big data). A whole new chapter will be dedicated to 'leaving no-one behind' to provide guidance how to do this in practice taking into account the opportunities and limitations.

36. It is planned to discuss the drafts of the second edition at the Steering Group meeting in September 2019, and at the Expert Meeting on statistics for SDGs in April 2020. The final draft would then be consulted with the CES Bureau in October 2020, and sent for an electronic consultation to all CES members in the beginning of 2021. It is planned to submit it to the June 2021 CES plenary session for endorsement.

⁹ The report of the workshop is provided in document ECE/CES/2019/14/Add.14, and workshop materials are available at <http://www.unecce.org/index.php?id=48571>.

V. Developing the UNECE regional platform on statistics for Sustainable Development Goals

37. In April 2019, the UN Economic Commission for Europe requested the UNECE Secretariat to prepare annual regional reports on progress towards SDGs to inform the UNECE Regional Fora on Sustainable Development. These reports should be based on existing statistics and data. The CES Bureau in February 2019 supported the preparation of the report using national data drawn from the national reporting platforms, as much as possible. Denmark leads a task team to work together with the UNECE Secretariat on this issue.

38. It is proposed to establish of a regional platform on statistics for SDGs to consist of (1) a knowledge hub, (2) a dashboard of indicators, and (3) a database. The approach for selecting and disseminating indicators is based on sub-regional indicator lists and databases (Eurostat, CIS-Stat and OECD), UNECE experience with Millennium Development Goals (MDG) indicators and the existing UNECE statistical database. It is proposed to provide national data on SDG indicators alongside with the data from custodian agencies. The planned work will be adjusted depending on how it evolves. Further details are presented in document ECE/CES/2019/8/Add.1.

VI. Proposal to the Conference

39. The Conference is invited to comment on progress in the area of statistics for SDGs, on the draft outline for the second edition of the Road Map, and the plans to develop the UNECE regional platform on SDGs.

Annex

Draft outline of the second edition of “Road Map on Statistics for Sustainable Development Goals”

I. Key messages to policy makers and other stakeholders

II. Executive Summary

III. Introduction

IV. Use of statistics for Sustainable Development Goals

- A. How official statistics are used in the context of SDGs; the value and role of official statistics. Why SDG statistics?
- B. Official statistics: its comparative advantage, users and their data needs
- C. Practical examples of SDG data use, including Voluntary National Reports (VNRs)
- D. Main obstacles/challenges in using official statistics; Why is it not used more?
- E. Stepping out of the comfort zone: using non-official statistics
- F. Recommendations for NSOs

V. National Coordination Mechanisms

- A. The role of NSOs
- B. Essential dialogue with policy makers
- C. Coordination and collaboration of data producers
- D. Assessing readiness to report on global (and national?) SDG indicators
- E. Recommendations for NSOs

VI. Reporting on Global Sustainable Development Indicators

- A. Global data flows: Framework for global dataflows; Tools provided by UNSD; Current experiences on SDGs dataflows and recommendations; A complex exercise
- B. Identifying national data providers: Pre-existing and new data flows, Statistical and non-statistical indicators; Nationally not relevant indicators; Non-official data; Proxy indicators
- C. Different processes and ways of data transmission for global reporting: Management of data flow models (Setting up national coordination); Different national mechanisms for providing data to global SDGs reporting; Automatization of data flows
- D. Validation: Different types of data validation

- E. Recommendations for NSOs

VII. Developing regional, national and sub-national indicators

- A. Measuring progress in regions: UNECE, EU, CIS, etc.
- B. Deciding on national/sub-national indicators
- C. Recommendations for NSOs

VIII. Leave no one behind

- A. Target population groups
- B. Disaggregated data: what and why?
- C. How to get disaggregated data
- D. Case studies/best practices
- E. Recommendations for NSOs

IX. Communication of statistics for Sustainable Development Goals

- A. Communication with various users
- B. Statistics for VNRs
- C. Storytelling
- D. Recommendations for NSOs

X. Capacity development for SDGs statistics and beyond

- A. Scope of capacity development for official statistics
- B. Main actors and sources
- C. Tools
- D. Coordination of capacity development
- E. Recommendations for NSOs

Annexes

Frequently Asked Questions related to statistics for SDGs

Areas for further work

Country case studies

Other initiatives - groups working on related issues

Glossary of the main terms used