

Sustainable Development Goals statistics – Voluntary National Review 2019, Israel

In 2018 a governmental team headed by Israel's Special Envoy for Sustainability and Climate Change and the Deputy Director General for Strategy at the Ministry of Environment Protection was commissioned to compile Israel's first Voluntary National Review (VNR) that was submitted in 2019. An inter-ministerial committee was formed, and consultations took place over a period of 18 months in order to prepare a report including all relevant data and information related to sustainability and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

Role of the National Statistical Office (NSO)

The Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics (ICBS) had a major role in the preparation of the report. The ICBS functions as the national focal point for all international reporting of SDG indicators data. This role requires from the ICBS to coordinate data collection from various government offices and other organizations in addition to providing data produced in the ICBS. The ICBS has been carrying out this work since international data collection started and before the national VNR process began. Based on the ICBS's responsibility for compiling, coordinating and reporting SDG indicators, its role in the completion of the VNR included:

- a. Mapping all relevant available data within the NSO, the National Statistical System (NSS) and beyond.
- b. Share this knowledge with all the relevant partners responsible for the different chapters in the report. All available data was made available to the writers so that they could be incorporated into chapters.
- c. provide guidance and statistical consultation services to government ministries when using data within their VNR chapters.
- d. Responsibility for writing and editing the statistical annex of the report. This role included collection of all available statistics and all relevant information regarding all 244 SDG indicators.

Statistical annex and statistics in the VNR

The VNR included statistics in the statistical annex and within the different chapters of the report.

Three main types of statistics were included in the report:

- a. Wherever it was possible and relevant data was aligned with the methodology and definitions of the global indicator framework.
- b. Additional data included national official statistics used as proxies for indicators that were not available as defined by the global indicator framework, or in other cases, where national official statistics was considered more relevant at the national level based on country characteristics or policy relevance.
- c. Additional data and information, traditionally not part of official statistics, provided by government ministries and other organization mainly for legislation and policy related indicators.

ICBS data for the statistical annex were based on two main types of ICBS data sources:

- a. Surveys conducted on an ongoing basis by the ICBS. These include surveys such as the labor force survey, household expenditure survey, social survey, victimization survey and more.
- b. Administrative sources such as the population register, social security and tax authority files, administrative files of the health and education systems and others.

Data for the selected indicators in the annex included a presentation of the current state at the national level and wherever possible the trend of at least the past ten years as well as international comparisons and any relevant disaggregation of the indicators (e.g., by sex, population group, age and more).

113 indicators were included in the statistical annex of the report. 88 indicators were based on ICBS data and 25 indicators were based on data and information from other government ministries or other agencies. 31 indicators contained relevant disaggregation based on available data.

Challenges and lessons learned

Platform for NSS capacity building and inter-governmental cooperation - Prior to the preparation of Israel's VNR, the ICBS started a process of mapping available SDG indicators data within the national statistical office (NSO) and in other governmental agencies for the purpose of providing maximum international reporting of all relevant data. This mapping process was complex at times since relations between international organizations (custodian agencies) and national data producers and suppliers often did not involve the NSO. One of the main contributions of the governmental VNR process in this respect is that in creating an intergovernmental task force, improvements in the quality of information concerning availability, relevance and development needs for the future were facilitated. The initial ICBS mapping was submitted to all members for

correction and completion. Members were also asked to send all past SDG reports to the ICBS and to coordinate all future reports with the ICBS so that after submitting Israel's first VNR no new data gaps will remain. A good example of cooperation with policy makers to improve data quality is the work done for the report by the Ministry of Construction and Housing on implementation of SDG 11 in Israel. Based on ICBS data, the ministry calculated SDG 11 indicators for Israel, developed new nationally specific relevant indicators for Israel and connected the indicators to challenges, policy and future trends. The result of this work is an additional side report dedicated only to SDG 11 implementation in Israel.

Promoting data-based decision making – Israel is currently in the process of developing a national indicator framework. Following the preparation of the VNR and based on the experience of the inter-ministerial task force, a government resolution on SDG indicators was approved in July 2019. This government resolution guides all government ministries to develop policy relevant indicators and mechanism's for publication and reporting. All this is to be done under the guidance of the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics functioning as the national focal point for reporting all SDG indicators. One of the straightforward lessons from the data collecting process for the statistical annex is that good quality data is more available or more easily obtainable when it is policy relevant or when there is motivation to promote policy measures for the matter in question. For this purpose, the inter-governmental team for implementation of the government resolution has set out to identify policy relevant indicators that correspond with the strategic planning issues that are planned to be dealt with in the coming years. Such strategic issues in Israel include for example the aging of the population, developing regional employment centers and exploiting innovation potential.

The need for the NSO to be involved in coordination throughout all statistics related issues in the VNR – although the ICBS was in involved in the overall preparation of the VNR, its major responsibility was preparing and editing the statistical annex. During the work process it became apparent that there were several discrepancies and contradictions between data included in the statistical annex and data presented in other chapters of the report. Data in the report were not subject to the same systematic quality checks and validations as in the statistical annex. Many times, government ministries involved in the preparation of the report were not aware the actions they need to take in order to ensure that the correct data are published. Furthermore, on many occasions, data in government ministries were not concentrated in one department and the representative of the ministry in the inter-governmental task force was not aware of all data available in his or her office. The reason for that was amongst other things because the

representatives came for departments more related to strategic planning or international relations rather than from departments in charge of producing data in the ministry. The ICBS conclusions and recommendations based on this experience is that in order for the NSO to be able to integrate and coordinate all statistical activities, first of all the NSO has to be defined as responsible for all statistics in the VNR. In addition, each ministry or other member needs to assign their own statistics-oriented representative that coordinates all statistical activities within the office and with the NSO.

Using statistical annexes for international SDG indicators reporting – an extensive amount of work has been put in collecting data and reporting SDG indicators in the VNR and especially in the statistical annex. This statistical effort can be used not only for submitting a report to the HLPF on sustainable development. After reviewing all SDG indicators available for Israel in the international databases it was apparent that not all indicators included in the annex are considered as available for Israel. A VNR statistical annex serves as a platform where all available SDG indicators of a country are concentrated in one place and given the necessary adjustments it could serve as a platform for reporting data to custodian agencies.
