

Economic Commission for Europe

Expert Meeting and Workshop on Statistics for SDGs,

Webinar “National SDG indicators and VNR”

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Session 5 - National SDG indicators and VNRs

Austria – Cooperation and coordination for the first VNR – role of Statistics Austria

Austria will present its first VNR at the United Nations High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development 2020 in New York. The VNR will include a chapter on progress regarding the SDGs in Austria which stems – in large parts - from the first national SDG-Indicators Report, written by Statistics Austria. This required a close co-operation between policy-makers and Statistics Austria.

Statistics Austria started in 2017 with the compilation of the [national indicator set](#) for the monitoring of the SDGs. Until now about 200 indicators are used in the national set, they are closely linked to the UN indicator proposals but taking into account the methodological data requirements of the European Statistical System. A close cooperation of all national data owners was necessary to find suitable existing data. Statistics Austria started a broad discussion and consultation process regarding the selection of indicators with ministries and other data owners. It should be noted that following the proposal of the first [Road map on statistics for SDGs](#) the national indicator set is under the responsibility of Statistics Austria.

In spring 2020, Statistics Austria will publish the first national SDG-Indicators Report with a main chapter on progress regarding the 17 goals. Part of this chapter is used for the VNR chapter "Progress regarding the SDGs", backed up with success stories from Austria for reaching the goals. This required close co-operation between the Federal Chancellery, the Federal Ministry of European and International Affairs (FMEIA), being together principally responsible for the VNR, and Statistik Austria. Several rounds of discussions were necessary both trilaterally and with an enlarged VNR working group of all ministries. Both cooperation partners (Federal Chancellery and FMEIA) took great care to respect statistical independence.

The chapter on progress is structured according to the 17 goals and contains key messages and a trend assessment of selected indicators – this according to the rules of Eurostat in their [monitoring report on sustainable development](#). In addition, main indicators are described in detail and some of them are presented graphically.

The preselection of these main indicators was done by Statistics Austria and discussed with the enlarged VNR working group. Ministries could propose further main indicators. It was of importance that the statistical analysis of the progress of the indicator was solely provided by Statistics Austria, as well as the trend assessment. This point was also strongly supported by the Federal Chancellery and the FMEIA, so that the VNR progress chapter could maintain its statistical independence.

As the VNR includes the chapter on "Progress regarding the SDGs", it was possible to do without a Statistical Annex. Instead the VNR will include some reference to the SDG-Indicators report. The latter contains in its annex the table of all national indicators.

Some challenge provided the transformation from “statistical language” as used in the SDG-Indicators report to a more “politically motivated language”, without losing the statistically correct statements. Still for the VNR, it was necessary to reword the statistically neutral terminology into a more easily understandable political language. See following an example for this:

Risk of poverty decreased by 0.4 percentage points was reworded into *Austria was able to reduce poverty by 0.4 percentage points*.

Working together clearly increased the amount of time required and also made it necessary to respond to each other's point of view but it improved the results of both reports – VNR and SDG-Indicators report.

Lessons learned:

- Close co-operation between policy-makers and statisticians can, on the one hand, enhance the VNR with essential data and, on the other hand, increase the importance of the monitoring process for the NSO.
- For this, the responsibilities – who is doing what - must be clearly defined.
- The statistical independence must be strictly respected and supported by all partners.
- A lot of coordination work is necessary but it is paying off.

Main point:

UN Handbook recommendation: Implementation of data in the VNR at least via Statistical Annex - Austria goes further: data chapter on progress in SDGs included in VNR that is based on the national SDG-indicators report.

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