

CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS

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Agenda

**OUTLINE OF A ROAD MAP FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF OFFICIAL
STATISTICS FOR MONITORING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS
IN THE UNECE REGION**

Prepared by the Secretariat

In June 2015, the Conference decided to launch work on a road map for the development of official statistics for monitoring the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the UNECE region. The CES Bureau decided to set up a Steering Group to coordinate and guide the work on the road map.

I. BACKGROUND

1. The UN General Assembly adopted the outcome document *Transforming our world: The 2030 agenda for sustainable development* on 25 September 2015. The document provides a plan of action for “people, planet and prosperity”. It sets 17 Goals and 169 targets that will induce “action over the next fifteen years in areas of critical importance for humanity and the planet”.
2. The outcome document emphasizes the importance of statistics and indicators for the follow-up and review of the achievement of Goals and targets. Paragraph 48 states that “Indicators are being developed to assist this work. Quality, accessible, timely and reliable disaggregated data will be needed to help with the measurement of progress and to ensure that no one is left behind. Such data is key to decision-making. Data and information from existing reporting mechanisms should be used where possible.”
3. Furthermore, paragraph 75 states that “The Goals and targets will be followed-up and reviewed using a set of global indicators. These will be complemented by indicators at the regional and national levels which will be developed by member states, in addition to the outcomes of work undertaken for the development of the baselines for those targets where national and global baseline data does not yet exist.”
4. In addition, the High-level Political Forum, created by resolution A/RES/67/290, recognizes the importance of the regional dimension in sustainable development “and invites the United Nations Regional Commissions to contribute to the work of the forum, including through regional annual meetings, with the involvement of other relevant regional entities, major groups and other relevant stakeholders, as appropriate.” In a more recent resolution, A/RES/69/214, the UN General Assembly asks the Regional Commissions to contribute to the work of the HLPF on the issue of monitoring and review of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.

5. The 2015 plenary session of the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) decided to “launch work on a road map for the development of official statistics for monitoring SDGs the UNECE region”¹. This road map “could contribute to a future action plan at a global level to succeed the Busan action plan for statistics adopted in 2011”.

6. In June 2015, the CES Plenary section also approved the “Declaration on the role of national statistical offices in measuring and monitoring the Sustainable Development Goals” (the Declaration, ECE/CES/89/Add. 1). The Declaration:

- (a) calls upon national governments to support national statistical offices in their key role in measuring and monitoring SDGs in countries and also recognizes the importance of cooperation at local, national, subregional, regional and global levels in monitoring SDGs; and
- (b) emphasizes the importance of efficient coordination of SDG monitoring and reporting at regional level between relevant international organizations and between international organizations and national statistical offices.

The road map for SDGs monitoring in the UNECE region is an important tool to implement this Declaration.

7. The road map will also contribute to the ongoing processes to establish the SDG indicator framework and follow-up and review process:

- (a) it will contribute as a regional input to the work of the HLPF which has a central role overseeing the processes at the global level and “will facilitate sharing of experiences, including successes, challenges and lessons learned, and provide political leadership, guidance and recommendations for follow-up. It will promote system-wide coherence and coordination of sustainable development policies”, and
- (b) it will contribute to the Interagency Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goals Indicators (IAEG-SDGs) by discussing the work plan, work methods and the way forward on SDG statistics.

8. The current document presents a draft outline of the roadmap for discussion by the CES Bureau. It will be updated to take into account the comments by the Bureau, and presented to the CES 2016 plenary session under the session “How to implement the monitoring system for the SDGs in UNECE region”.

9. On 31 August 2015, the Secretariat invited all CES members to provide input to the preparation of the road map. Sixteen countries provided comments². Extracts from these comments are also reflected in the outline below.

¹ ECE/CES/89, paragraph 23

² Belarus, Canada, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Mexico, Poland, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, United States

II. STRUCTURE OF THE ROAD MAP

10. The report of the 2015 Conference indicates six items that could be included in a road map for the development of official statistics in the UNECE region:

- (a) outline of the setup of reporting on SDGs in the UNECE region (who does what and when);
- (b) identification of new areas of statistics where internationally harmonized indicators need to be developed in cooperation with international organizations, academia, civil society, and other stakeholders;
- (c) strategy on how to reinforce communication with other data providers and users of official statistics, including policy makers;
- (d) strategy on how to deal with the required disaggregations of data;
- (e) plan for the necessary capacity building for reporting on SDGs; and
- (f) collaboration between various international agencies in the UNECE region.

11. The following two additional issues could be considered in the road map, which could be part of the sections below, or could be added as sections on their own:

- (a) development of an indicator list for UNECE region to complement the global list of indicators (establishing a process and timeline for this);
- (b) development of the baselines for targets.

12. The sections below describe the content of each item and list some of the comments received from countries. Some of these topics are also included in the proposal for in-depth reviews which could provide input to the road map (ECE/CES/BUR/2015/OCT/4).

A. Outline of the setup of reporting on SDGs in the UNECE region

13. This section will deal with the setup of reporting and monitoring of SDGs in the region. The setup can concern several levels and different issues, such as:

- (a) monitoring at national, regional and global levels;
- (b) links between the national, regional and global level monitoring;
- (c) establishment of a national focal point for SDG monitoring;
- (d) distribution of tasks between the different stakeholders (such as data collection, checking, validation, communication, etc.), responsibility for data quality;
- (e) how to establish data flows and technical means of data provision (between national, regional and global levels);
- (f) the role of international agencies and their cooperation.

14. The CES Declaration stipulates that NSOs should have a coordinating role in measuring and monitoring SDGs in countries. The road map may provide suggestions how to establish this role.

15. Some comments received from countries on the setup of reporting on SDGs in the UNECE region include:

- The road map should describe how the UNECE member states want to build up a review and monitoring framework at UNECE level (based on the CES

recommendations). Regional monitoring must be coordinated and led by the UNECE in a close cooperation with the OECD and Eurostat (Switzerland)

- Data reporting for the Members of European Union would be carried out using resources of Eurostat database. Using data from other databases (e.g. OECD, ILO) should be considered. In case the contents of available databases do not cover the demand - reporting should be carried out directly from the National Statistical Offices. (Poland)
- Cooperation is needed to avoid the duplication of the process and indicators (Estonia)
- This section should also examine collaboration with other data producers: how to work with data scientists/big data/strategic partnerships, etc. (France)

B. Identification of new areas of statistics where indicators need to be developed

16. This section will identify which data for SDGs monitoring are currently not available in the statistical system and need to be developed. Countries who sent their input to the road map suggested to group the SDG indicators according to the following criteria:

- a) Indicators that are already produced,
- b) Indicators that can be produced within mid-term timeframe (up to 5 years),
- c) Indicators that require more than 5 years for their development.

17. The section should also look at data sources, and identify areas where the SDG indicators will (continue to) be produced outside official statistics. The Section could provide some indication of the resources needed to develop the new statistical areas.

18. Some comments received by countries on the development of new statistics on SDGs in the UNECE region include:

- Within the UNECE region, identification of new areas where official statistics needs to be developed must be driven by each individual country's government priorities. (Canada)
- It is a complicated issue and necessitates a gradual approach, such as:
 - Identification of data that are currently available for monitoring of SDGs;
 - Identification of data that can be derived from the existing data;
 - Identification of data that necessitates new data sources and new statistics;
 - What initiatives should be implemented to cover the new needs for data and statistics?

Furthermore, it is worth discussing how we manage the differences in data coverage between the Member States and whether there is a possibility for a standardized approach in order to solve the problem of data gaps. (Denmark)

- An inventory study on the basis of indicators for UNECE countries could be recommended in order to determine data availability of SDG indicators (including disaggregation). For the success of this inventory study, detailed metadata for each indicator should be provided beforehand. (Turkey)

C. Communication strategy towards other data providers and users of official statistics

19. This section will deal with the communication of SDG indicators to various users, such as government agencies and ministries, academia, media, NGOs and the general audience. In the Declaration, Chief Statisticians committed to engage effectively with data producers within the official statistical system, provide advice on methods to ensure high quality of data, provide leadership in the dissemination and communication of data on SDGs, and advise in the interpretation of data.

20. The road map should deal with several aspects of communication related to SDG indicators:

- a) Communicating with policy makers. This will be required concerning the selection of indicators and continue after the indicator lists will be established: the measurement framework will evolve and new data/indicators may become available. Several countries emphasized the need to manage the (high) expectations of policy makers;
- b) Communicating the indicators and indicator sets to users;
- c) Communicating with data providers: both inside and outside the statistical system;
- d) Communicating the value of official statistics as compared to other potential SDG data providers. The work of the UNECE Task Force on Value of Official Statistics will be very useful in this respect.

21. Several countries suggested setting up an electronic platform on the monitoring of implementation of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda in the region.

22. Some comments received by countries on communication on SDGs include:

- A road map itself is a communication tool to present where and when we want to do what (best if everything has a price tag). It is not only important to communicate well but also to be in a position to react quickly to new events. The road map should describe the purpose of the communication, with whom we need to communicate, when and what we want to bring up and very important, who has the lead. (Switzerland)
- The communication with users will be very important. This concerns the general user as well as the advanced user in the form of scientists, modelers and policy makers that may need data and assessments that partly fall outside of the statistical realm. The coordination of the reporting could also include a mapping of the actors producing the data and using the data in policy, to see how the interaction with the statistical community can become more effective. (Sweden)
- UNECE members can provide important leadership by managing expectations through early, consistent, and broad communication on the production of statistics for the SDG indicators. It should be made clear that the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics will guide NSOs in the production of these statistics. NSOs are accountable to the public to continuously improve the quality of their statistical products. This may mean to make greater efforts to communicate about statistical products with

stakeholders and the public at large. It is through this teaching stance that we can contribute to greater public knowledge. (United States)

- Within the big number of indicators, each of them describes a small part of reality in figures. To find information within this data, guidance is necessary. So all types of state-of-the-art communication should be used such as cross cutting topics, user-specific communication, maps, storytelling and visualization, video, cross-cultural topics, data visualization, open data portal, adding of geospatial information, using of web2.0-tools such as forums, twitter, blogs, etc. (Germany)

D. Strategy on how to deal with the required disaggregations of data

23. The outcome document calls for “data disaggregated by income, sex, age, race, ethnicity, migration status, disability, geographic location and other characteristics relevant in national contexts” (paragraph 74 (g)). This section of the road map will cover how to deal with the required data disaggregations for SDG targets, observing good practices in statistical reporting, particularly the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics, as committed in the CES Declaration. The Section could analyse the following issues:

- a) which targets require disaggregations and according to which parameters;
- b) issues linked with disaggregating data, such as data availability, confidentiality, legal issues, cost and data quality;
- c) possible solutions how to provide disaggregated data (e.g. developing standard breakdowns of data).

24. Some comments received by countries on data disaggregation include:

- It is important that a road map describes the topic very well, the real need of the disaggregation and what level of disaggregation should be produced. Producing disaggregated data needs further resources. Disaggregation can also be very sensitive or even legally not allowed in some countries. (Switzerland)
- Budgetary constraints will prevent us from producing all these statistics with the usual methods and quality requirements. We should look together for alternative approaches, such as producing detailed statistics with lower frequency, consider different quality labelling, use alternative methods, etc. (France)
- Caution is necessary in further breakdown of indicators; very detailed indicators (based on (sample) surveys) can result in data reliability being too low, which will make their presentation impossible (this is particularly true for smaller countries). (Slovenia)
- In-depth disaggregation of data for small countries could cause confidentiality problems. Therefore, confidentiality issues have to be carefully evaluated and recommendations to overcome this issue could be produced (Latvia, Lithuania)
- The right way forward would be to study what disaggregation are possible in different Member States and discuss how do we approach the ‘disaggregation gaps’ This underlines the importance of using of administrative data in statistics, as it addresses, among many other advantages, the question of disaggregation in an adequate way. (Denmark) *[Note: Denmark proposes a project on “Measuring SDGs using administrative data”.]*

E. Plan for necessary capacity building for reporting on SDGs

25. The production of SDG statistics will require that NSOs have the technical means to collect and process data. Therefore, plans for capacity building in certain countries and in certain areas are needed. The Declaration includes a commitment to “develop statistical capacity in countries to ensure good quality reporting on SDGs” and recognizes that “additional effort and investments will be required to maintain the necessary infrastructure for the production of statistics”.

26. An initial approach would be to identify those areas where capacity building is most urgently needed, including components of data production, dissemination and communication. As new areas of statistics are being implemented, the plans for capacity building should cover both developing and developed countries. In addition, the importance of sharing experiences and learning from peer mechanisms are acknowledged in the Declaration.

27. Some comments received by countries on capacity building for SDGs in the UNECE region include:

- A strong coordination of capacity building activities among UNECE countries can help to maximize the effectiveness and help address scarcity of resources. UNECE working with PARIS21 could be an excellent avenue to help ensure coordination. (Canada)
- This is a very important topic to discuss, including how do we approach capacity-building, under which fora and do we aim for a general strategy (for example, can we aim for common ‘bottom line’ for data coverage in the Member States across the UNECE) or do we make it more country specific. As a Member of the High Level Group this item is especially important to Denmark. (Denmark)
- Production of all SDGs will require additional financial resources, as mentioned in the Declaration. It is desirable that the Declaration is widely and officially circulated for the attention of the national governments. It should also be observed that necessary statistical capacity building requires not only financial resources, but also takes time for training of staff or upgrading of IT infrastructure. (Lithuania)
- A platform or a wiki can be created, where countries can share best practices, tools, knowledge and experiences. Furthermore a repository of all definitions regarding the development of indicators at UNECE-level would be a very useful activity. (Germany)
- We need to formulate a plan where capacity building is described in the short-, middle- and long term to guarantee a national, regional and global monitoring. If possible, the next steps should be described in a detailed manner and with a price tag. This will be helpful when we communicate with agencies for development to mobilize money. (Switzerland)

F. Collaboration between various international agencies in the UNECE region

28. This Section will discuss how different international agencies can collaborate in the SDG reporting in the region. It can outline the ways of collaboration and coordination between UNECE, OECD, Eurostat, CIS-STAT and with other international organizations. A successful collaboration between various international agencies is also closely linked to the setup of reporting discussed in Section A. The Declaration recognizes that cooperation is

important in monitoring SGDs at local, national, subregional, regional and global levels. In order to do so, the Declaration emphasizes the importance of efficient coordination between international organizations and between international organizations and national statistical systems.

29. Some comments received by countries on the collaboration between international agencies in the UNECE region include:

- Methodological guidance on the indicators will be necessary and this coordination work on methodology will ideally be part of the on-going coordination at an international level on the SDGs. (Ireland)
- Setting up of a monitoring and review system in the UNECE region should take into account OECD and EU. All international organizations have their own experiences in different areas that can be used. In addition, other organizations and agencies should be taken on board, i.e. PARIS21. A road map at the UNECE level should briefly describe the role of the different organizations and agencies and how their programs could be used and how they coordinate. (Switzerland)

III. PROPOSAL FOR A DECISION BY THE BUREAU

30. The Bureau is invited to comment on the outline of the road map and planned contents of the different sections, and provide advice on developing the different parts.

31. Furthermore, the scope and timeframe of implementing a monitoring system for SDGs would require a group of member countries to steer the work, contribute to developing the road map and identify priority tasks. **In view of this, the Bureau is invited to establish a Steering Group to coordinate and guide the work on developing the road map for monitoring SDGs in the UNECE region.**

32. The following countries and organizations who have contributed actively to work related to sustainable development, and to the outline of the road map could be invited to join the Steering Group: Canada, Denmark, Germany, France, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, United Kingdom, United States, Eurostat and OECD. Any other countries and organizations are welcome to join the Steering Group.

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