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Road Map on statistics for Sustainable Development Goals

Results of the consultation on the *Road Map on Statistics for Sustainable Development Goals*

Addendum

Note by the Secretariat

Summary

This note summarizes the comments by members of the Conference of European Statisticians on the *Road Map on Statistics for Sustainable Development Goals*. The secretariat carried out an electronic consultation on the Road Map in March 2017.

Forty five countries and five international organizations replied to the request for comments. There was general support for the Road Map and for the proposals on its implementation. Countries and organizations also provided detailed comments on individual sections that are summarized in this document.

The Road Map was also discussed at the Expert Meeting on statistics for SDGs on 10-12 April 2017 in Geneva. The text of the Road Map is updated to incorporate the suggestions made in the electronic consultation and at the Expert Meeting.

In view of the strong support received, the 2017 Conference of European Statisticians plenary session will be invited to endorse the *Road Map on statistics for Sustainable Development Goals* as the First Edition. The Road Map reflects the knowledge and international guidance on statistics for SDGs that is currently available. The document will be updated in the next years to take into account the developments related to statistics for SDGs.

I. Introduction

1. The present note summarizes the comments by members of the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) on the *Road Map on Statistics for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)*, received through electronic consultation in March 2017.
2. The Road Map is prepared by a Steering Group on statistics for SDGs. The Steering Group includes representatives of 17 countries: Switzerland (co-chair), United States (co-chair), Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Kyrgyzstan, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Poland, Republic of Moldova, Russian Federation, Sweden, Turkey and United Kingdom. The following international organizations are represented: Eurostat and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) acts as secretariat to the Steering Group.
3. The text of the Road Map has benefited from several rounds of updates and consultations to reflect the suggestions by CES (including at the previous CES plenary session in April 2016) and its Bureau, and relevant developments at global and regional levels.

II. Summary

4. The following 45 countries and 5 organizations responded to the electronic consultation: Albania, Andorra, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Canada, Czechia, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Lithuania, Mexico, Montenegro, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom, United States, Eurasian Economic Commission (EEC), Eurostat, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), OECD and Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).
5. The consultation provided rich input to updating the Road Map. The comments and proposals from the consultation will be also taken into account in further work of the Steering Group and in implementing the Road Map.
6. There was a lot of support for the Road Map and positive comments about its clarity and usefulness. Several countries informed that they were already using the Road Map in practical statistical work and in communications.
7. Out of the 50 respondents, 48 expressed explicitly that the Road Map is ready for endorsement by the CES plenary session, subject to incorporation of the comments made in the consultation. Two countries (**Bulgaria** and **Romania**) asked for more clarity about the data flows before endorsing the Road Map.
8. Three Sections of the Road Map received more substantive comments, namely Section III “Establishing national mechanisms for collaboration”, Section VI “Providing data on global SDG indicators”, and Section VII “Building capacity for SDG statistics”.
9. The issues covered in the above mentioned three Sections were discussed thoroughly at the Expert Meeting on statistics for SDGs (10-12 April 2017). The discussion allowed to bring more clarity into the issues, and to identify the actions needed to make progress. These three Sections of the Road Map were carefully revised to reflect the comments received in the electronic consultation and outcomes of the Expert Meeting.

10. All updates were agreed by the Steering Group. A summary of the comments and the resulting changes to the Road Map is provided below.

III. General comments

11. Many countries praised the Road Map as a comprehensive, well-prepared and useful document. **Austria** noted that the document is well-designed and offers a broad guidance for the implementation of SDG indicators. **Belarus, France, Greece, Montenegro** and **Slovenia** considered the road map to be a valuable methodological document. **Bosnia and Herzegovina** mentioned that it gives a broad, clear and understandable picture. **Latvia** noted that the road map is one of the most comprehensive overviews on the work planned for statistics of SDGs so far. **Portugal** considered that the document contains important guidelines to better identify the model that best suits national circumstances. **Spain** said that all sections of the document were relevant.

12. Several countries informed that they are already using the Road Map in communication with stakeholders, including with policy makers. For example, **Norway** noted that the Road Map can help to raise awareness of the complexity and issues related to providing official statistics for SDGs.

13. Several countries praised the case studies and noted the usefulness of the template for data assessment.

14. A number of countries, such as **Andorra, Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Dominican Republic, Hungary, Lithuania** and **Portugal**, welcomed the clear recommendation that NSO should be the coordinating authority for SDG indicators. The Dominican Republic noted that for countries whose level of development is not comparable with those of the CES region, the national statistical office (NSO) should be strengthened through legal framework and reinforcement of the statistical system to be able to effectively carry out its coordinating role for SDG indicators.

15. **Australia** expressed concern about the suggestion of NSO's as chief producers of SDG reporting which is not in the mandate of NSOs and will jeopardise their ability to maintain independence from government. (This issue and the related updates to the Road Map are explained in more detail in Section IV.A below).

16. **Belarus** mentioned that the support of international organizations is very important, particularly by the development of methodological materials and training courses. **Switzerland** noted that the Road Map is ambitious and needs resources for its implementation. It is likely that countries may implement simplified pragmatic solutions.

17. **OHCHR** underlined the importance of human rights in the context of statistics for SDGs. The human rights guidance and the UN Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics are fully consistent. NSOs, as other government agencies, play an important role in the protection and realization of human rights. OHCHR has produced a note referring to international human rights norms and principles that are particularly relevant to statistics. The note provides practical guidance on how these standards can be operationalized in statistical work, concerning the issues of participation, data disaggregation, self-identification, transparency, privacy and accountability. A reference to the OHCHR guidelines is included in the updated text of the Road Map.

IV. Comments on specific sections

18. The comments on specific sections of the Road Map are summarized below together with a summary of changes to the text. Some respondents also provided specific editorial feedback which was taken into account.

A. Section III. Establishing national mechanisms for collaboration

19. A number of countries expressed support for the proposal that NSOs should be the national body coordinating the provision of statistics for SDGs (**Andorra, Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Dominican Republic, Hungary, Lithuania and Portugal**).

20. **Australia** cautioned about the role of NSOs in SDG reporting: “ABS is concerned that the suggestion of NSO's as chief producers of SDG reporting will jeopardise their ability to maintain 'independence' from government. The suggestion that NSO's be responsible for reporting progress on SDGs ultimately implies that NSOs are holding governments to account for their progress. This is not a mandate of NSO's.” Australia suggested changes to the wording related to this issue in the Executive Summary, Introduction and in the recommendations to NSOs (recommendations b, c and d in Section III.D).

21. **Estonia** suggests “to use a term ‘provide statistics’ or ‘monitor’ instead of ‘report’ as there is no other reporting from the countries foreseen to UN on implementing SDGs than the report to HLPF as far as we have found out.” **Slovenia** suggested using the wording of the *CES Declaration on the role of NSOs in measuring and monitoring SDGs*.

22. **Finland, Montenegro and Ukraine** indicated that other ministries are responsible for coordination of the work on SDG indicators where NSO is a partner in the process (Montenegro) or has a limited role (Finland and Ukraine). **Israel** noted that it might be helpful to include a recommendation for establishing a national SDG implementation focal point (led by policy makers) that will guide and work alongside the statistical office as the statistics focal point.

23. **Latvia** pointed out that the recommendation about the role of NSOs in providing statistics for SDGs should be viewed on par with national legislation describing the role of NSO and the statistical system. Latvia asked for guidance on how to integrate SDG related processes within an established system of cooperation between statisticians and policy makers, and how to strengthen cooperation with partners beyond the national statistical system.

24. **Dominican Republic and Estonia** highlighted that national governments play a key role in strengthening the "weight" of national statistical offices related to SDG statistics and ensuring that work with the indicators is NSO's responsibility. Dominican Republic asked for guidance on how to establish mechanisms of coordination in case of conflicts between institutions responsible for the accomplishment of a certain SDG target.

25. **Greece** noted that it would be useful to share national road maps via web.

Main changes to the Road Map to reflect the comments

26. Some concerns arose from a different understanding what is meant by "reporting SDG indicators" because the word “reporting” is often used in the context of policy reporting. Therefore, "reporting" is replaced in the text of the Road Map with "providing statistics for SDGs" or "providing data on SDG indicators”.

27. The formulation in Section III is made consistent with the *CES Declaration on the role of NSOs* that speaks about NSOs “key coordinating role in measuring and monitoring

SDGs in countries”. The text is also updated to indicate that there may be already existing structures for monitoring policy implementation in countries that have to be taken into account. Furthermore, the importance of collaboration with the national coordinating body on SDG implementation and strengthening cooperation with the relevant national partners on SDG indicators is emphasised.

B. Section IV. Assessing countries’ readiness to provide data on global SDG indicators

28. The comments on this Section were mainly to improve the clarity of the text and to add some additional considerations. **Greece** and **Hungary** underlined that it is important to give NSOs a possibility to decide on the use of non-official sources. **Brazil** emphasised the importance of having a quality assessment of the data from non-official sources.

29. **Hungary** proposed that the UNECE region could have its own Tier classification, which might differ from the global one.

30. **Norway, Poland** and **The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia** asked for more clarity about non-statistical indicators.

31. **Latvia, Norway** and **Slovakia** raised the need for information on contacts of the international organizations (custodian agencies for SDG indicators) in countries. This information is crucial for identifying the data sources for SDG indicators but difficult to collect at country level.

32. **Brazil, Portugal** and **Switzerland** asked for more clarification on disaggregations, including who and how decides which disaggregations are mandatory and relevant in a particular country context. **United States** indicated that the specifics of disaggregations have not so far been well covered in developing the SDG indicators. Each disaggregation should be addressed separately as it requires specific expertise.

33. **Andorra** asked for a platform where countries could share national experiences with the assessments. As a response, the Secretariat encourages countries to upload the results of their assessments to the UNECE wiki on statistics for SDGs¹.

Main changes to the Road Map to reflect the comments

34. The title of the Section is reformulated as explained in para 26.

35. The point about a need for information from custodian agencies on their country contacts is added to the text. [This is also reflected in the report of UNSC 2017 session and in decisions of the Expert Meeting on statistics for SDGs in April 2017.]

36. Some explanation and examples on non-statistical indicators are included in the text. The Road Map acknowledges that the role of an NSO vis-à-vis non-statistical indicators may vary according to national circumstances. The Road Map asks for an appropriate global body (such as IAEG-SDGs) to identify which are the non-statistical indicators on the global SDG indicator list.

37. The Road Map acknowledges that further work on disaggregations is needed. Any work related to disaggregations at regional level should be undertaken in close collaboration with the IAEG-SDGs subgroup on disaggregations.

¹ <http://www1.unece.org/stat/platform/display/SFSDG>

C. Section V. Developing regional, national and subnational indicators

38. The comments on this Section were mainly to improve the clarity of the text and to add more detail on specific issues.

39. **France** considered the section very useful and noted that it makes clearer the differences between levels of reporting. **Lithuania** considered the criteria for setting up national indicators to be relevant and suitable. **Hungary** emphasised the importance of building synergies among the indicator sets at different levels. **Switzerland** underlined the necessity of parsimony in developing indicator sets.

40. **Estonia** asked for more clarity about the plans concerning regional indicators for the UNECE region.

41. **Latvia** asked for providing guidance to countries that are dealing with SDGs in their existing policy monitoring system. Latvia proposed to make maximum use of the existing national sustainable development indicators and brought the EU SDI set as a good example. **Switzerland** underlined that the use of a conceptual framework would help to choose and justify the selection of indicators. **Israel** noted that lessons for the implementation of national indicators could be learned from other related national statistical sets, such as well-being indicators.

42. **Montenegro** emphasised the importance of a national strategy on sustainable development as a basis for national indicators. **Switzerland** emphasised that the localisation of SDGs should be based on existing national or subnational strategies.

43. **FAO** commented that IAEG-SDGs has decided not to use headline indicators.

Main changes to the Road Map to reflect the comments

44. The text on the need to use existing mechanisms and processes for measuring progress towards SDGs, including existing policies and indicators related to sustainable development, is strengthened.

45. More detail is provided concerning regional and sub-regional indicators in the UNECE region, based on the outcomes of the Expert Meeting on statistics for SDGs in April 2017, and updated information from CIS-Stat, Eurostat and OECD. The Road Map clarifies that the policy makers have so far not raised the need for regional indicators covering the whole UNECE region.

46. Concerning possible headline indicators that countries may choose to use, it is underlined that this would be done for communication purposes and should not imply a hierarchy between goals and targets.

D. Section VI. Providing data on global SDG indicators

47. This Section received the highest number of comments from countries and organizations. A number of countries asked for more clarity and guidance on data flows and stressed that the Section should be updated to take into account the decisions of UNSC and IAEG-SDGs, the resolution adopted by UNSC and other relevant developments. Two countries (**Bulgaria** and **Romania**) asked for more clarity on data flows before endorsing the Road Map.

48. The text in the Road Map has been extensively updated to take on board the recent decisions and developments. At the same time, the Road Map recognises that more work needs to be done to establish efficient data flow mechanisms in practice. This Section will be further developed in the next editions of the Road Map as new/additional decisions are taken and experience is acquired.

49. A number of countries (**Austria, Belarus, Brazil, Hungary, Portugal, Switzerland, United States**) emphasised the need to ensure country ownership of data and have clear principles and processes to deal with inconsistencies between data made available by NSOs and by different international, regional and supranational organizations. **France** suggested adding a reference to the country data lab project that will contribute to clarify discrepancies between national and international organizations' data.

50. **Andorra** and **Bosnia and Herzegovina** asked for a common format for providing data on SDG indicators, including a common metadata template.

51. **Norway** and **Switzerland** raised the question of the burden on NSO if they are to be the coordinator of the SDG indicators and responsible for assessing quality of data coming from other data producers. Norway suggested relying on existing reporting mechanisms to international organizations. Several countries emphasised the need to minimize the burden of providing SDG indicators and to avoid duplicate reporting lines (**Lithuania, Spain**).

52. **Estonia** asked for more guidance on how statistical data and SDG indicators are used by countries for HLPF reporting.

53. **Israel** requested a schedule for providing data on SDG indicators for the annual global SDG report.

54. **Japan** asked for a common understanding of what constituted a proxy indicator and for sharing best practices in dealing with proxy indicators.

55. **Latvia** indicated that as the mechanisms of data collection are yet to be established, the simultaneous global and regional processes related to statistics for SDGs limit NSOs possibilities in planning their work in a comprehensive and timely way, especially in decentralized systems.

Main changes to the Road Map to reflect the comments

56. The Section's title is reformulated as explained in para 26. The text of this Section is extensively updated to reflect the decisions and developments during the previous months, based on the reports of UNSC and IAEG-SDGs. The wording is improved to be consistent with the terms used in the UN documents related to follow-up and review of progress towards SDGs.

57. More explanation is provided on the purpose of the global SDG indicators and their use for the global follow-up and review. The description of the role of custodian agencies is included, based on the report of IAEG-SDGs.

58. The data flow models are updated. Text on ensuring the country ownership and on clarifying the discrepancies between national and international organizations' data is strengthened in several places. The Road Map recognises that, on the one hand, the preparation of the UN Secretary General's report and the HLPF are already ongoing using data provided by international organizations. On the other hand, the mechanisms for providing data are not set in stone and there are many opportunities for clarifying and improving the international processes related to statistics for SDGs. The Road Map will follow-up on the relevant decisions and developments in its next editions.

E. Section VII. Building capacity for SDG statistics

59. This was another Section that received the most substantive comments. Several countries and organizations highlighted that although all countries will require increasing their statistical capacities for SDG indicators, the Section deals with capacity building mostly from developing countries' viewpoint.

60. The issue of improving statistical capacities for SDGs was discussed at the Expert Meeting on statistics for SDGs in April 2017. The meeting concluded that conceptual work is needed to clarify definitions and terminology and rethink the approach to capacity building. Following the Expert Meeting a task team was set up to define and clarify the issues of building statistical capacities in the context of SDGs.

61. **Norway** suggested that the chapter should make clearer what is meant by capacity, which are the types of capacities to be built, and made a proposal based on work undertaken by the Nordic countries. **Estonia** and Norway highlighted that the Section was not responsive enough to the needs of targets 17.18 and 17.19 are valid for both developed and developing countries. **Austria** and Estonia noted that this chapter should be more detailed and concrete, including on the required financial resources. **Bosnia and Herzegovina** noted that a better understanding of the importance of statistical institutions and their funding needs among policymakers is required to enable NSOs to provide statistics for SDGs.

62. **Eurostat** and **OECD** pointed out that the concept of national statistical development strategies (NSDS) applies to the developing countries only and therefore the recommendations in the Section were not applicable to the whole UNECE region.

63. **FAO** remarked that the Section did not recognise the special role of custodian agencies in providing capacity development for compilation of SDG indicators.

64. **Andorra** noted that it would be useful for capacity building purposes to identify which indicators can be produced in short, medium and long-term.

65. **Latvia** underlined the role of coordination within the European Statistical System regarding identification of common data gaps.

66. **United States** stressed that, to make progress in this area countries should develop their own Road Maps according to national circumstances and priorities. US also underlined the importance of a strategic approach and setting priorities in improving statistical capacities, as the issues concern organizational obstacles/opportunities, resource requirements, cost constraints, etc.

67. **Estonia** suggested that the chapter should describe a set of measures to elevate the SDG indicators to the level of official statistics.

68. **Turkey** suggested the road map to have a summary table as Annex identifying where countries need support, based on the survey conducted by the Steering Group on NSOs' strategies and plans related to statistics for SDGs.

Main changes to the Road Map to reflect the comments

69. The text of the Road Map has been updated to reflect the comments and discussion during the Expert Meeting on statistics for SDGs (Geneva, 10-12 April 2017). The text emphasises the need for building and improving statistical capacities both in developed and in developing countries. There is more focus on SDG targets 17.18 and 17.19.

70. A task team has been set up to develop a concept note on statistical capacity building in the context of SDGs is included (the team should work in close collaboration with the Paris21 Task Team on new approaches to capacity development).

71. More detail on the capacities to be built is included (based on Norway's contribution). The Road Map further underlines the importance of a holistic approach and long-term view of capacity building. The special role of custodian agencies in capacity building is noted.

72. This Section will be developed further in the next editions of the Road Map, to give a more balanced approach to capacity building to cover the needs of all countries regardless of the level of their statistical development.

F. Section VIII. Communication of statistics for SDGs

73. The comments on this Section were mainly to improve the clarity of the text and to bring in additional ideas to improve the communication of statistics for SDGs.

74. **Montenegro** welcomed the recommendation that NSOs should develop a communication strategy for SDGs. **Finland** noted that communication and visibility should be part of the general SDG strategy at the national and global level. Publishing the indicators with other information on SDG work would promote the Agenda 2030.

75. **Latvia** welcomed that the communication needs within NSOs and within statistical systems are also considered. This can require significant resources, especially in countries where NSOs have so far not been involved in statistics on sustainable development and little experience is available. Latvia would welcome closer collaboration between countries to share good practices and practical solutions in this area. **Switzerland** suggested building on the experience acquired by countries and organizations that are already publishing sustainable development indicator sets.

76. **Lithuania** considered the recommendations useful for developing closer cooperation with other institutions producing official statistics.

77. **Poland** pointed out the need to explain to the users clearly the differences between different levels of indicators (global, regional, national).

Main changes to the Road Map to reflect the comments

78. The comments are taken into account in updating the text. The points about the link between communicating statistics for SDGs and a general national SDG communication strategy, and the need to share good practices and experience by countries are added. The Road Map notes that communication of sustainable development indicators in a comprehensive and overarching manner will require significant planning, coordination and resources, especially in countries where the statistical offices so far have not been involved in communicating issues related to sustainable development.

G. Annexes

79. Several case studies in Annex I are updated to take into account the latest developments, namely the case studies 2 (Poland), 3 (Russian Federation), 4 (Switzerland), 9 (Mexico), and 10 (United States).

VI. Proposals to the Conference

80. The Conference is invited to:

- Endorse the *Road Map on Statistics for Sustainable Development Goals, First Edition* with the understanding that the text will be updated in the coming years as new decisions are taken by the relevant UN bodies and new experience becomes available.
- Discuss how to implement the Road Map (including the actions identified in the Road Map), and how international work can support national implementation.