

CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS

Approved

Meeting of the 2018/2019 Bureau
Geneva (Switzerland), 14-15 October 2018

Item 4 (d) of the Provisional
Agenda

**PROGRESS REPORT AND PLANS FOR THE 2ND EDITION OF ROAD MAP ON
STATISTICS FOR SDGS**

Note by the Steering Group

This note provides a progress report on the work completed since June 2018 by the UNECE Steering Group on Statistics for SDGs, with a focus on the Task Force on National Reporting Platforms (which mandate expires in October 2018), and results of the second pilot of data flows carried out over summer of 2018.

Furthermore, in June 2018, the Conference supported the proposal for a second edition of the 'Road Map on Statistics for SDGs', and requested the Steering Group to prepare a plan and timetable for its preparation.

The Bureau is invited to (1) comment on the progress achieved, including on the outcome of the second pilot of data flows, and (2) provide feedback on the plans for the second edition of the Road Map.

I. BACKGROUND

1. In 2015, the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) launched work on a road map for the development of official statistics for monitoring SDGs. A Steering Group was set up for this purpose in October 2016, consisting of 17 countries and Eurostat, OECD and UNECE. It was co-chaired by Switzerland (until September 2018) and United States (until December 2017). Currently it is co-chaired by Poland (since January 2018) and Sweden (since September 2018).

2. CES endorsed the *Road Map on statistics for SDGs* in June 2017. In June 2018 the CES plenary session considered progress in implementing the Road Map, and noted that:

- a) The Road Map is an effective resource that countries can adapt to their national circumstances. Countries have made considerable progress in its implementation;
- b) It is important to understand how the data moves between countries and custodian agencies, including the data flows that are already well established. Discussion at global level is needed to find ways to organize the SDG data provision in an efficient and transparent manner, taking into account the needs of both countries and international organizations, and ensuring that the data are of high quality.

3. The Conference emphasised that the work should continue under the guidance of the CES Steering Group, including in the four subgroups of the Steering Group which are developing practical tools to support the implementation of the Road Map in the areas of national reporting platforms, data flows, statistical capacity, and communication of statistics

for SDGs. The Conference noted that these inputs also have contributed to work at the global level.

4. 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.

5. The present note summarizes the work completed by the Steering Group with a focus on most recent developments (since June 2018), in particular on the National Reporting Platforms and the second pilot of data flows that was carried out in summer 2018.¹ The document also presents the plans for preparing the second edition of the Road Map.

II. RECENT WORK UNDER THE STEERING GROUP

Task Force on National Reporting Platforms

6. The Task Force on National Reporting Platforms (NRPs) (currently chaired by Sweden) was established in 2016 to facilitate sharing of country experiences in using online platforms to provide statistics for SDGs. The work of the Task Force has contributed to widespread use of NRPs as a means to communicate and provide national statistics for global and national SDG indicators; 33 CES countries currently use or plan to use such platforms. The Task Force has 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).

7. The Task Force is currently completing its third report to provide extended practical guidance in establishing NRPs, including improving interoperability across platforms and on denoting national SDG indicators and proxy global SDG indicators in NRPs. The report will include over 10 country case studies.

8. **The Task Force's terms of reference expire in October 2018.** With the achievement of its activities planned in the terms of reference (except for editing its third report, expected in December this year), **the work of the Task Force will be concluded.**

Task Team on Data Flows

9. The Task Team on Data Flows (co-chaired by France and Turkey) was established in 2017 to provide practical suggestions to support data flows for global SDG indicators. In summer 2017, the Team conducted a **first pilot study of data flows** of SDG indicators involving countries and custodian agencies (agencies responsible for different SDG indicators). Five countries and six custodian agencies participated in the first pilot. The pilot's practical recommendations informed discussions at the global level, and were reflected in the IAEG-SDG *Guidelines on global data flows* that were considered at the 49th session of UNSC in March 2018.

¹ For a summary of Steering Group activities prior to June 2018 including an analysis of the implementation of the Road Map within the UNECE region, please see [ECE/CES/2018/40](#). For Steering Group products, please see <https://statswiki.unece.org/display/SFSDG/Steering+Group>.

10. In August 2018, the Task Team completed its **second pilot study of data flows**. The pilot focused on indicators for which global statistics are difficult for NSOs to validate given the nature or origin of the data (non-statistical indicators, indicators based on non-traditional data sources, or data modelled by custodian agencies). Forty countries and five agencies participated in the pilot covering eleven indicators.

11. **The results of the data flow pilots focus on practical guidance for countries**, and suggestions that could help to make the process more efficient for the benefit of the countries and the global process as a whole. The high number of countries (including from outside the UNECE region) participating in this voluntary exercise shows the interest of countries in the transmission of their data to the custodian agencies and to the global SDG database.

12. **The main findings and some practical suggestions that could improve the process** are presented below (more detail is provided in the Annex which was sent to the co-chairs of IAEG-SDG and the co-chairs of CCSA):

- a) Problems in communication, mainly due to the fact that country focal points are not known to the custodian agencies and vice versa. Agencies' data collection calendars are incomplete and difficult to find. UNSD has established **a dashboard listing contact focal points** but there **should be a possibility for countries and agencies themselves to update this on a continuous basis**. Furthermore, NSOs are not aware of some data flows that are well-established with agencies outside NSOs. At the same time, existing data flows should be used as much as possible to avoid duplication of reporting. Therefore, **the custodian agencies should always inform the NSO focal point on SDGs when requesting data from countries**.
- b) Problems with metadata: Some Tier 1 and 2 indicator metadata are insufficient (incomplete, misclassified, lacking, inconsistent, or difficult to understand). Countries sometimes disagree with metadata which impose a data source or a method of estimation done by agencies. **Metadata for Tier 1 and Tier 2 indicators should be systematically reviewed** to ensure that they conform to the quality and the format recommended by IAEG-SDGs (currently IAEG-SDGs reviews only Tier 3 metadata).
- c) Data validation processes are not transparent: Sometimes NSOs disagree with the data published in the global database and have detected obvious errors, or NSOs are not asked to validate the data at all. Data validation by country is sometimes complex and requires sufficient time for countries and agencies to conduct their tasks professionally. The **validation process should be well documented, noting the source of data in the global database and the status of validation** to allow for different levels of maturity (validated by country, pending review, cannot be validated as the country does not have the data, country does not agree with the data, etc.).

13. The pilot also identified a number of problems or errors with the metadata related to the eleven indicators covered. These have been communicated to the custodian agencies and UNSD.

14. The initial findings and recommendations were shared with the co-chairs of IAEG-SDG and the co-chairs of CCSA to inform the implementation guidance for global SDG

data flows to be presented at the 50th session of the UNSC. The Task Team is currently finalising the reports from the data flow pilots. The results will be communicated to the IAEG-SDG meeting in the beginning of November.

15. With finalising the reports of the two data flow pilots, the Task Team is completing its work. The Steering Group is currently discussing **follow-up to the work of the Task Force on NRPs and the Task Team of data flows**. Several lines of action can be considered, e.g. developing recommendations on technical aspects of the data flows from NRPs (such as SDMX, or other machine readable formats for data transfer); or a few countries making an inventory of existing data flows that include SDG indicators, as a case study that could be shared with other countries.

Task Team on communication of statistics for SDGs

16. The Task Team on communication of statistics (co-chaired by the Russian Federation and the United Kingdom) was established in March 2018 to provide practical guidance and tools to facilitate the sharing of communication experiences among countries. In September 2018, the Task Team completed a survey to gather existing NSO tools and core messages on SDGs to reach the general public, researchers, and policy makers. In addition, the Task Team completed an initial analysis of the communication of statistical information in Voluntary National Reviews to the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF). These analyses will provide resources to NSOs to strengthen their communication strategies and prepare their VNRs (in 2019, 16 CES countries will prepare a VNR).

Task Team on statistical capacity development

17. The Task Team on statistical capacity development (co-chaired by Italy and Montenegro) was established in April 2018. The aim of the Team is to develop an approach to SDG statistical capacity development for the UNECE region. In September 2018, the Task Team prepared its initial analysis of the HLG-PCCB/PARIS21 survey on SDG statistical capacity development for UNECE countries. Taking these analyses into consideration and in consultation with HLG-PCCB and PARIS21, the Task Team is working to identify common statistical capacity priorities in the region.

III. TOWARDS SECOND EDITION OF THE ROAD MAP ON STATISTICS FOR SDGS

18. The CES 2018 plenary session supported the proposal to start preparing a second edition of the Road Map, and requested the Steering Group to prepare a plan and timetable for its preparation.

19. The Steering Group has started discussions on the second edition of the Road Map, including at its meeting in St-Petersburg on 13-14 September 2018. **Below are some ideas for the second edition where the feedback by the Bureau will be appreciated.**

20. The main objectives of the 2nd edition will be to:

- Support NSOs in developing the monitoring system for SDGs; and
- Help NSOs explain and communicate their role in achieving SDGs.

21. The second edition of the Road Map is planned to target a wider audience than just national statistical offices, and be of interest and understandable to other stakeholders, in addition to NSOs. The second edition will build on the experience and lessons learned with the implementation of the 1st Road Map and include practical examples and tools.

22. The Road Map is planned to be published both in a printed and electronic version. The electronic version will include links to related documents (e.g., reports from the Task Teams, country case studies, relevant IAEG-SDG and HLG-PCCB materials, etc.).

23. The issues to be addressed in the second Road Map may include:

- Coordination of work on statistics for SDGs in countries (role of NSOs, best practices in coordinating SDGs)
- Various types of SDG indicators (global, regional, national, subnational) – why different sets are needed, how to define them, including proxy (global) indicators – where and why needed
- Efforts to measure targets for which indicators are not yet available – possible approaches
- How to deal with the required disaggregations of data
- Integration of geospatial information with SDGs (national estimates using geospatial information; geocoding and visualization)
- Identifying and coordinating existing data flows on SDGs (including NRP to agency machine reading and SDMX protocols for NSOs, and maturation model of data validation)
- Statistical capacity development (defining what it means, alignment with ECE statistical capacity development strategy, identifying areas for development including regional priorities, possible pilot of mapping country needs with available donor resources)
- Communicating essential messages (key value message, glossary of terms, guidance on statistical annexes to VNRs, telling stories with SDG statistics to the public).

24. The draft timeline for preparing the second edition is as follows:

2018	14-15 Oct	Discuss the initial plans of preparation of the 2 nd edition of the Road Map (RM) at the CES Bureau meeting
2018/2019	Nov-Feb	Establish drafting team; prepare first outline and work plan
2019	March	Discuss the first outline and work plan at mini-Steering Group meeting during the UN Statistical Commission
	15-16 April	Discuss work/emerging issues and gather input at Expert Meeting on Statistics for SDGs (15-16 April, Geneva)
	May-June	Prepare extended outline of the RM
	26-28 June	Present extended outline and early progress at the CES plenary session
	Jul-Sept	Initial drafting of the RM chapters; discussion at the meeting of the Steering Group (September 2019, tbc)
2019/2020	Oct - Jan	Finalize the draft version and send to CES Bureau
2020	Feb	Discussion by CES Bureau to decide whether the Road Map can be sent for wide consultation to CES members
	March	Present at side event at UNSC
	March-	Electronic consultation with all CES members

	April	
	May	Finalising taking into account comments from electronic consultation
	June	Present at the CES 2020 plenary session for endorsement
	2 nd half of 2020	Publication and planned translation into French and Russian

IV. PROPOSAL TO THE BUREAU

25. The CES Bureau is invited to:

- a) Comment on the progress achieved, including on the outcome of the second pilot of data flows;**
- b) Provide feedback on the plans for the second edition of the Road Map.**

ANNEX

Thirty-seven countries² and five agencies participated in the second pilot of data flows of SDG indicators over July-August 2018. The pilot covered the following eleven SDG indicators:

Issue type	Indicator	Custodian Agency
Indicators modeled by agency	3.9.1, 11.6.2	WHO
National data are produced by agencies using geospatial information	15.4.2	FAO
Non-statistical indicator based on a questionnaire whose responses may be adjusted by the agency	5.1.1	UN Women
Indicators produced by Agencies that use data, transmitted by well-established process	17.2.1, 17.3.1	OECD
National data are transmitted already to an intermediary international database	6.4.1, 6.4.2	FAO
Indicators calculated by the agency without a validation of the nationally nominated SDGs focal point	3.6.1 9.1.2	WHO and UNEP ICAO and ITF-OECD

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE UNECE PILOT OF SDG DATA FLOWS FOR IAEG-SDGS AND CCSA

24 August 2018

The initial observations and recommendations below are the result of a second pilot study of data flows of SDG indicators conducted by the Task Team on Data Flows under the auspices of the Conference of European Statisticians Steering Group on Statistics for SDGs. The pilot was carried out during July-August 2018. More information regarding the purpose, scope, instruments and findings of the pilot can be found at <https://statswiki.unece.org/display/SFSDG/Task+Team+on+Data+Flows+for+SDGs>.

I. FINDING ONE

1. Most countries are strongly invested in the transmission of their data to the custodian agencies as shown by the strong participation in this survey on a voluntary basis and well beyond the geographical scope of UNECE. Most countries strive to produce national statistics that are aligned with the UN global indicator metadata, while recognizing that international harmonization of the statistics will be challenging.

2. Most agencies involved in the survey by the selection of indicators ensured on-going dialogue with the task team to provide clarification on their process of collecting national data for global monitoring of SDGs in order to maximize quality, transparency and trust in the SDG global reporting and adherence to the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics.

² Albania, Argentina, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Chile, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Mexico, Mongolia, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Russia, Slovakia, Sweden, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey, UK, Ukraine, USA

II. FINDING TWO

3. Most countries noted with appreciation the on-going efforts made by the UNSD to facilitate SDG data flows between agencies and countries and remarked on the continued improvements. They noted with appreciation the release of a dashboard listing contact focal points; and the posting of SDG metadata and global statistics on the UN website's UNSD database. They would like this work to continue and to go further.

4. Regarding information about focal points, custodian agencies regret that some countries have not yet transmitted their national focal point contact information, which has, impeded follow up to resolve data flow issues. In other cases, countries regret that the custodian agencies' focal point contact information is insufficient. For instance, for indicator 9.1.2, a name is provided without an e mail, phone number or physical address.

5. Countries also note that the calendars of agencies' request and of data collection are also too incomplete (and difficult to find on the UN website), limiting the current use of this tool for national data flow coordination.

Recommendation

6. UNSD could post an **online dashboard of focal point contact information for countries and custodian agencies, regularly updated** with precise contact information for each indicator and the calendar of the data and validation request which should be agreed by the IAEG-SDGs.

7. Taking into account concerns for confidentiality, this dashboard should be password protected. It should be updated through secure login by the central focal points at each country and custodian agency. Countries would be responsible for maintaining the list of country focal points per indicator for their countries, and custodian agencies would be responsible for maintaining the list of custodian agency contacts per indicator and their calendar of data request and data validation, allowing for planning coordination on the national level. Reminders for updates could be timed with preparations for the SDG annual report to the Secretary General.

8. This dashboard should become a reference document between agencies and countries.

III. FINDING THREE

9. SDG data transmission does not start from scratch in all cases. In fact, some data transmission are already well established with their own focal points and their own national mandate given by the Foreign Ministry or another national line ministries. (For instance, the data transmission for indicator 17.1.2 is DAC members' obligation to OECD with their own process of data validation; similar existing data flows are in place for indicator 3.6.1 reporting on rate of death rate due to road traffic accidents and indicator 9.1.2 passengers and freight volume by mode of transport).

10. NSOs have sometimes mapped SDGs indicators with their national statistical system identifying a new data provider and a national focal point, not being aware of these existing

data flows. Discrepancies might appear with new data sources and be source of conflict with agencies.

11. In some cases, custodian agencies directed their SDG data request to the previously established focal point without (also) informing the SDGs focal point.³ In several cases, national SDG focal points are not aware of these existing data collections by agencies or recent requests from agencies for some indicators.

Recommendation

12. To avoid such conflicts, national coordination within countries should be promoted. This will require some support from custodian agencies.

13. In particular, the SDG focal point nominated by the country should be systematically informed by the custodian agencies of existing national focal points for indicators and existing validation processes, where these have been established.

14. To accomplish this, **custodian agencies are encouraged to put in copy (not hidden copy) the national SDGs focal point whenever they address any SDG data request to a previously established national data provider, including requests concerning non-statistical indicators.** This recommendation applies even if the Custodian agency's request is broader in scope than the SDG indicator request alone (for instance, collection of data on education, of which some SDG indicators are included).

IV. FINDING FOUR

15. The quality of metadata for indicators assigned as Tier 1 or Tier 2 is unequal. While most of that metadata are well structured and have good quality concepts, some metadata are incomplete,⁴ difficult to understand, and feature open questions and inconsistencies. For instance, metadata for indicator 17.3.1 are incomplete. The definition is limited to the ODA aspect of the indicator. Overall, it seems very similar to the metadata provided for 17.2.1, although it is intended, by its tier designation, to be conceptually clear and to have an internationally established methodology. The same can be said of indicators 6.4.1 and 6.4.2, for which there are many inconsistencies and open questions remain. Also, metadata for 15.4.2 does not take into account, that some countries experience greening of mountain areas due to climate change.

16. Metadata for Tier 1 and Tier 2 indicators are not reviewed by the IAEG-SDGs; only Tier 3 indicators are reviewed by IAEG-SDG to determine possible reassignment to Tier 2 or Tier 1 as concepts are clarified and agreed upon methodology is established.

Recommendationr

17. **All metadata of Tier 1 and 2 indicators should be systematically reviewed by IAEG-SDGs** to ensure that they conform to the quality and the format recommended by the IAEG-SDGs. Among these, priority of review should be given to those indicators that are subject to country signature.

³ This should be indicated in the UN dashboard of focal points.

⁴ Or, even lacking altogether (for instance, see indicator 3.3.4).

18. Furthermore, the task team would like to encourage the **IAEG to review certain indicator's tier classification**. It is not evident, for example, why the indicator 17.3.1 is classified as tier 1 even though it is not produced and the custodian agency has not proposed a method for its calculation.

19. **A dedicated venue should be allotted for countries (or agencies) to raise their questions on the interpretation of metadata and difficulties they have observed.** Custodian agencies should be invited to answer the questions raised and to update accordingly the metadata in track changes (with date of update), which will allow countries to avoid unnecessary review.

V. FINDING FIVE

20. In several cases, NSOs mention that they were not asked to validate of some data associated with their country that is published in the UN global database, and, in some cases, they disagree with the data published. Sometimes, these are obvious errors (an error of unit for instance, for 9.1.2 and ITF data).

Recommendation

21. **The national focal point for SDGs should always be informed prior to the publication of data on the UN SDGs global database**, even if these data have been validated by another process. It also gives the opportunity for a last check and validation of these national data.

VI. FINDING SIX

22. Some SDGs indicators could be collected with existing reporting mechanisms (for instance 6.4.1 and 6.4.2 Aquastat indicators), with some adaptation or extension of the current process.

Recommendation

23. Agencies are encouraged to **minimize the data reporting burden of Member States by utilizing existing reporting mechanisms and adapting them**. They are encouraged to work with other international agencies working on these existing data flows to adapt them as appropriate and avoid duplicative reporting and unnecessary burden.

VII. FINDING SEVEN

24. Data validation is sometimes complex, especially when metadata require the indicator to be modelled by agencies or calculated by agencies directly with open data sources (such as geospatial information).

Recommendation

25. **Data validation requires sufficient time for countries and agencies to conduct their tasks professionally**, and full transparency on the status of data which are released in

the global database. Accordingly, a transparent validation process that allows maturation of review and agreement should be implemented.

26. Essentially, this is a documentation process. Systematically, the **source of data should remain indicated in the UN global data base** (i.e., country data, data estimated by the agency) **and the status of validation** (i.e., validated by country, cannot be validated by country (missing data), pending review) should be included in the data regardless of whether the statistics is published.

27. This modification to current procedures will make the global process more fully transparent. All data used to calculate the aggregate will be noted. Further, reporting on SDGs will be facilitated and potentially take greater advantage of other available data sources that meet acceptable standards of statistical quality. This can also help communicate clearly the responsibility of NSOs in providing national data. Moreover, the progress made in increasing the number of indicators validated by the focal points nominated by the national SDGs coordinator in itself is a measure of progress in country-led monitoring of SDGs.

* * * * *