

Third Expert Meeting on Statistics  
for Sustainable Development Goals

**UNECE CES Steering Group on Sustainable Development Goals**

Practical suggestions from  
the Second UNECE Data Flow Pilot Study



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**Objectives of the Study**

- Inform the IAEG's and CSSA's deliberations of the implementation guidance
- Analyze current data flows, focusing on indicators where validation of global statistics is difficult
- Explore methods to facilitate understanding between NSOs and Custodian Agencies (CA)

## Design Team

- Members of the UNECE CES Task Team on Data Flows
- prepared the study design and survey instruments
- analyzed results, and
- wrote sections of the report
- Countries: (France (co-chair), Turkey (co-chair), Belarus, Denmark, Germany, Kazakhstan, Russian Federation, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, United States.
- Agencies: FAO, ICAO, IMF, OECD, UN WOMEN, UNEP, UNODC, WHO

## Methods

- Observational study of country and custodian agency actual experiences
- Based on a selection of 10 indicators to represent different cases where data are not sent directly by countries to agencies
- Survey prepared for NSOs and for CAs regarding
- their process of data transmission (coordination, use of NRP, attitude towards SDMX)
- the common challenges and potential solutions to facilitate data transmission of each indicator examined
- a self-assessment of what works well and what does not

## Participants

- 38 countries and 4 agencies responded, including 31 of 56 UNECE countries, but also 7 countries from ESCAP and ECLAC
- As a separate activity initiated by IAEG countries, the survey also informed examinations of SDG data flows in the UNECA and ESCAP regions, which could facilitate cross cutting analyses and solutions
- This wide and voluntary participation shows the strong commitment of both countries and agencies to improve data flows for the best global data based on
  - national harmonised data that have been
  - validated by countries.

## Limitations of the Study

The pilot was fielded to describe experiences of countries in the UNECE region, which share similar data production process and have strong data coordination. Therefore,

- results do not describe circumstances for countries where variations in the process can affect the data flows and the comparability of data.
- findings represent data flows where statistical coordination is likely to be strongest
- only Tier 1 indicators were selected. Data validation for indicators classified as Tier 2, using non-statistical or non-traditional data sources, may be more challenging

## List of selected indicators for the survey

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 survey 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

## Key Observations: (1)

### A communication disconnect remains...

- Some country focal points are still not known to agencies. Agency contacts are sometimes not known to countries (e.g., 9.1.2 is lacking the precise agency focal point contact information; 17.2.1 is lacking the (previously established) focal points)
- Some NSOs identified focal points for SDGs without being aware of existing and well-managed data flows (e.g. for 17.2.1 ODA)
- Agencies' data collection calendars are often incomplete and difficult to find

## Key Observations: (1)

### ...but a secure dashboard of contacts could help

- The dashboard should be a **key reference document**, **agreed upon**, **up to date**, and **easily accessible** to countries and agencies
- Contact details must be complete for country and agency focal points.
- A link to the agency data request calendar would improve communication
- Country focal points should be informed by agencies of previously established data flows.
- Custodian agencies should copy country SDGs focal points when they request national data (even if request is broader than SDGs)

## Key Observations: (2)

### Some Tier 1 and 2 metadata are insufficient...

- Some metadata are incomplete or misclassified (17.3.1), lacking (3.3.4), difficult to understand, or have open questions and inconsistencies (6.4.2)
- Countries sometimes disagree with metadata, which impose a data source (15.4.2) or a method of estimation done by agencies (3.9.1)
- Metadata for Tier 1 are not currently within the purview of IAEG-SDGs which can be problematic.

## **Key Observations: (2)**

### **...but IAEG-SDGs could review tier classifications.**

- 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 the IAEG-SDGs
- Some metadata require a method using data outside of the national system. Yet, national data can be used instead that otherwise conform to the metadata. This should be examined by the IAEG-SDGs.
- Priority of review should be given to indicators subject to country signature
- A dedicated venue for metadata discussion on unresolved issues would be welcome

## **Key Observations: (3)**

### **Validation processes are not transparent...**

- Sometimes national focal points are not asked to validate data associated with their country published in the UN global data base.
- In some cases, NSOs disagree with the data published and have detected obvious errors (e.g., 9.1.2 on road transport)
- Data validation by country is sometimes complex and requires sufficient time for countries and agencies
- Countries require their responsibility regarding the data being published in the global database to be clear

### **Key Observations: (3)**

#### **...but processes can be updated to allow maturation**

- Country focal points should be invited to validate, even if a courtesy
- Promote a documentation process noting
  - the source of data in the global database
  - if the data were modeled by the agency
  - the status of country validation (validated, can't be validated, pending review, not validated by country)
  - allowing all globally harmonized national statistics to be published in the UNSD database

### **Key Observations: (4)**

#### **Existing data flows should be used if possible...**

- Data or related data are already collected with existing reporting mechanism (e.g., 6.4.1, 6.4.2)
- Countries would like to avoid duplicate reporting, even if an adaptation of the questionnaire is required

## Key Observations: (4)

### ...but agencies should adapt extant flows, if needed

- Country focal points should always be informed of the existing data collection process and be invited to validate with all necessary information provided by the agency

## Conclusions and way forward

### Important progress has been made...

- Participation in the study shows a strong involvement of the countries and agencies to improve the quality of data transmitted
- Countries and agencies noted their appreciation of the on-going efforts made by UNSD to facilitate data flows (e.g., release of a dashboard of contacts)
- Countries noted their appreciation of the efforts made by agencies to answer their questions
- Interesting feedback from UNSD and agencies to improve the process
  - Reinforce agency's internal coordination , clarification of the validation process
  - Reexamination of metadata tier1/2'

## Important progress has been made ...but there are steps we can take to improve

- **Improve coordination by making a dashboard** with specific contacts in countries and in agencies, validated by both parties and regularly updated.
- This document is essential as a first step to facilitate coordination at the country level and awareness of NSOs of all data transmitted.
- **Provide clear and accessible metadata for Tier 1 and 2 indicators** (translation in UN languages?).
- Inform **national focal points' information before the release of their national data in the global database**, even if a courtesy

## All pilot documents are on the UNECE public wiki

- The complete report of the second data flow pilot is expected in April 2019
- Specific issues and proposed solutions are listed in user-friendly charts
- See <https://statswiki.unece.org/display/SFSDG/Task+Team+on+Data+Flows+for+SDGs>

Table 11. Possible Solutions Suggested by Pilot Participants by Proposed Lead

Proposed Lead	Possible Solution
NSOs (with UNSD)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. National country focal point information should be added to the UNSD global database as a resource for agency focal points (at the country's discretion).</li> <li>2. National contacts provided by NSOs should be coordinated at the national level and consistent with the mandate received by the custodian agencies from country governments. Such coordination is also essential for reporting non-statistical indicators.</li> <li>3. National country focal points should include any other national contacts for extant data flows related to SDG indicators in the UNSD global database.</li> <li>4. National country focal points should copy these other national contacts on their communications with agency focal points.</li> </ol>
IAEG-SDGs (with UNSD)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The IAEG-SDGs does not have the governance mechanism or mandate to review metadata for Tier 1 and 2 indicators. Countries felt that is a clear need.</li> <li>2. More changes in metadata files should be reviewed by IAEG-SDGs. IAEG-SDGs should receive feedback from countries on metadata and follow up with custodian agencies as needed.</li> <li>3. It would be helpful to denote in the UNSD global database and/or official indicator list which global indicators are non-statistical in nature, and those that apply to a subset of countries only (for example, LDCs, SIDS, 11.Cs, DAC members).</li> <li>4. In cases where country validation is difficult, a note is added indicating that the data are modeled by the custodian agency and the status of validation by the country (validated by country/country can't validate not validated by country/pending review) is included. Thus, all globally harmonized national data and statistics are published in the UNSD database. This could be recommended as update to the 2018 UNSC data flow guidance. (Near unanimous opinion)</li> </ol>
Custodian Agencies (with UNSD)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The data sources used to calculate harmonized statistics should be referenced in the UNSD global database. (Unanimous opinion among respondents)</li> <li>2. The UNSD calendar should indicate agencies' data collection and validation time frames. When exact dates are unknown, tentative dates should be used so NSO work programs can plan ahead.</li> <li>3. Agency contact information should be updated/complete for indicators.</li> <li>4. Some indicators have more than one metadata file. This can be confusing. The files should be integrated by custodian agencies.</li> <li>5. The following indicators seem to have missing metadata or require clarification, based on the data flow pilot include: 9.1.2, 17.1.2, and 17.3.1.<sup>1</sup></li> <li>6. Work plans for some Tier III indicators are outdated and need to be updated.</li> </ol>
UNSD (with countries and agencies)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A dashboard is needed to support communication between countries and agencies. This dashboard should integrate contact information for country and agency focal points and data collection schedules. The dashboard should be shared upon by both countries and agencies, should be up to date, and easily accessible shared.</li> <li>2. Any updates made in the metadata files should allow notification and tracking of these updates by national focal points. This will help NSOs respond to agency requests in an efficient manner.</li> <li>3. The validation status should be displayed in the UNSD global database, and updates (such as new postings by custodian agencies or revisions) should be communicated to national and agency focal points. For example, such changes could generate an automatic email to focal points. (Unanimous opinion)</li> </ol>

<sup>1</sup> This coordination is especially necessary for mandatory data flows, such as DAC flows, where the established national contact is sponsored by the government's foreign ministry or UN national permanent mission.

<sup>2</sup> Countries observed, through the course of their activities, that multiple metadata files were posted for the following indicators (not the focus of the data flow pilot): 1.1.1, 1.3.1, 2.2.2, 5.1.1, 6.6.1.

<sup>3</sup> Countries also observed that metadata were missing needed clarification for the following IDG indicators (not the focus of the data flow pilot): 1.2.2, 1.2.3, 4.4.1, 5.2.2, 5.2.3, 10.2.1, and 11.1.1.

