

Expert Meeting on statistics for Sustainable Development Goals
(Geneva, 10-12 April 2017)

REPORT OF THE MEETING

I. ATTENDANCE

1. The Expert Meeting was attended by representatives of Albania, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Mexico, Montenegro, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Republic of Moldova, Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Tajikistan, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom, United States of America and Uzbekistan.

2. The meeting was also attended by representatives from European Economic Commission (EEC), European Free Trade Association (EFTA), Eurostat, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), Interstate Statistical Committee of the CIS (CIS-STAT), International Labour Organization (ILO), Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century (Paris21), Statistical Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries (SESRIC), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Conference for Trade and Development (UNCTAD), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), United Nations Statistical Division (UNSD), United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR), United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), World Food Programme (WFP), and World Health Organization (WHO).

3. The following non-governmental organization participated: Group on Earth Observations

II. ORGANIZATION OF THE MEETING

4. Benjamin Rothen (Switzerland) and Jennifer Park (United States) chaired the meeting.

5. The participants adopted the provisional agenda of the meeting.

6. The following substantive topics were discussed on the basis of presentations and papers:

- Session 1: Setting the scene
- Session 2: National strategies and plans for measuring SDGs
- Session 3: National reporting on global SDG indicators
- Session 4: Coordination of data flows and harmonisation of statistics for SDGs in the region
- Session 5: Coordination of capacity building
- Session 6: The way forward: Actions to support countries to meet the SDG measurement challenges

7. All documents for the meeting are available at: www.unece.org/index.php?id=45249

III. SUMMARY OF THE DISCUSSION AND MAIN CONCLUSIONS REACHED AT THE MEETING

1. Setting the scene

Opening addresses: Lidia Bratanova (UNECE, Director); Benjamin Rothen (Switzerland) and Jennifer Park (United States) – co-chairs of the CES Steering Group on statistics for SDGs

Presentations: Benjamin Rothen (Switzerland), Jennifer Park (United States), and Tiina Luige (UNECE)

8. The first session was organized by the chairs of the Steering Group on statistics for SDGs, Benjamin Rothen (Switzerland) and Jennifer Park (United States). Participants were informed of the recent developments on statistics for SDGs at the global level, particularly on the work of the Inter-agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators (IAEG-SDGs) and the High-level Group for Partnership, Coordination and Capacity-Building for statistics for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (HLG-PCCB). The Chairs presented the CES Road Map on Statistics for SDGs¹. UNECE presented the findings from a survey on the national statistical offices' (NSOs) plans and strategies related to statistics for SDGs, which was developed and analysed by the Steering Group.

2. National strategies and plans for measuring SDGs

9. The session was organized and chaired by Gerard Eding (Netherlands) and Natalia Ignatova (Russian Federation). The session was divided into four sub-sessions.

Sub-session A: Developing NSO work plans related to SDGs. Presentations by: Marina Gandolfo (Italy), Bojana Radojevic (Montenegro), and Ovunç Uysal (Turkey)

Sub-session B: Strengthening national mechanisms for coordination, collaboration and partnerships. Presentations by: Maia Guntsadze (Georgia), Ana Gricevic (Lithuania) and Hemanus Rietveld (Netherlands)

Sub-session C: Establishing national SDG indicators. Presentations by: Claire Plateau (France) and Enrique Ordaz (Mexico)

Sub-session D: Communication with stakeholders, including policymakers. Presentations by: Elena Kukharevich (Belarus) and Miriam Blumers (Germany).

10. The following points were raised during the discussion:

- National road maps or plans of action of countries are generally not publicly available. Sharing examples of national plans and preparing a template for road maps on statistics for SDGs will be helpful;
- Dialogue with policymakers is important to set priorities at the national level, particularly given the scarce resources for producing statistics for SDGs;
- The need to share best practices in national coordination and consultation related to statistics for SDGs was highlighted;
- A national assessment of available data should identify data providers and data gaps within a country;
- NSOs have a key role in providing data for SDGs. However, data will also come from institutions outside of the national statistical system. The role of NSOs is not yet clear with respect to quality assurance of data produced by non-official sources;

¹ <http://www.unece.org/statistics/statstos/ces-steering-group-on-statistics-for-sustainable-development-goals.html>

- National sustainable development indicator sets that serve a clear national purpose should complement global SDG reporting;
- United Nations Country Teams (UNCTs) have a key role in coordinating activities and capacity building in countries, from different donors and UN agencies;
- Effective communication strategies of SDG indicators to the general public and policymakers should be further developed and implemented

11. The CES Steering Group was asked to provide a template for national road maps on statistics for SDGs. Member countries were encouraged to share even preliminary outlines of national road maps on the UNECE Wiki on statistics for SDGs². The Steering Group was asked to develop guidance and collect best practices on communication strategies related to statistics for SDGs. Lastly, the Steering Group should cooperate with the UNECE group on Statistical Communication and Dissemination and explore the possibility of joint activities in the future.

3. National reporting on global SDG indicators

12. The session was organized and chaired by Renata Bielak (Poland), chair of the Task Force on Reporting SDG indicators using National Reporting Platforms, and Sara Frankl (Sweden), member of the Task Force. The session considered the preliminary results of the work of the Task Force, including the draft documents Description of National Reporting Platforms and Guidelines for National SDG indicators reporting mechanisms. Selected countries presented their national reporting platforms for SDGs. The session included a discussion round on how countries should decide on the most appropriate reporting mechanism on SDG indicators.

Presentations: Renata Bielak (Poland), Enrique Ordaz (Mexico), Ovunç Uysal (Turkey) and Joanne Evans (United Kingdom).

13. The following points were raised during the discussion:
- National Reporting Platforms (NRPs) are useful tools to provide information on SDG indicators. NRPs can help communication with users and ensure transparency of reporting. In addition, NRPs are also useful in documenting the role of the different data producers;
 - Areas of work to be noted in NRP Task Force Guidelines for National SDG Indicators Reporting Mechanisms include:
 - Use (and expansion) of SDMX (the Task Force should liaise with the IAEG-SDGs' SDMX subgroup);
 - Facilitating collaboration between countries;
 - Encouraging greater coordination within countries
 - International organizations also have developed/are developing dissemination platforms that can be used for SDG reporting (e.g., IMF and OECD). These could be explored to see how they could be leveraged to address wider reporting needs (such as supranational reporting).

14. Participants asked the Task Force to consider the issues raised during the Expert Meeting in preparing its guidelines. Countries were encouraged to share their experiences in setting up NRPs, e.g. through the Wiki on Statistics for SDGs, set up by the Steering Group.

4. Coordination of data flows and harmonisation of statistics for SDGs in the region

15. The session was organized and chaired by Maria-Joao Santos (Germany) and Simon Scott (OECD) and discussed the different set up of data flows for SDG indicators in the UNECE region. The session consisted of three sub-sessions.

² <https://statswiki.unece.org/display/SFSDG>

Sub-session A: National data flows to regional bodies and cooperation at regional level. Presentations by: Elena Vosmirko (CIS-STAT), Marleen de Smedt (Eurostat), and Trevor Fletcher and Simon Scott (OECD)

Sub-session B: National data flows to custodian agencies. Presentations by: Linda Hooper (UNSD), Omid Fekri (WHO), Angela Me (UNODC, by videoconference), and Cara Williams (Canada)

Sub-session C: UNSD global database and preparation of the UN Secretary General's annual report on SDGs. Presentations by: Linda Hooper (UNSD), and Abdulla Gozalov (UNSD, by videoconference)

16. The following points were raised during the discussion:
- All data flows on SDG indicators must reflect the principle of country ownership. This must be reconciled with agency mandates and the custodian system that has been agreed by UNSC;
 - It still needs to be further clarified how statistics for global SDG indicators will flow from countries to custodian agencies and custodian agencies to UNSD;
 - The meeting identified many details yet to be addressed, such as: (i) how to deal with indicators that a country cannot compile on its own (including PPP-based); that are sometimes reported by other countries (e.g., aid flows), or Tier III indicators that are still being developed; and (ii) procedures to follow when national data differ from globally harmonized data in a way that cannot be explained;
 - IAEG-SDGs set up a drafting team to develop guidance on how data flows should work, led by Germany and Cameroon. They will develop guidelines on how custodian agencies and countries can work together to coordinate data flows necessary to have harmonised statistics. A draft is expected for the next IAEG-SDGs meeting in the fall. Final guidelines will be submitted to UNSC in 2018;
 - Progress on SDMX can speed up the data flows and reduce the reporting burden
17. The Steering Group will consider the following elements and may make proposals to the co-chairs of the IAEG-SDGs: (i) improvement of metadata; (ii) improvement of verification processes between countries and custodian agencies; (iii) preparation of lists of focal points for SDG reporting: national statistical systems, focal points in custodian agencies, and custodian agency focal points in countries; (iv) request of a schedule of reporting deadlines from custodian agencies and from UNSD; (v) consideration of revising the deadline for country data validation for alignment with the preparations for the UN Statistical Commission meetings.
18. The Steering Group will launch work with selected countries and agencies to pilot data flow models over the summer of 2017.

5. Coordination of capacity building

19. The session was organized and chaired by Tiina Luige (UNECE) and discussed different efforts to build statistical capacity in the region and how the related activities can be coordinated to avoid overlap. The session considered the topic both from countries' and international organizations' viewpoints.

Presentations: Johannes Jutting (Paris21), Lori Bell (UNICEF), Kanykey Orozbaeva (Kyrgyzstan), and Enrique Ordaz (Mexico)

20. The following points were raised during the discussion:
- Coordination of capacity building is important to avoid duplication, streamline efforts of different donors, and take into account priorities and absorption capacity of countries;
 - Capacity building is relevant for all countries. Conceptual work is needed to clarify definitions and terminology related to capacity building;
 - It is needed to rethink the approach to capacity building. This may include: (i) mainstreaming SDGs in national strategies of developing statistics; (ii) sharing outcomes of capacity building to extend the benefit; (iii) mapping the supply and demand of capacity building; (iv) involving NSOs in the capacity building efforts of custodian agencies; and (v) leveraging (limited) resources by building partnerships.
 - Need for translation of documents related to statistics for SDGs into Russian and making them available in a commonly accessible place to facilitate in EECCA countries was pointed out;
 - Coordination of capacity building provided to a specific country can be best done at national level.
21. The Steering Group will consider how to incorporate the outcomes of the discussion during the Expert Meeting into the CES Road Map on statistics for SDGs' section on 'Building Statistical Capacity for Indicator Reporting'.

6. The way forward: actions to support countries to meet the SDG measurement challenges

22. The session was organized and chaired by Benjamin Rothen (Switzerland) and Jennifer Park (United States). It discussed the actions in the CES Road Map and how they can be implemented. The session discussed the conclusions of the meeting highlighting areas for further work and next steps for the CES Steering Group and for the Secretariat.
23. The Expert Meeting encouraged all participants to share their best practices and challenges in implementing the statistics for SDGs through the UNECE Wiki on statistics for SDGs.
24. The Task Force on Reporting SDG indicators using National Reporting Platforms will consider the issues raised during the expert meeting and will reflect them in the Guidelines for National SDG Indicators Reporting Mechanisms. The Task Force will invite custodian agencies to discuss their plans and intended use of the national reporting platforms. In addition, it will explore how to develop processes to facilitate «machine pulling» from national reporting platforms.
25. The CES Steering Group will carry out the following activities:
- Update the Road Map on statistics for SDGs, particularly the sections on data flows and capacity building;
 - Develop a generic outline for a national road map on statistics for SDGs;
 - Develop of a narrative on SDGs to facilitate communication with different users;
 - Conduct a pilot to map specific data flow processes and thereby better understand the needs of NSOs, custodian agencies, and UNSD;
 - Contact IAEG-SDGs and UNSD on the concerns raised during the Expert Meeting, including the following items:
 - a) Request custodian agencies to provide a list of focal points on SDG indicators in their organizations, and of the focal points of custodian agencies in countries.
 - b) Request NSOs to provide a list of focal points for SDG indicators in NSOs and in the statistical system.
 - c) Request a schedule of reporting deadlines for SDG indicators from custodian agencies and from UNSD;

- d) Consider revising the deadline for country data validation to align with preparations for UNSC meetings.
 - Raise issues related to statistical capacity building with the CES Bureau, and set up a task team to produce a concept note on statistical capacity building related to SDGs. This task team should coordinate and collaborate with the existing related international initiatives;
 - Prepare a proposed work plan to the CES including recommendations regarding the timing and focus of a next Expert Meeting on statistics for SDGs.
26. The next Expert Meeting is planned to take place in April 2018.
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