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Second Edition of the Road Map on statistics for Sustainable Development Goals

Results of the consultation on the *Conference of European Statisticians Road Map on Statistics for Sustainable Development Goals, second edition*

Prepared by the Secretariat

Summary

This document summarizes the comments by members of the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) on the *Road Map on Statistics for Sustainable Development Goals, second edition*. The Secretariat carried out an electronic consultation on the Road Map in March–April 2021.

A total of 49 countries and organizations replied to the request for comments. All responding countries and organizations considered the Road Map ready for the endorsement by the Conference of European Statisticians, subject to incorporation of the comments made during this consultation.

This note presents the substantive comments received, and amendments to the Road Map by the Steering Group on statistics for Sustainable Development Goals to address the comments.

In view of the support received, the Conference of European Statisticians is invited to endorse the *Road Map on Statistics for Sustainable Development Goals, second edition*, subject to the amendments outlined in this document.

Please recycle

I. Introduction

1. The note summarizes the comments by the members of the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) on the *Road Map on Statistics for Sustainable Development Goals*. The Secretariat carried out an electronic consultation on the Road Map in March–April 2021.

2. The Road Map was prepared by the CES Steering Group on statistics for SDGs (co-chaired by Poland and Sweden) and a number of contributing experts. The CES Bureau reviewed the draft Road Map in February 2021 and requested the Secretariat to send it to all CES members for electronic consultation.

3. The following 49 countries and international organizations replied to the consultation: Albania, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Belarus, Belgium, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Colombia, Croatia, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Malaysia, Malta, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Palestine, Poland, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine, Interstate Statistical Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS-Stat), FAO, Eurostat, OECD, UNECE Transport Division and United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO).

4. Substantive comments and the Steering Group's responses are summarized in sections II and III. The detailed editorial comments (e.g. by Serbia, Switzerland, United Kingdom and Food and Agriculture Organisation) are not presented in this note but will be taken into account when editing the Road Map for publication.

5. Countries and organizations also provided information on their national experiences, challenges and solutions in implementing the Road Map. These will be included as case studies in the UNECE Knowledge Hub on SDGs (https://statswiki.unece.org/display/SFSDG/Country+Case+Studies+2).

6. The Steering Group thanks all countries and organizations who provided feedback allowing to make the Road Map a result of a truly collective effort reflecting the richness of experience and solutions for improving statistics for SDGs.

II. General comments

7. All responding countries and organizations consider the Road Map ready for endorsement by CES, subject to the amendments resulting from the electronic consultation.

8. Many countries acknowledge the value of the Road Map and appreciate its importance and usefulness (including: Armenia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Colombia, Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Georgia, Hungary, Ireland, Lithuania, Malta, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Russian Federation, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and Turkey). For example:

    (a)   Austria: "The Road Map is a great help for taking the 2030 Agenda forward on a statistical level. It guides through essential topics like quality assurance, leaving no one behind or communication, and has a practical approach";

    (b)   Estonia: "The Road Map is a comprehensive document, covering all the relevant aspects of SDG statistics and management, being very practical but yet relevant to countries of different development level";

    (c)   Greece: "The new version of the Road Map is very useful, supporting the NSOs' efforts to establish a system for measuring progress towards SDGs. We support the Key messages to policy makers. We appreciate that in the Road Map there is a special mention for the implications of Covid-19";

    (d)   Mexico: "This Road Map is very complete and considers all the challenges that a statistical institute faces when measuring the sustainable development goals. In a very timely manner, some considerations regarding Covid-19 are added both for data collection and for obtaining information for vulnerable groups";

(e)   Serbia: "It is a well-balanced and rich document covering many important subjects."

(f)   Ukraine: "This document is playing an important role in making progress towards SDGs and is extremely useful for all countries since it contains the best practices, priorities and recommendations that could be adapted and used to strengthen the coordination of activities related to sustainable development.";

(g)   United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO "It is a brilliant extension of the very successful first edition".

9.   Many countries highly appreciate the country case studies for sharing best practices on various aspects related to SDG statistics. Switzerland notes that the UNECE Knowledge Hub is the right place to publish the case studies and it should be regularly updated.

10.   Brazil, Colombia, Finland, Japan, Republic of Moldova, Sweden, Switzerland, FAO and UNIDO offer additional case studies for specific sections of the Road Map. These will be included in the UNECE Knowledge Hub on SDGs (https://statswiki.unece.org/display/SFSDG/Country+Case+Studies+2). The Secretariat is also following up with some additional countries who have informed about interesting solutions asking to submit these as case studies.

11.   New Zealand points out that obtaining funding and resources for measuring progress towards SDGs will continue to be challenging, particularly in the post-Covid19 environment where additional funding is limited and there are more pressing priorities.

12.   Sweden notes that we should start thinking about a third edition already now to reflect the continuous developments related to statistics for SDGs. Greece highlights that the need to understand the economic and social impacts on SDGs of the pandemic and its recovery phase will require continuing efforts. New Zealand recommends strengthening the chapter on 'Leave no-one behind' in future versions of the Road Map, providing guidance on how to link, integrate and combine data from different sources.

13.   In the electronic consultation countries were asked also about implementation of the first edition of the Road Map. The form was filled in by 39 countries. The responses showed that many countries have implemented the recommendations of the first edition. Strong commitment in strengthening the national systems to produce SDG statistics is demonstrated by developing national roadmaps on statistics for SDGs (11 countries), national indicator frameworks (23 countries) and including SDGs in capacity development needs and planning (19 countries).

14.   To overcome the coordination challenges in the process of production and dissemination of statistics for SDGs, out of the 39 responding countries, 27 reported that the NSO is appointed as the coordinator of statistics for SDGs in their country and 26 have a national reporting platform or other web-based solution to disseminate the SDG statistics. Furthermore, UNECE is maintaining a summary table of country progress on the Knowledge Hub on SDGs which shows the progress among more than 60 countries who participate in the work of CES. From there we can see an even higher number of countries implementing the Road Map recommendations.

III.   Comments and amendments on specific sections of the document

A.   Executive summary

15.   Switzerland notes that the sections of the Road Map should serve as 'entry points' to the main issues related to SDG monitoring. Therefore, special attention should be paid on the focus of individual sections and their interlinkages.

Response by the Steering Group

16.   The Steering Group will consider how to make the focus of the Sections and their interlinkages clearer in the text, e.g. by adding a scheme how the Sections fit together.

B.   Section 1 – Use of statistics for Sustainable Development Goals

17.   Switzerland asks for better alignment with the general indicator terminology and methodology, comments on the use of the term "shadow indicators" (para 62) and asks to include definitions of "data" and "statistics" in the Road Map.

18.   Para 51: Finland points to the fact that alternative datasets can help uncover underlying systemic disadvantages that vulnerable population groups are facing.

19.   Para 87 (Voluntary national reviews): Columbia suggests adding the definition of long-term policies and measures (such as decrees, laws, policy documents, and development plans) that allow for continuity in the fulfilment of the Agenda 2030 so that governmental changes would not affect the country's commitment.

Comments on recommendations

20.   Mexico and Brazil propose to add a recommendation regarding promotion of the Road Map within the national statistical system (NSS) for capacity building purposes.

21.   Switzerland finds the existing recommendation vague and questions if recommendations are needed in this introductory section.

Response by the Steering Group

22.   The Steering Group takes note of the need for better alignment of indicator terminology and will amend the text from this viewpoint. However, it should also be noted that this introductory section aims to present many issues that are further developed in the rest of the Road Map. The purpose of this section is to explain the role of official statistics for SDG follow-up and highlight its value. It also comments on some limitations of official statistics and the fact that non-official statistics is widely used to cover data gaps.

23.   The terms "data" and "statistics" will be added to the glossary. A footnote will also be added explaining that in practice these terms are often used as synonyms, including in this Road Map.

24.   Instead of using the terms "shadow indicators" and "shadow reports", para 61 will focus more clearly on the fact that countries sometimes use data produced by civil society organisations to complement their SDG reviews.

25.   In response to Finland's comment on alternative data sets, para 51 will be amended to include official statistics *and alternative data sets* in the term "SDG statistics".

26.   The Steering Group takes note of Colombia's comment on Voluntary national reviews as a tool to promote continuity in the fulfilment of the 2030 Agenda. However, the Group considers that recommendations on the definition of long-term policies is beyond the purpose of this Road Map.

27.   No recommendations will be included in this section due to its introductory nature. Proposals for additional recommendations from Mexico and Brazil will be addressed in Section 9 on Capacity development for SDG statistics.

C.   Section 2 – Quality assurance of Sustainable Development Goals indicators

28.   Finland considers the statement: "We need to emphasize what the SDG indicators actually indicate and what type of analysis they can and cannot be used for" (para 108) to be too demanding for National Statistical Offices.

Comments on recommendations

29.   Serbia proposes that recommendations should be addressed to the overall national statistical system and not only to NSOs.

30.   Mexico proposes to include a recommendation to promote quality and peer reviews of administrative data sources.

31.   Switzerland suggests to add a recommendation on applying quality requirements of official statistics to all SDG indicators independently of the data source and data provider. In cases of non-official data, the quality of underlying data is the responsibility of the data provider. NSOs should focus on establishing quality criteria for SDG indicators and ensuring that they apply to all indicators including those which are based on non-official statistics. Further, in relation to the recommendation on a working group on quality, Switzerland notes that if quality assurance schemes are already implemented, there should be no need to restart the work.

32.   Colombia highlights that plans should be formulated for improving the quality of both underlying data sources and the SDG statistical indicators (recommendation 2a).

Response by the Steering Group

33.   <u>Para 108</u>: The intention on this para was to refer to metadata which should give indication on what types of analyses can and cannot be made based on the indicator (due to sample sizes and confidence levels). This will be made clearer in the text.

34.   The Steering Group recognises that many of the recommendations throughout the Road Map will apply to the overall NSS. However, many apply specifically to NSOs. As the NSO is often the coordinating body in NSS, the Steering Group finds it appropriate to address the NSO. NSOs are in turn encouraged to promote the Road Map and the recommendations within their NSS. In specific cases when the recommendation targets the whole statistical system, this will be mentioned.

35.   The Steering Group agrees that the quality of administrative sources and peer reviews are important aspects of quality assurance, however, these are not explicitly considered in the Road Map and will therefore not be covered in the recommendations.

36.   The Steering Group recognises the need to assess the quality of the statistics used to monitor SDGs. However, the group also recognises the need to sometimes use data and statistics that might not always fulfil all the requirements of official statistics. The recommendations therefore focus on the need to be transparent about quality rather than on absolute criteria. It is the prerogative of each country to apply such measures if appropriate to the national context.

37.   <u>Recommendation 2a</u>: The Steering Group considers the recommendation 2a broad enough to cover both aspects of quality assurance mentioned by Colombia.

38.   <u>Recommendation 2b</u>: The recommendation will be amended to reflect situations where a quality assurance scheme is already in place.

39.   <u>Recommendation 2d</u>: The recommendation will be deleted as this aspect is not elaborated in this section.

D.   Section 3 – National coordination mechanisms

Comments on Recommendations

40.   Switzerland suggests adding a recommendation to identify global SDG indicators which are reported based on previously established data collection procedures as these do not require coordination in the SDG context.

41.   Concerning recommendation 2e, Switzerland suggests that working groups focusing on specific themes are more efficient than a group representing all data producing ministries.

42.   FAO suggests appointing a direct focal point for each SDG indicator so that custodian agencies can have a direct counterpart when soliciting data and providing technical support.

Response by the Steering Group

43.   Steering Group takes note of the Swiss proposal on established data collection procedures for some SDG indicators. However, following the IAEG-SDGs *Recommendations on Best Practices in Data Flows and Global Data Reporting for SDGs,* other national agencies and producers of SDG indicators should inform NSOs on existing data flows linked with SDG indicators and share with them the list of national contacts. NSOs as coordinators of the national statistical system need to know also the existing data provision arrangements. They will compile a list of focal points within their National Statistical System to know which agencies and departments provide data to custodian agencies.

44.   Recommendation 2e: The recommendation will be reformulated in such a way that it allows for the creation of cross-government working groups or groups focusing on specific subject-matter areas, as appropriate.

45.   The Steering Group considers that appointing a direct focal point for each SDG indicator would diminish the coordinated country response on the SDG indicators and would come into contradiction with above-mentioned IAEG-SDGs Recommendation to have a national focal point/entry to coordinate all SDG indicators related activities.

E.   Section 4 – Reporting on global Sustainable Development Goals indicators

46.   FAO proposes to add a reference to their methods to measure distance and status for assessing progress towards the SDG targets.

47.   Para 148: Colombia notes that country specific issues of metadata need to be reflected with special notes in the published data of the UN Global SDG Database.

48.   Para 155(e): Colombia and UK ask to note in the Road Map that the access to the SDG Data Lab is not public and requires login credentials. Colombia also asks to clarify in the text that the Global SDG Database and SDG Data Lab are separate data holdings.

49.   Section 4.2 'Identifying national data providers': Brazil points out that the role of an NSO must be well defined concerning other national data sources for SDGs and their quality, in particular when the national statistical system is not properly formalised.

50.   Figures 4.2a and 4.2b: Belarus proposes to simplify the visual representation of SDG data flow model by removing the repeated diagram on custodian agencies.

51.   Section 4.3 'Automation of data flows': Switzerland proposes to rename the sub-section to 'Processes and methods of data transmission'.

52.   Para 182: Referring to automated data acquisition by a country, Colombia proposes to recommend also the use of Statistical Data and Metadata eXchange (SDMX) for collecting the data from ministries and organizations within a country.

53.   Section 4.3.3: France proposes to complement the SDMX related sub-section with recent developments such as tools for translating metadata, Data Structure Definitions (DSD) or any relevant other updates. Colombia notes that the currently published version of DSD has already included changes due to the 2020 Comprehensive Review of the global SDG indicators framework.

54.   Section 4.4 'Validation': Brazil emphasises the importance of metadata quality and comprehensiveness, as well as transparency and communication of any updates.

55.   Para 231: Referring to data validated by countries FAO suggests to update the text in line with the 2019 IAEG-SDG *Guidelines on Data Flows and Global Reporting* which says that country estimates that are pending validation or have been explicitly denied validation cannot be published by custodian agencies.

Comments on Recommendations

56.   Switzerland emphasizes the need for agreed common standards for efficient data transmission between countries and custodian agencies to avoid that each country would set

up its own reporting mechanism, transmission tools and standards, or that custodian agencies imply different data transmission methods (the current situation).

57. Recommendation 4f: Belarus proposes to strengthen the recommendation on validation of data posted in the global database by excluding the expression "where possible" as data validation in the global database should be done by countries on a regular basis, at least twice a year.

Response by the Steering Group

58. Information about FAO methods to measure progress and distance to targets will be included in section 5 of the Road Map, introducing a new subsection on thematic global reporting.

59. Para 148: A text will be added to explain that the country metadata submitted to custodian agencies follow an approved template. In the cases when country metadata differ from the global one, this is signalled in the UN SDG database with a footnote indicating the difference.

60. Para 155(e): The information on access to the SDG Data Lab will be included in the text. More explanation will also be added to make clear the difference between the UN SDG Database and SDG Data Lab.

61. Section 4.2 'Identifying national data providers': the issue raised by Brazil will be added to the text.

62. The SDG data flow model figures (4.2a and 4.2b) will be simplified, as suggested by Belarus.

63. Title of the section 4.3 'Automation of data flows': the section focuses on *automation* of data transmission not just any data transmission (e.g. using Excel files), therefore the Steering Group will maintain the initial title.

64. Para 182: The proposal to use SDMX for collecting the data from data providers within a country will be added, mentioning that the recommendations in the Road Map are generic to accommodate different country situations. It is the country's decision whether to use SDMX or another data transmission tool within a country.

65. Section 4.3.3: Information on the latest developments with SDMX and the Data Structure Definitions (DSDs) and the relevant weblinks will be added to the text, making clear that this work is continuously progressing and readers can get the latest information from the web.

66. Section 4.4 'Validation': the point on the importance of metadata quality, including comprehensiveness and transparency, as well as the need to communicate any updates will be added to the text.

67. Para 231 (Section 4.4.4) will be updated according to the IAEG-SDGs *Guidelines on Data Flows and Global Reporting* to note that country estimates that are pending validation or have been explicitly denied validation cannot be published by custodian agencies.

68. A recommendation to agree on common standards for efficient data transmission between countries and custodian agencies will be added.

69. The words 'where possible' will be deleted form the recommendation 4f, as suggested by Belarus.

F. Section 5 – Beyond global monitoring

70. Switzerland asks for the title of this section to refer explicitly to the development of regional, national and sub-national indicator frameworks, as the existence of SDG indicator sets at different levels is a communication challenge for countries.

71. Belarus does not agree with the approach where a national indicator set would be completely different from the IAEG-SDGs global indicator set. Belarus points out that countries supporting this approach would not be able to participate in tracking progress in

the implementation of the 2030 Agenda at the global level, and it will not be possible to ensure comparability across countries and regions.

Comments on Recommendations

72. Latvia suggests to focus in the recommendations more at national level, and explain that nationally relevant policies come first and indicators follow. National SDG indicators need to follow national planning rules and procedures.

73. Recommendation 5a 'Needs assessment for SDG monitoring': Switzerland suggests addressing the issue of relevance of SDG indicators at national level.

74. Recommendation 5d: Colombia suggests adding 'verification of the quality of information sources, in particular how well they address users' needs as one of the steps in the proposed checklist.

Response by the Steering Group

75. The title of the Section will be reformulated. The Steering Group is considering as a possible new title 'Not only global monitoring', or 'SDG monitoring at all levels'.

76. With respect to the comment made by Belarus, the Steering Group is of the opinion that all possible approaches for developing a national monitoring framework should be presented in the Road Map. Having a national indicator set that is different from the global one does not exclude implementation of global indicators in a country. However, the word 'completely' will be dropped from 3rd bullet point in para 265 to say that the national indicator set may be different from the global one.

77. The recommendations 5a and 5d will be updated as suggested by Latvia, Switzerland and Colombia.

G. Section 6 – Leave no one behind

78. New Zealand considers this chapter to be critically important, given that the success of Agenda 2030 lies in ensuring that vulnerable populations are not left behind, and recommends strengthening this chapter in future versions of the Road Map. Providing data on vulnerable populations will often require combining data from different sources. More guidance could be provided on the different ways of linking/integrating/combining data and the associated risks.

79. Brazil agrees on the importance of SDGs being inclusive. Issues to be considered include harmonization of concepts (for example, disability) and the difficulty of capturing certain population groups, such as homeless or people living in areas affected by terrorism. An additional challenge is to protect the confidentiality of data on specific population groups while ensuring that the data are still useful.

80. Para 298: FAO points out that in addition to Canada and France, many countries are using small-area estimation. References to other examples of tools for providing data on vulnerable groups are brought also by Brazil and Colombia.

Comments on Recommendations

81. Poland proposes to add a recommendation on using non-statistical data sources and modern techniques for their processing and sharing, to ensure up-to-date and timely data, and to collaborate with other national and international organizations to exchange good practices, source codes and develop open-source technologies for non-statistical data processing.

82. Recommendation 6c: Brazil suggests to complement the recommendation by explaining how to transform non-official into official data, and makes proposals on specific approaches.

Response by the Steering Group

83. Concerning the general comments from Brazil on harmonization, these are covered in subsection 6.3.9. The Steering Group considers that specifying all cases for which

harmonization should apply would present too many details in the context of this Road Map. The difficulty of capturing certain population groups is covered in sub-sections 6.3.2 and 6.3.6. The Steering Group will add a sentence on proportionality in terms of potential disclosure and data protection measures versus usefulness of the data.

84. A recommendation on using non-statistical data sources and modern techniques as suggested by Poland will be added.

85. The Steering Group takes note of Brazil's proposal on complementing recommendations and text, however, the level of detail proposed to be added exceeds the scope of this Road Map.

86. Case studies proposed by Brazil, Colombia and FAO will be included in the Country Case Studies on the web.

H. Section 7 – Communication of statistics for Sustainable Development Goals

87. Colombia notes that, in addition to internal communication, NSOs should have an internal strategy as sustainable institutions addressing the Agenda 2030.

88. Eurostat suggests adding a reference to the publication *Getting messages across using indicators*. Switzerland suggests making a distinction in Section 7.4.3 'Useful resources' between general guidelines and specific SDG-related guidelines.

Response by the Steering Group

89. The experience of Colombia in adopting an internal strategy as a sustainable institution will be included as a case study, and a reference to the Eurostat publication will be added. The list of resources will be restructured following the suggestion of Switzerland.

I. Section 8 – Voluntary national reviews

Comments on Recommendations

90. Switzerland underlines the need to clarify the responsibilities of an NSO in the process of VNR development. The statistical annex might include evidence-based trend assessments or even trend forecasting but should avoid making any political assessments. At the same time, the statistical methods applied should be made transparent and documented in the statistical annex.

91. Mexico proposes to add a general recommendation to promote the use of official statistics in VNR, and to organise workshops with other national authorities on the use of robust methods and tools to improve the quality of SDG data.

Response by the Steering Group

92. Recommendation 8d: The points about promoting the use of official statistics in Voluntary national reviews and making clear that NSOs are responsible for data and not political assessments will be added.

93. The recommendation about promoting the use of official statistics in VNRs will be added. Working together with other data producers on improving the quality of statistics for SDGs is covered in Section 2 of the Road Map.

J. Section 9 – Capacity development for Sustainable Development Goals statistics

Comments on Recommendations

94. Brazil suggests adding a recommendation on promoting the Road Map among other national data producers as part of capacity building. Mexico suggests recommending

maintaining a discussion within NSS about needs for building capacity and allocating resources.

Response by the Steering Group

95.   The point about using the Road Map in capacity development will be added to Recommendation 9a. The issue of discussion with other stakeholders about capacity building needs is covered in recommendation 9d. A reference to NSS can be added in this recommendation.

K.   Frequently asked questions and Glossary

96.   France proposes to add to FAQ a question to what extent the global SDG indicator list is relevant to follow-up on Covid-19 impacts.

97.   Para 512: Serbia notes that the global SDG targets can not be achieved if they are not achieved at national and subnational levels as guided by 'leave no-one behind'.

98.   Para 528 (Open Data Inventory): Belarus notes that the information provided in the Open Data Watch reviews is at a too general level to allow countries to identify and address data gaps from the perspective of their coverage and openness, and may distort the real situation (e.g. Belarus has identified several errors in the ranking calculations for their country).

99.   Switzerland asks to add definitions of data and statistics, and statistical and non-statistical indicators to the Glossary.

Response by the Steering Group

100.   Frequently Asked Questions: A question on the relevance of global SDG indicators in the context of Covid-19 impact will be added.

101.   Para 512: The point about the need to measure progress at both levels will be added. The issue of how measuring progress towards SDGs at national and sub-national levels is linked with measuring global progress is addressed in more detail in Section 5.

102.   The Steering Group takes note of Belarus' concern on the use of Open Data Watch ranking and agrees that composite indicators have a number of limitations. Such indicators and rankings are being used to show more a general direction and not specific problems in the area or in a country. The Steering Group will amend the paragraph to include the necessary clarifications in the text so that the readers may know about the limitations when using such rankings.

103.   Glossary: The definitions of data and statistics and statistical and non-statistical indicators will be added.

IV.   Proposal to the Conference

104.   The Conference is invited to endorse the *Conference of European Statisticians Road Map on Statistics for Sustainable Development Goals, second* edition, subject to amendments outlined in this document.