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**SDGs Statistics at the 2030 Agenda Midpoint: lessons learned from the Spanish experience**

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**Abstract**

*The SDG indicators present an unprecedented challenge. This document discusses the state of statistical capacity to address this challenge at the 2030 Agenda Midpoint, drawing on the Spanish experience.*

*In a complex system with multiple stakeholders at all levels, coordination and cooperation are essential. In the case of Spain, the National Statistical Institute acts as the coordinating body and main producer of indicators, although there are many other producers involved. Leveraging existing legal and organizational institutions, like the National Statistical Plan or the collegiate bodies of coordination, has been a positive approach. Holding a considerable amount of meetings with various participants has also been necessary.*

*A main tool in meeting the challenge has been the implementation of a National Reporting Platform (NRP). It is not a one-time project, but rather an ongoing activity. Continuing the work on SDMX and the UN Data Lab is essential to further improve the efficiency of data transmissions and ensure the coherence of data across platforms.*

*While a significant amount of information exists, further data, particularly at a more granular level, is still required. Some tools should be explored to fully cover the broad scope of the 2030 Agenda. We are starting to work with geospatial information, to include in the NRP and the Voluntary National Review.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

1. A global commitment like the 2030 Agenda, with its measurable targets, requires quality statistical information. Fully developing the global indicator framework, complemented by regional, national, sub-national, and thematic indicators, presents a significant challenge for the statistical community. As Mr. Mogens Lykketoft, President of the 70th session of the UN General Assembly, noted, the SDG indicators are an "unprecedented statistical challenge". The halfway point towards the 2030 Agenda, reached in 2023, is an opportune time to reflect on lessons learned from providing statistics for the SDGs. In fact, the Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians has chosen this topic for an upcoming in-depth review.
2. The National Statistical Institute of Spain (INE) is committed to producing and disseminating high-quality indicators that facilitate effective monitoring and reporting of the 2030 Agenda's goals and targets. SDG indicators span the economic, social, environmental, and institutional areas. As a result, they are

obtained from a wide variety of sources. INE serves as the coordinating body and primary producer of indicators, though many other producers are involved. To carry out its objectives, INE has had to undertake numerous activities and works. One of the fundamental activities has been the creation of a National Reporting Platform (NRP). The Platform is broader than just a dissemination database; indeed, it can serve as a starting point for other SDG-related actions (SDG reports, press releases, etc.). The development of the SDG indicators is not considered a one-off project, but rather an ongoing activity that must be maintained and improved over time.

3. This paper discusses the state of statistical capacity to address the SDG indicators challenge at the 2030 Agenda Midpoint, drawing on the Spanish experience. While a significant amount of information exists, further data, particularly at a more granular level, is still required. Some tools should be explored to fully cover the broad scope of the 2030 Agenda. The outline of this paper is as follows. Section 2 discusses the need of coordination and cooperation. Section 3 describes the implementation of a NRP as a main tool. Section 4 presents continuous improvement as a suitable approach. Section 5 presents some new tools to be explored in order to fill the gaps. The paper ends with some final remarks.

## **II. THE NEED OF COORDINATION AND COOPERATION**

4. The SDG indicators spread across the different goals and targets. This set is very heterogeneous, encompassing indicators related to the economic, social, environmental, and institutional areas. Consequently, the indicators are obtained from a wide range of sources. In a complex system with multiple stakeholders, coordination and cooperation are essential. In Spain, INE serves as the coordinating body and main producer of indicators, although many other producers are involved, including 15 ministries and the Bank of Spain.

5. To coordinate the statistical services of ministries responsible for producing the SDG Indicators, INE has used the legal and organizational tools existing in Spain. The SDG indicators were incorporated into the National Statistical Plan, the main organizing legal instrument for the statistical activity. Moreover, in its role as coordinator, INE has reported and discussed the developments of SDG indicators in the collegiate bodies of coordination (the Inter-ministerial Statistics Commission and the Inter-territorial Statistics Committee). In both bodies, Working Groups have been created. Leveraging existing legal and organizational institutions, like the National Statistical Plan or the collegiate bodies of coordination, has been a positive approach. Holding a considerable amount of meetings with various participants has also been necessary.

### **A. The SDG indicators are introduced in the National Statistical Plan**

6. A statistic called "Indicators of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" was incorporated into the National Statistical Plan in 2018. Its aim is to establish a framework of indicators that serve to monitor the goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda in Spain. The INE's Directorate for International Relations and the 2030 Agenda is responsible for this statistic, with the collaboration of the statistical services of the ministerial departments and the Bank of Spain. The SDG indicators are holistic and transversal in nature, affecting practically all the producing units of the Spanish statistical system, both inside and outside the INE. For this reason, the Indicators of the 2030 Agenda can be considered a special project inside the Plan, a kind of "macroproject".

7. The project was presented to the Higher Statistics Council, an advisory body representing trade unions, business organizations, and academic and social institutions. The Council unanimously approved

the project, facilitating consensus-building for the introduction of the indicators. The legal provision, which introduces the Agenda 2030 Indicators into the National Statistical Plan, reinforces INE's coordinating role. It establishes INE as responsible for coordinating the statistical services involved in producing these indicators.

## **B. Coordination through collegiate bodies**

8. To coordinate the SDG indicators, INE has leveraged existing collegiate coordination bodies. The Inter-ministerial Statistics Commission (CIME) aims to achieve horizontal coordination among state statistical services. Meanwhile, the Inter-territorial Statistics Committee (CITE) aims to facilitate coordination and enhance cooperation between state and regional statistical services. INE has regularly reported on SDG indicator developments to these bodies. Since the adoption of the Agenda in 2015, updates on the progress of the indicator framework has been provided. This is crucial due to the continuous development and refinement of the framework, including annual reviews and comprehensive reviews in 2020 and 2025. In addition to regular meetings, specific meetings have been held to discuss SDG Indicators.

9. In both bodies, Working Groups have been created to study and implement the SDGs indicators, exchange methodological experiences, and solve practical problems. The general purpose of the CIME Working Group is to coordinate and promote the work related to the constitution of a framework of statistical indicators. The specific objectives are to strengthen coordination between the producers of indicators, to report on relevant national and international initiatives, to advance the availability of sub-indicators, and to constitute a forum for the exchange of knowledge and experiences. Among other tasks, work has been done on the exploration of new data sources to complete the framework of indicators, on the disaggregation of sub-indicators, and on sub-indicators metadata.

10. The CITE Working Group aims to exchange methodological experiences. Its specific objectives include sharing methodological information among INE, ministries, and the statistical bodies of the Spanish regions (Autonomous Communities). A comprehensive analysis of numerous indicators has been conducted, leading to a positive exchange of experiences and detailed knowledge of methodologies and sources. This in-depth methodological review has established a kind of peer review process. The joint work has broadened the analysis and reflection on each indicator, incorporating different perspectives. As a result, the collaboration has improved the coherence between indicators produced by state and regional statistical services and ensured the production of high-quality data.

11. Moreover an internal INE Working Group on SDG Indicators was created since the beginning of the Agenda, involving the units working in the production of indicators, as well as those responsible for IT issues, e.g. maintenance of the indicators platform.

## **III A MAIN TOOL: THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A NRP**

12. Like in many other countries, INE has implemented a NRP for SDG Indicators. It is specifically developed for SDG reporting, although it is integrated in the general IT architecture of INE (it can be consulted at: <https://www.ine.es/dyngs/ODS/es/index.htm>). One of the main characteristics of the Platform is that it follows the same structure as the 2030 Agenda itself: goals, targets, and indicators. The category "sub-indicators" has been added to name the data series that are offered. For each indicator, it is specified whether it is available, whether data sources are being explored or whether it is not applicable

or not relevant to Spain. Likewise, for each sub-indicator the source from which the data is obtained and its metadata are provided.

13. The Platform is wider than just a dissemination database. It serves as a means of collecting SDGs data and metadata from data providers. It is used as a tool for the coordination of the national statistical system, by ensuring compliance with methodological standards and the quality of data and metadata. It can also help to identify data gaps and encourage collaboration.

14. From a dissemination point of view, the Platform centralizes all SDG indicators into a single-entry point, allowing to access to national and subnational data. It serves various user groups by presenting data in different formats such as tables, graphs, and maps. The Platform provides time series data to analyse the progress of indicators towards the SDGs. It is also intended to promote the use of SDG statistics by presenting them in a user-friendly manner.

15. An additional objective of the Platform is the transmission of data and metadata to international bodies (e.g., custodian agencies) through Statistical Data and Metadata eXchange (SDMX) files. SDMX can improve cross-domain coherence between platforms, by using standard concepts, shared code lists, and guidelines that are reused across domains and statistical agencies.

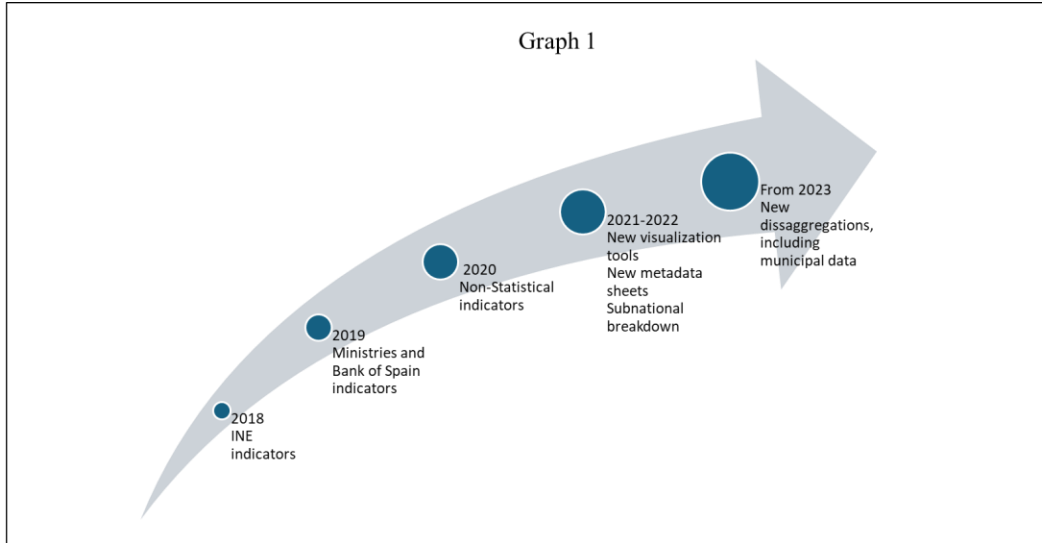
16. The United Nations Statistical Division (UNSD) has implemented the SDG Data Lab, a platform to carry out data and metadata exchange between NRPs, custodian agencies and UNSD, to gradually replace all other forms of data submission. Data exchange is beginning to be carried out with countries, which submit their relevant data sets to the Data Lab. INE is also working on SDMX transmission. Currently there are around 120 global series in SDMX format available on the NRP and uploaded in the SDG Data Lab. The intended objective is to move towards automated transmission of data to custodian agencies. This way data disseminated on international organization databases and NRPs would be more coherent.

17. Platforms can enhance transparency by providing relevant metadata and other background documentation. On the INE Platform, for each indicator, there is a link to its metadata, which includes metadata for the current indicator available from Spanish statistics closest to the corresponding global SDG indicator. Similarly, a link to the UN metadata is provided.

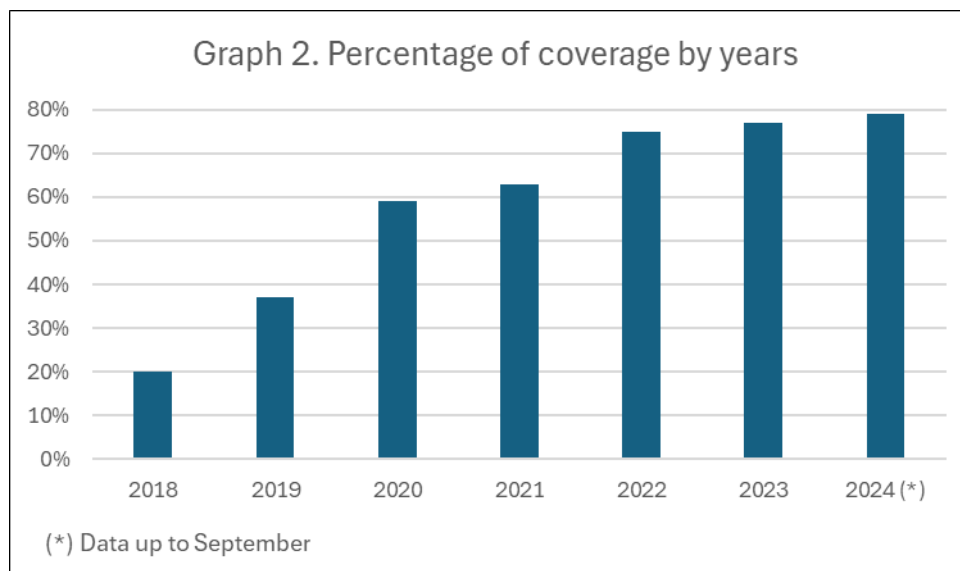
18. According to the INE's experience, the NRP is proving to be an essential tool for meeting the challenge of monitoring the SDGs. Indeed, data platforms can serve as a starting point for other SDG-related actions (SDG reports, press releases, etc.). As an example, the Statistical Annex for the Voluntary National Review of Spain in 2024 is based on the data available on the Platform.

#### **IV A CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT APPROACH**

19. The development of the SDG indicators is not considered a one-off project, but rather an ongoing activity that must be maintained and improved over time. For example (see graph 1), considering the NRP, it was launched in 2018, including only INE data. In 2019, it expanded to include data from ministries and the Bank of Spain. Starting in 2020, indicators are introduced from administrative data even if they are not part of the National Statistical Plan, if they respond to the metadata established by the UN. The platform was renewed in 2021 with new visualization tools and in 2022 with new metadata sheets. In parallel, we started to publish indicators disaggregated by autonomous communities and other variables. Finally, from 2023, a considerable effort has been made to include more disaggregated data, reaching to municipal level in 2024, which allows for more granular analysis.



20. The work of exploring data sources is carried out continuously, incorporating new indicators and breakdowns of data from different sources whenever they can meet rigorous quality standards. The platform's coverage of global indicators, as tracked in December of each year (see graph 2), has increased over time in a continuous way. The coverage has passed from 20% in 2018 to 79% in 2024.



21. However, specific occasions, such as Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs), can be leveraged to promote the development of SDG indicators, mainly national indicators. Spain has presented three VNRs, in 2018, 2021 and 2024. The VNRs offer a valuable opportunity to disseminate indicators through the Statistical Annexes.

## **V SOME NEW TOOLS TO BE EXPLORED**

22. While a significant amount of information exists, further data, particularly at a more granular level, is still required. Traditional methods are not enough to address the challenges posed by the SDG indicators. Therefore, new data sources and new production methods are needed. Some tools should be explored to fully cover the broad scope of the 2030 Agenda. INE has begun to utilize Earth observation data to fill the gap, mainly in indicators of Goal 11 "Sustainable cities and Communities".

23. Several international initiatives, such as the Global Geospatial and Statistical Framework, the SDGs Geospatial Roadmap, the UNECE SDGs Statistics Roadmap, and the findings of the IAEG-SDGs Working Group on Geospatial Information, have demonstrated the significant value of geospatial data in supporting the development of the indicator framework. Building upon previous international initiatives, INE and the National Geographic Institute (IGN) have developed a first project to generate SDG indicators from Earth observations. In particular, we have worked by combining IGN and INE data for the calculation of indicator 11.7.1. "Average share of the built-up area of cities that is open space for public use for all, by sex, age and persons with disabilities".

## **VI FINAL REMARKS**

24. The SDGs are global in nature, necessitating international cooperation for metric development. INE tries to actively participate and collaborate in the main international statistical forum. Moreover, INE finds the instruments facilitating statistical systems (e.g. Road Map 2.0, Self-Assessment Tool) very useful. While the SDGs are globally defined, their implementation is highly localized. To enhance indicator coverage and disaggregation, continued collaboration with regional and local statistical bodies is essential.

25. Halfway through the Agenda, SDG indicators continue to be a challenge to be faced in the coming years, but also a strategic opportunity to improve statistical systems.

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