

Guide to statistics in European Commission development cooperation

VOLUME 1: SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT
GOALS AND INDICATORS

2021 edition



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Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2021

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Foreword

Reliable and relevant statistics are essential for all aspects of public discourse and for holding governments accountable. They constitute a key tool for governments and policy makers to measure progress towards development goals and provide information about the effectiveness of policies and programmes.

This Guide provides extensive information on statistics in development cooperation, presenting key international initiatives supporting developing countries in building sustainable statistical systems that produce quality statistics. It provides information on how to identify and develop actions in support of key statistics and how to use data and indicators to define and follow-up cooperation programmes.

This edition also includes various key developments, including the sustainable development goals (SDGs) and the SDG indicators framework, the UN World Data Forum and other related initiatives. The implementation of development programmes aimed at achieving the SDGs has further raised the demand for high-quality statistics in this area.

The EU is the biggest provider of development assistance in the world. In the area of statistics, the European Commission, together with the EU Member States, is highly involved in the field of international statistical cooperation, with Eurostat — the Statistical Office of the EU — at the forefront of developing methodology and instruments for harmonised and reliable statistics. This publication is intended to support EU Delegations around the world, as well as various EU/EC services, and more generally, those involved in implementation of statistical cooperation programmes.

For a non-statistician, the Guide explains how national statistical systems are organised and how they function, the central role of national statistical offices, as well as core international quality frameworks and principles for statistics. Overall, the Guide has been designed as a dynamic, interactive tool providing technical references and guidance on statistics, through hundreds of active hyperlinks for further information.

This updated version of the Guide is the fifth consecutive edition; the first edition was published a decade ago. To make the Guide easier to use, it has been divided into a core volume, supplemented by chapters that present statistics and statistical processes in specific sectors (gathered into a set of four thematic volumes): Sustainable Development Goals and indicators; social statistics; economic statistics and; environment and climate change statistics. With the exception of the volume on economic statistics, the whole publication has been updated for this edition.

Since the start of 2020, the world has been under immense strain from the COVID-19 pandemic and its repercussions. The setback caused by the pandemic and its dire consequences for finances and capacity in many societies may further amplify the challenges. The need for support through capacity development and technical assistance is therefore more vital than ever. In this context, the demand for data and statistics to monitor and evaluate this dynamic situation has become proportionally greater, with a requirement for new statistics and more rapid results.

I hope you will find this new edition of the Guide useful. As always, Eurostat welcomes any feedback and ideas on how to develop it further.



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Acknowledgements

Eurostat is grateful to those who provided their contributions towards the compilation of this Guide.

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Introduction: The guide to the Guide

Why a Guide to statistics in European Commission development cooperation and who should read it?

'I have no data yet. It is a capital mistake to theorise before one has data. Insensibly one begins to twist facts to suit theories, instead of theories to suit facts...'

Sherlock Holmes in 'A Scandal in Bohemia' by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, 1891

The purpose of the Guide to statistics in European Commission development cooperation is to explain why statistics are important for development cooperation, how to use them and what needs to be done to make them available. It is not intended to be a course in statistics and statistical methods. Alternative and additional reading is shown in the 'To find out more' box at the end of each section.

The Guide is the fruit of a close cooperation amongst Commission services and international stakeholders in statistical co-operation for development. It is principally aimed at supporting EU staff working in development cooperation, especially in EU delegations. However, it is also relevant to other actors in statistical development programmes. In particular, it aims to aid practitioners who need to know more about statistics in development cooperation context. The Guide explains why and how statistics are relevant to their work and what they need to do in various situations. It provides the information required for Commission staff to undertake the following tasks:

- Use statistical indicators to design and monitor development programmes;
- Identify and develop statistics support actions;
- Promote the use of statistics at each stage of the aid cycle;
- Advocate for early consideration of which statistics and indicators will be needed for implementation, evaluation and impact assessment (and what is required to obtain these).

The Guide aims to answer a number of basic questions about development statistics:

- Part A, this Introduction, is a guide to when and how to consult the Guide
- Part B: Statistics in Development looks at why and how statistics enter the development process and how to understand and check data
- Part C: Support for Statistics considers when and how the European Community needs to act to make sure that good quality statistics are available to support its development goals
- Parts A-C are completed by four thematic volumes dealing with the use of Statistics for Policy Issues. Chapters in these volumes look at how statistics can be used and supported to achieve European Commission policy aims in specific sectors.

When arguing that statistics are important but bread is more urgent, one should ask oneself on what information the answers to the following questions are based: 'How much bread?' and 'Where is it needed?' Development fundamentally is about people and about eliminating poverty. In order to manage the process, it is essential to measure it. While statistics may not directly reduce poverty or hunger, they are an essential component of a complex process; without adequate statistical data it is by no means certain that actions to reduce poverty will be directed at the right problem, that they will be effective or that they will result in sustained improvements.

It is obvious that good and reliable statistics are necessary to donors, in order to assess where aid is most needed, to use resources efficiently, to measure progress and to evaluate results. There is broad consensus that the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) identify the desired outcomes as well as the means for measuring progress. Thus, statistics are vital to 'Managing for Development Results' with shared accountability and focus on results.

A key issue is the need for good country-specific and country-owned policies and institutions. Better statistical data and improved analysis can create a political will for changes. Without good statistics, governments cannot deliver efficient administration, good management, and evidence-based policymaking. An effective and efficient national statistical system, providing regular and reliable data on the economy and the well-being of the population, is an important indicator of good policies and a crucial component of good governance.

Statistics also provide a means for the media, non-governmental organisations and any citizen to monitor the activities of government. The ability to provide regular and reliable data on the economy and the well-being of the population is an important indicator of good policies and institutions. When the statistical system produces quality data which is trusted by the public, transparency increases and accountability is promoted. The quality and availability of data depend on the capacity of the institutions involved in the national statistical system, which are often undervalued and underfunded.

This Guide, and in particular this volume, will help you find what you want to know about statistics for Sustainable Development Goals and indicators

How to read this volume of the Guide

There are text boxes at the start and end of each chapter. The chapter in brief box starts each chapter and provides a summary of one to two paragraphs. Most sections and each sector chapter end with a 'To find out more' box, which provides references, hyperlinks and supporting information for further research.

The table of contents is provided in detail so that most key issues can be found easily. Hyperlinks are also provided to Eurostat's Concepts and Definitions Database (CODED) and OECD's Glossary of Statistical Terms, as well as to the International Statistical Institute's (ISI) Multilingual Glossary of Statistical Terms.

The Guide is prepared primarily to be used as an electronic document to be disseminated in PDF format. To navigate through the text and find related information, the user can simply click on the interactive links from the Table of Contents. To consult external references over the Internet, the user just has to click on the hyperlinks in the 'To find out more' boxes. The user may also use the normal 'search' facility for PDF documents to find the information of interest, searching on specific keywords or key terms.

To find out more...

These boxes, provided at the end of most sections, summarise reference documents and in most cases give hyperlinks to them, e.g.:

- [Eurostat's Concepts and Definitions Database \(CODED\)](#)
- [OECD's Glossary of Statistical Terms](#)
- [International Statistical Institute's \(ISI\) Multilingual Glossary of Statistical Terms](#)
- [European Consensus on Development](#)
- [Conference of European Statisticians: Classification of Statistical Activities \(CSA\)](#)

V1.1

SDG and sustainable development indicators



V.1.1. SDG and sustainable development indicators

The chapter in brief

This chapter starts by setting out the global framework for sustainable development, the European Union's development policies, and the role that statistical indicators play for measuring progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).

The second section describes the background concepts and definitions supporting the tools for measuring progress.

The third section focuses on the sources of data and associated metadata required for quantifying global and national achievements in time and space. The roles and responsibilities of national and international stakeholders for monitoring progress and reporting on SDGs are depicted. The European Union development strategy as well as best practices from around the world illustrate the variety of paths adopted for measuring progress.

The fourth section provides a brief review of data quality assurance that secures trust in the reliability of statistical indicators. The fifth and last section presents the principles and methods recommended for constructing Sustainable Development Indicators that should lead to harmonised and comparable metrics.

1. Reviving growth to eliminate poverty.
2. Changing the quality of growth to make it less material- and energy-intensive.
3. Meeting essential human needs.
4. Ensuring a sustainable level of population size.
5. Conserving and enhancing the resource base.
6. Reorienting technology and managing risk.
7. Merging environment and economics in decision making.

These 7 strategic imperatives were followed up by a global political commitment in the "Rio Declaration on Environment and Development" and the "Agenda 21" action plan at the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro in Brazil, also known as the "Earth Summit".

In September 2000, the Millennium Summit gathered the largest number of world leaders in history, at the United Nations headquarters in New York City. At this meeting, world leaders ratified the United Nations Millennium Declaration and the 8 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The MDGs started a global effort to tackle the indignity of poverty. It established measurable, universally agreed objectives for tackling extreme poverty and hunger, preventing deadly diseases, and expanding primary education to all children, among other development priorities. An Inter-Agency Expert Group on MDG Indicators (IAEG) was mandated with developing a framework for monitoring progress towards achieving the MDGs. This framework consisted of 60 indicators, providing one or more indicators for most of the specific targets under the MDGs. The indicators represented the first attempt at building a framework of global indicators, including indicators on both social and environmental sustainability.

In June 2012, the UN Conference on Sustainable Development, also known as "Rio+20", was held in Rio de Janeiro. The conference addressed the global challenges of sustainable development (social, economic, environment). In particular, it focused on two interlinked issues: the green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication, and the institutional framework for sustainable development. It resulted in a focused political outcome document which contained clear and practical measures for implementing sustainable development. In Rio, Member States decided to launch a process to develop a set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which would build upon the MDGs and converge with the post 2015 development agenda. The main objective was to produce a set of universal goals that meet the urgent environmental, political and economic challenges facing our world.

In July 2014, the UN General Assembly's Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals (OWG) presented a proposal for new development goals to be achieved by 2030. The proposal contained 17 main development goals, sub-divided into 169 concrete targets. The 17 SDGs were

V.1.1.1 Sustainable development framework

V.1.1.1.1 WHAT IS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT?

Sustainable Development is the organizing principle for meeting human development goals while simultaneously sustaining the ability of natural systems to provide the natural resources and ecosystem services on which the economy and society depend. The desired result is a state of society where living conditions and resources are used to continue to meet human needs without undermining the integrity and stability of the natural system.

The most well-known definition comes from the Brundtland report 'Our common future' of the UN World Commission on Environment and Development (1987)

"Sustainable development" is a normative concept, rather like 'justice' or 'democracy'. It integrates short-term and longer-term objectives and actions at local and global level, and seeks a balance between social, economic and environmental issues. The general meaning of the concept 'sustainable development' is clear, but there is no simple definition of it".

"... development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs".

'Our common future' outlined seven critical objectives for environment and development policies that follow from the concept of sustainable development:

formally adopted at the UN Sustainable Development Summit 25–27 September 2015 in New York, under the title “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” (see Box V.1.1.1). The SDGs balance the three dimensions of sustainable development: economic, social, and environmental. They are global in nature and universally applicable. However, each government can set its own national priorities in the context of this framework.

To monitor the progress towards these 17 goals and their 169 targets, the United Nations Statistical Commission created an Inter-agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators (IAEG-SDGs) in March 2015. Their proposal for a global monitoring framework for the SDG, comprising 231 unique indicators, was agreed by the UN Statistical Committee in March 2016.

To facilitate monitoring progress, a variety of tools help tracking and visualizing achievements towards the SDGs. All intend to make data more available and more easily

Box V.1.1.1: Sustainable Development Goals

- Goal 1** End poverty in all its forms everywhere.
- Goal 2** End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture.
- Goal 3** Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.
- Goal 4** Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.
- Goal 5** Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.
- Goal 6** Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.
- Goal 7** Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all.
- Goal 8** Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.
- Goal 9** Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation.
- Goal 10** Reduce inequality within and among countries.
- Goal 11** Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.
- Goal 12** Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns.
- Goal 13** Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.
- Goal 14** Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development.
- Goal 15** Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation.
- Goal 16** Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all.
- Goal 17** Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development.

understood. For example, the online publication SDG-Tracker, launched in June 2018, presents available data across all countries and indicators.

V.1.1.1.2 EUROPEAN UNION SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT POLICIES

Following the UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro (1992), the EU ratified both the Rio Declaration and Agenda 21. In 1997, sustainable development became a fundamental objective of the EU when it was included in the Treaty of Amsterdam as an overarching objective of EU policies. At the Gothenburg Summit in 2001, EU leaders launched the first EU Sustainable Development Strategy (EU SDS). In June 2006, a renewed EU Sustainable Development Strategy was adopted by the European Council.

In the run-up to the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, the Commission worked closely with the Member States to ensure an ambitious global outcome. The EU has fully committed itself to delivering on the 2030 Agenda and its implementation, as outlined in the European Commission Communication 'Next steps for a sustainable European future - European action for sustainability' (2016), the reflection paper 'Towards a Sustainable Europe by 2030' (2019) and the 'The European Green Deal'. Regular monitoring of progress towards the SDGs in an EU context is essential for this purpose.

V.1.1.1.3 THE ROLE OF INDICATORS

Sustainable development indicators (SDIs) are conceived to enable assessment of whether targets and objectives of sustainable development are being met. In other words, they are policy performance indicators, designed to enable evaluation of the policy performance of the different facets of sustainable development.

By establishing quantitative measures for sustainability, it becomes possible to set goals, apply management strategies, and measure progress. Such indicators are needed to increase focus on sustainable development and assist decision-makers to adopt sound national sustainable development policies.

The SDG monitoring framework comprises several levels:

- **Global indicators**, which form the core of all other sets of indicators.
- **Indicators at regional, national and sub-national levels**, developed by the UN member states to complement the global indicators, taking into account specific circumstances.
- **Thematic indicators**, being developed in a number of areas.

The regular monitoring of progress towards the SDGs by the EU is based on the EU SDG indicator set, developed in cooperation with a large number of partners and stakeholders. This indicator set comprises some 100 indicators, distributed over the 17 SDGs. Around a third of these

indicators are multi-purpose indicators, monitoring more than one SDG target.

To facilitate the implementation of the global indicator framework, all SDG indicators are classified by the IAEG-SDGs into three tiers, based on their level of methodological development and the availability of data at the global level.

Box V.1.1.2: SDG Tier Classification Criteria/Definitions:

Tier 1: Indicator is conceptually clear, has an internationally established methodology and standards are available, and data are regularly produced by countries for at least 50 per cent of countries and of the population in every region where the indicator is relevant.

Tier 2: Indicator is conceptually clear, has an internationally established methodology, and standards are available, but data are not regularly produced by countries.

Tier 3: No internationally established methodology or standards are yet available for the indicator, but methodology/standards are being (or will be) developed or tested. (As of the 51st session of the UN Statistical Commission, the global indicator framework does not contain any Tier III indicators).

All indicators are equally important, and the establishment of the tier system is intended solely to assist in the development of global implementation strategies. For tier I and II indicators, the availability of data at the national level may not necessarily align with the global tier classification and countries can create their own tier classification for implementation. Tier I and II indicators' metadata are available in the metadata repository.

Data are produced by the national statistical systems, ensuring national ownership. Countries are asked to strengthen collection of baseline data in order to better measure progress for each of the SDGs. Thus, statistical capacity building is essential for national statistical systems to meet the demands of the 2030 Agenda.

Following one of the main recommendations contained in the report entitled "A World That Counts", presented in November 2014 by the United Nations Secretary-General's IEAG on Data Revolution for Sustainable Development, the Statistical Commission agreed that a UN World Data Forum on Sustainable Development Data (UN World Data Forum) would be the suitable platform for intensifying cooperation with various professional groups, such as information technology, geospatial information managers, data scientists, and users, as well as civil society stakeholders. The first World Data Forum met in Cape Town in January 2017. A Virtual UN World Data Forum was held in October 2020.

Developing countries are encouraged to design, implement and monitor National Strategy for the Development of Statistics (NSDS), along the methodology proposed by PARIS21 and to have nationally owned and produced data for all SDG indicators. Countries need to have an overall vision of the development of their national statistical system which will include the national, regional, and international needs; be part

of the country development and poverty reduction policy; serve as a framework for international and bilateral assistance; include all parts of the data production units and address the issues related to the analysis and use of data; follow the international standards including quality; and build on all past and existing activities and experiences.

An NSDS provides a country with a strategy for developing statistical capacity across the entire national statistical system (NSS). The NSDS provides a vision for where the NSS should be in five to ten years and sets milestones for getting there. It presents a comprehensive and unified framework for continual assessment of evolving user needs and priorities for statistics and for building the capacity needed to meet these needs in a more coordinated, synergistic and efficient manner. It will also provide a framework for mobilising, harnessing, and leveraging resources (both national and international) and a basis for effective and results-oriented strategic management of the NSS.

Generally, the UN recommends a policy-driven approach, adapted to each region of the world. Thus, the regional Commissions of the UN are also prioritising the work on regionally adapted frameworks for SDIs. Good examples are the frameworks developed by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), the UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), the UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), and the

Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). The World Bank has developed dashboards to present data from the World Development Indicators (WDI) that help to monitor the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), but these dashboards are not always the official indicators for SDG monitoring.

Eurostat and the European Statistical System play a leading role in providing data and monitoring to what extent the EU is on track to achieving the SDGs (see chapter D V.1.1.3.3).

V.1.1.1.4 INDICATOR FRAMEWORKS

An indicator is a quantitative or qualitative factor or variable that provides a simple and reliable means to measure achievement, to reflect the changes connected to an intervention, or to help assess the performance of a development actor. Indicators need comparable, reliable and timely data. Official statistics is a key source of such data. The accuracy and relevance of indicators are critically dependent on the timely availability and the quality of the data on which they are based. Official statistics are provided by the national statistical system; the statistical capacity of the NSS is essential to assure that the data needed for the indicators are available and of sufficient quality.

The European Commission uses the OECD Development Assistance Committee's typology to classify indicators. This classifies each indicator according to what it measures;

Box V.1.1.3: Indicator types

Type of Indicator	What does it measure?
Input indicators	Financial, administrative and regulatory resources ("process") provided by government and donors. It is necessary to establish a link between resources used and results achieved to assess the efficiency of actions. Examples: share of the budget devoted to education expenditure, technical assistance person-days provided.
Output indicators	Immediate and concrete consequences of the measures taken and resources used. Examples: number of schools and training centres built, renovated or equipped; number and percent of teachers trained; teachers employed; nurses trained.
Outcome indicators	Results at the level of beneficiaries. Examples: gross enrolment rates in primary schools; percentage of girls among the children entering first year of primary school; vaccinations; inscription rates for professional training; percentage of professional training graduates employed after training.
Impact indicators	Measure the consequences of the outcomes. They measure the general objectives in terms of national development and poverty reduction. Examples: literacy rates; health improvement; employment and unemployment rates.

an “input”, an “output”, an “outcome” or an “impact”. Each indicator falls into one and only one of these types.

Indicators should be both limited and sufficiently comprehensive to capture the multidimensional nature of sustainable development. If too many indicators are used, the results become unwieldy and difficult to interpret. Indicators need to be clear and unambiguous. Clarity of purpose and audience will instruct indicator clarity.

Over the past decade, the increased emphasis on evidence-based decision making has led to improved efforts to build capacity in this regard especially in developing countries. Despite major advances over the last decade, data availability and reliability continue to be a problem in many countries. To increase cost effectiveness, SDG indicators often require data that are routinely collected either by national statistical services or through international processes. Many indicators rely on data contained in national accounts, and progress made in the adoption of the system of national accounts (SNA) will also improve data availability.

Countries are encouraged to strengthen their National Statistical Systems for producing quality data necessary for providing indicators to respond to national and international needs. Moreover, to provide a framework for enhanced statistical systems, the International Monetary Fund in its ‘Enhanced General Data Dissemination System’ (e-GDDS) sets out objectives for data production and dissemination. These objectives relate to four data properties (“dimensions”):

- Data coverage, periodicity and timeliness relates to the production and dissemination of economic, financial, and socio-demographic data by member countries.
- Quality of the data relates to information that is available to users to access the data covered by the system.
- Integrity of the data related to the transparency of practices and procedures surrounding the production and dissemination of official statistics.
- Access by the public relates to the dissemination of official statistics to users in a convenient and equitable manner.

Data availability is a critical issue. In general, data required for SDG indicators are available at the national level from a variety of institutions that collect and manage the data, but there may be some gaps. National statistical offices are the major data source in most countries. In general, this holds for national and satellite account data, census data as well as data derived from major surveys. Other ministries and government agencies are also major data sources, especially for data from administrative records. Regional and international organizations also collect and manage data from various national sources and could be consulted directly in cases where the data are not readily available at the national level.

Many developing countries have weak statistical systems and mechanisms for measuring results. Good, reliable

statistics are essential for measuring progress in reaching development goals and provide essential information about the effectiveness of policies and programmes. They help governments improve their policies and to be transparent and accountable about the delivery of development results. Reliable statistics are a key element towards better measurement, monitoring and management of the results of development assistance.

A wide range of statistical data is needed to support the development process, to provide the evidence base for policy formulation, to support implementation, to monitor progress and to evaluate outcomes, inter alia:

- Social data;
- Economic data;
- Demographic data; and
- Environmental data.

The quality and availability of these data are subject of the capacity of institutions involved in the national statistical system (NSS) to answer to statistics users’ needs, the legal and institutional framework, and the awareness of the importance of statistics at the political level.

The existence and use of indicators support the development of country-specific and country-owned policies and institutions. Indicators built on quality statistics are vital for the development of evidence-based policies. Furthermore, the development aid allocated to a country is calculated on the basis of a number of indicators; multi-annual indicative allocations should be based on standard, objective and transparent need and performance criteria. Reliable and relevant indicators are vital for setting baselines, for monitoring and for evaluation of results, thus they should be comparable over space and time.

V.1.1.2 Concepts and definitions

V.1.1.2.1 POLICY DRIVEN APPROACH

In many cases, the relationship between indicators and policy is very strong. This is the case for sustainable development indicators, which are designed specifically to monitor progress in the different aspects of the sustainable development strategies. This policy driven approach assures the relevance of the SDIs. Policy makers see them as being directly relevant to the sustainable development strategies and effective means for communication. While there may be concerns about having indicators closely aligned with policy objectives and targets at the expense of other aspects of sustainable development, this is also one of their strengths. On the other hand, indicators which are closely connected with the measurement of specific policies must be redefined whenever there are changes in these policies. The United Nations’ E-Handbook on Sustainable Development Goals

Indicators' is targeted towards national statisticians to enable them to monitor progress made in implementation of the SDGs based on data produced by national statistical systems.

V.1.1.2.2 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS

Sustainable development covers two different scales: the temporal and the spatial. The temporal scale considers sustainability within a generation and between generations; the spatial scale considers sustainability with respect to local, national, regional and global sustainability. This is also at the core of the Agenda 21. With respect to the intra-generation scale and the spatial scale, there is a divide in economic, social and ecological standards and growth between the developing countries and developed countries, often labelled a 'North-South divide'.

Another dimension of sustainable development is the discussion of 'weak' versus 'strong' sustainability as regards 'natural' and 'artificial' capital, understood as the volume and quality of the stock of natural, physical, human, financial, produced and social capital. In essence, these two views disagree as to what should be handed over to future generations. 'Weak sustainability' argues that 'natural' and 'artificial' capital can be substituted for another, i.e. that depreciation of natural capital such as the use of non-renewable resources such as oil and uranium can be compensated for by a corresponding investment in 'artificial capital' such as knowledge of production of renewable energy and of energy efficiency. Strong sustainability, in contrast, argues that humans are embedded in a natural system and that limits to natural resources ('capital') constrain the scope for human actions. In other words, that the two kinds of capital are complementary.

The focus of countries in monitoring progress towards achieving sustainable development measured through an agreed indicator sets has generally been on meeting the information needs of a national sustainable development strategy. It is relatively rare that such policies are formulated on the basis of an explicitly defined conceptual framework. Nevertheless, they should be the result of rigorous consultations inside and outside local government to ensure that different perspectives on how sustainable development should be defined are taken into account.

V.1.1.3. Sources of data and metadata

V.1.1.3.1. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL INDICATORS

Following internal and open consultations, the Inter-agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators (IAEG-SDGs) proposed a monitoring framework for the SDGs. This was agreed by the UN Statistical Commission in March 2016.

This framework covers 231 unique indicators, with each of the 169 SDG targets being covered by at least one indicator for

each target (9 of the 231 indicators relate to 2 or 3 different targets). The framework includes most of the 60 Millennium Development Goals indicators, as well as a number of other existing indicators sourced from international organisations and others.

At regional, national and sub-national levels, the Sustainable Development Indicators (SDIs) are to be adapted by countries and regions to reflect their specific circumstances and to complement the global SDG indicators.

For thematic indicators, the IAEG-SDG continues the development in consultation with the relevant concerned parties. For example, UNESCO's Institute for Statistics (UIS) chairs the Technical Advisory Group developing thematic indicators on education, which also includes experts from the EFA Global Monitoring Report, OECD, UNESCO and UNICEF.

In 2016, the UN Secretary-General released the first Sustainable Development Goals Report, based on information provided by the SDG global indicators. The report provides a baseline of where the world stands at the beginning of the efforts towards achieving the SDG. At the same time, the Global SDG Indicators Database was launched. This database presents country level data, as well as global and regional. The Global SDG indicators website also contains the metadata repository for all SDG indicators.

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic had a devastating impact on progress towards achieving the 2030 Agenda. The importance of timely, quality, open and disaggregated data and statistics has never been as clear as during the COVID-19 crisis. Such data are critical in understanding, managing and mitigating the human, social and economic effects of the pandemic. They are also essential for designing short-term responses and accelerated actions to put countries back on track to achieve the SDGs.

Turning the ambition of the SDGs into reality will require robust data to capture progress and evidence to inform decision-making. The OECD is helping countries to track progress in areas such as trust, health inequalities, green growth, income and consumption inequality, and job quality. It supports countries in developing and using environmental and green growth indicators and in achieving environment-economy integration over time. The OECD also supports developing countries in building their own statistical capacities and systems through the PARIS21 partnership.

V.1.1.3.2. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES FOR SDG MONITORING AND REPORTING

The national level

Countries are the centre and starting point for all monitoring and oversee national monitoring via their national statistical system. The national statistical system comprises the National Statistical Office, line ministries and other national institutions involved in monitoring. It is up to the countries themselves to decide on the level of detail of data and metadata they wish to share with the custodian agencies, and to what extent these should be published. The minimum requirement is

Box V.1.1.4: Matrix for SDG indicators dimensions

	Relevance				
	Relevant	Related indicator relevant	Relevant but missing	Irrelevant	
Data availability	Available	1	2	3	4
	Potentially available	1	2	3	4
	Related data available	2	2	3	4
	Not available	4	4	4	4

Legend: 1: to be used; 2: modified for national context; 3: to be identified; 4: not available in or irrelevant for the country.

The darkest boxes (1) contain indicators that can be incorporated without any changes to national indicators. The dark blue boxes (2) are for those indicators that have to be modified for a given country, either because there exist related and more relevant or specific indicators or because data for the original indicator cannot be made available. The light blue boxes (3) contain those indicators important for a country but not included in the SDG set. The plain boxes (4) are either irrelevant to the country or not available.

Source: Measuring distance to the SDG targets 2019, an assessment of where OECD countries stand

one national aggregate per indicator, however, by sharing more detail on the subcomponents of the indicators and the monitoring methods, and at a higher level of disaggregation, the data will be more credible and useful for different audiences.

The SDG global indicators only represent a subset of the full suite of indicators monitored in a country. Countries are welcome to share additional relevant data sets with the custodian agencies and directly with the HLPF, through their voluntary national reporting.

The role of the National Statistical Systems is crucial in the SDG Review and reporting process. The SDG review process has to draw on the entire NSS, involving all relevant ministries and government agencies and in particular the National Statistical Office (NSO) that regularly collect data. Thus, there is a need to set up a single, integrated national database containing all the information required for the overall 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as well as for addressing global challenges. An integrated information should ensure data interoperability, timeliness, disaggregation, flexibility, integration, sharing and autonomy.

Implementing the SDG review and reporting process implies that:

- National, subnational and local reporting levels are the most significant levels of the SDG review process.
- The global SDG monitoring system builds on national data reporting:
 - Data are derived from national sources in the foundation of SDG reviews at all levels.
 - There is a need to create opportunities for countries to directly contribute to global reporting.

The global level

Based on the premise that a robust follow-up and review mechanism for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development requires a solid framework of indicators and statistical data to monitor progress, inform policy and ensure accountability of all stakeholders, the UN-DESA Statistics Division is building a Global Data Hub that will incorporate a network of national SDG Data Hubs, linked together to the Global Data Hub.

At the global level, Custodian agencies are United Nations bodies (and in some cases, other international organizations) who have been granted the responsibility to compile and verify country data and metadata, and for submitting the data, along with regional and global aggregates, to UN-DESA. These agencies may publish the country data in their own databases and use it for thematic reporting. The country data need to be internationally comparable. To this end, the agencies are also responsible for developing international standards and recommending methodologies for monitoring.

Box V.1.1.5 : Distribution of SDG indicators by major custodian agencies

International Organisation	SDG number (number of indicators per Goal)
FAO	SDG 1 (1); SDG 2 (1); SDG 3 (1); SDG 10 (1)
ILO	SDG 1 (2); SDG 8 (9); SDG 10 (1)
IMF	SDG 8 (1); SDG 10 (1); SDG 17 (2)
ITU	SDG 1 (1)
OECD Focal Point	SDG 1 (1); SDG 2 (1); SDG 3 (1); SDG 4 (1); SDG 6 (1); SDG 8 (1); SDG 9 (1); SDG 10 (1); SDG 15 (2); SDG 17 (5)
OHCHR	SDG 10 (2); SDG 16 (3)
PARIS21	SDG 17 (2)
UIS/UNESCO	SDG 1 (1); SDG 4 (9); SDG 6 (1); SDG 9 (2); SDG 11 (1); SDG 12 (2); SDG 13 (1); SDG 14 (2); SDG 16 (2)
UN Disaster Risk Reduction	SDG 1 (11)
UNDP	SDG 16 (6)
UNEP	SDG 6 (1); SDG 8 (4); SDG 12 (7)
UN-Habitat	SDG 1 (2); SDG 6 (1); SDG 11 (8)
UNICEF	SDG 2 (2); SDG 3 (4); SDG 4 (1); SDG 5 (2); SDG 16 (3)
UNIDO	SDG 9 (7)
UNODC	SDG 9 (5)
UN-Women	SDG 5 (6)
Various UN Agencies	Other SDG and related indicators
WHO	SDG 2 (2); SDG 3 (16); SDG 6 (3); SDG 7 (1); SDG 11 (1)
World Bank	SDG 1 (3); SDG 7 (1); SDG 8 (1); SDG 9 (1); SDG 10 (4); SDG 16 (2); SDG 17 (2)
WTO	SDG 2 (1); SDG 8 (1); SDG 12 (1)

Another central responsibility of the custodian agencies is to strengthen national monitoring and reporting capacity. When country data are missing, collected using a different methodology or inconsistently reported by different sources, agencies may need to do estimates or adjust the data together with the specific countries. All final data to be submitted to UNSD will first be validated and approved by countries.

Another example of monitoring progress towards achieving SDGs at the global level with potential application at the national level, is the SDG Tracker, a joint collaborative effort between researchers at the University of Oxford and the

Global Change Data Lab. SDG Tracker is an open-access project to track the latest data across all of the 17 SDGs. This serves an interactive hub where users can explore and track progress across all of the SDG indicators for which there is data available. The SDG Tracker presents data across all available indicators from the Our World in Data database, using official statistics from the UN and other international organizations. It is a free, open-access publication that tracks global progress towards the SDGs and allows people around the world to hold their governments accountable to achieving the agreed goals. A specific application for Bangladesh is presented in the box below.

Box V.1.1.6: SDG Tracker for Bangladesh

In order to enable tracking its progress towards attainment of SDGs and other national development goals, Bangladesh has tailored a national version of the SDG Tracker, through a web-based information repository. A unique, searchable database provides a snapshot of what those global and national priorities are. Users can get the latest updates of the status of implementation of those goals along with the facilities of data visualization in multiple ways.

To ensure Sustainable Development Goals in Bangladesh by leaving no one behind in most possible short time, a set of 39 indicators has been selected under the instructions of SDG Working Committee of The Prime Minister's Office. Under this process, some of the indicators are selected from the global Sustainable Development Goals and some of the indicators are selected after modification on Bangladesh perspective. All relevant ministries are connected with this process.

The Statistical Division of the UN-DESA has also developed a website where users can explore progress towards achieving SDG for all individual countries and areas around the world. Country profiles covering results of the SDGs and associated targets and indicators at the national level are available.

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has developed its own SDG Pathfinder for monitoring progress on SDG targets. The SDG Pathfinder is an open digital discovery tool that applies an SDG lens to policy content from six international organisations. Content coverage includes curated analysis (books, chapters, articles, papers, etc.), extracted via artificial intelligence based on advanced machine-learning technologies and natural language processing.

V.1.1.3.3. EU SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT INDICATORS

Sustainable development objectives have been at the heart of European policy for a long time, firmly anchored in the European Treaties and mainstreamed in key cross-cutting projects, sectoral policies and initiatives. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have given a new impetus to global efforts for achieving sustainable development. The EU, in coordination with its Member States, is committed to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and to strive towards a sustainable future for all.

Eurostat is called to regularly monitor progress towards the SDGs in an EU context. For this purpose it coordinated the development of the EU SDG indicator set. The indicators have been chosen both for their policy relevance and their statistical quality. Based on the EU SDG indicator set Eurostat produces annual monitoring reports on progress towards the SDGs in an EU context. In 2020, the fourth edition was released: 'Sustainable development in the European Union: Monitoring report on progress towards the SDGs in an EU context — 2020 edition'.

The EU set of indicators, comprising around 100 indicators, is structured along the 17 SDGs, and covers the social, economic, environmental and institutional dimensions of sustainability as represented by the Agenda 2030. Each SDG is covered by five to six main indicators. These indicators have been selected to reflect the SDGs' broad objectives and ambitions. In addition, around one third of the indicators are 'multi-purpose', meaning they are used to monitor more than one goal. This allows the link between different goals to be highlighted and enhances the narrative of the monitoring report. Around two thirds of the EU SDG indicators are aligned with the UN SDG indicators. The indicator set is based on priority policy issues, but is reviewed annually to adjust to possible changes in these priorities and objectives, bearing in mind that new issues and priorities emerge from time to time (e.g. European Green Deal).

Box V.1.1.7: Key features of the EU SDG indicator set

The following principles are applied to frame the EU SDG indicator set:

- The EU SDG indicator set is structured along the 17 SDGs and is balanced among the social, economic, environmental and institutional dimensions of sustainability as represented by the Agenda 2030's text for each goal.
- The EU SDG indicator set consists of maximum 6 indicators per goal to attach equal importance to all goals and to limit the indicator set to around 100 different indicators, which is widely recognised as an upper limit for effective and harmonised reporting by experts from National Statistical Offices, OECD, Eurostat and many others.
- The EU SDG indicator set includes multi-purpose indicators (MPIs) which are used to monitor more than one goal. As a result, each goal is monitored through 5 to 12 indicators in total with the current set.

V.1.1.3.4. EXAMPLES OF REGIONAL AND NATIONAL SDI FRAMEWORKS

Latin America and the Caribbean - Argentina

A good example of a policy-driven, regionally adapted framework for SDIs is the framework developed by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (UN-ECLAC). The conceptual framework developed through the Latin America and the Caribbean in the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development.

ECLAC has developed a number of information systems related to economic and social development in the Latin American and Caribbean region. These systems are available for governments and institutions of the region through direct request to the corresponding divisions, including CEPALSTAT that is the gateway to all the statistical information of Latin America and the Caribbean countries collected, systematized and published by ECLAC; and REDATAM which creates and processes hierarchical databases from censuses, surveys, vital statistics and other sources for local, regional, and national analyses; produces thematic maps.

The Argentinian System of Sustainable Development Indicators (SIDSA) presents a good example of a national adaptation of the ESALC framework. The national government mandated the Consejo Nacional de Coordinación de Políticas Sociales (CNCPS) as the office in charge to prioritizing certain SDGs in accordance with the government's initiative "Poverty Zero" focusing on eliminating poverty in Argentina.

In April 2016, CNCPS coordinated and convened a National inter-institutional Commission for the implementation and follow-up of the SDGs, which involved all ministries. The Commission initiated a process of adapting the prioritized SDGs through six working groups. The result was the creation of a basis for monitoring progress towards the achievement of the SDGs in line with national objectives. An online platform was created to help monitor progress.

CNCPS also assists the provincial governments in their efforts to adapt the SDGs to the provincial reality, offering technical support in each of the stages of this process. As part of this, CNCPS prepared a Guide for the SDG Adaptation Process by the Provincial Governments, offering tools that help the provincial technical teams to achieve their respective objectives.

Asia and Pacific - Vietnam

On the request of its member States, the UN-ESCAP provides support for:

- Promoting the balanced integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development and provide annual updates and recommendations to member States;
- Supporting the process to define a regional road map for implementing the 2030 Agenda and to address challenges to its achievement in Asia and the Pacific;
- Strengthening support to member States in their efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda in an integrated approach; and
- Continuing to provide capacity-building opportunities to member States, leveraging existing expertise and its intergovernmental forum to contribute to the strengthening of their capacity.

The Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD) is the preeminent platform for follow up and review of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals in the Asia-Pacific region. Regional process and dialogues strengthen the delivery of the means of implementation while subregional dialogue brings governments together to plan for cooperation and prioritizing action at the subregional level. The Sustainable Development Goals – Tracking Progress and Engaging Stakeholders in Review. The Sustainable Development Goals is a complex and ambitious framework for transformative change. ESCAP is also supporting monitoring, review and follow up on the Sustainable Development Goals, through its work on statistical capacity building, knowledge products such as the SDG Progress Report, dedicated data portal on the SDGs (Asia-Pacific SDG

Gateway), close engagement of the Asia-Pacific Regional Coordination Mechanism as an inter-agency coordination mechanism for the United Nations system at the regional level, and a partnership with ADB and with UNDP (Asia-Pacific SDG Partnership) that produces high-quality knowledge products to support follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs.

The latest Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report was published in March 2020, which analyses trends as well as data availability for monitoring progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Asia and the Pacific and its five subregions. It assesses gaps which must be closed to achieve the goals by 2030. The report advocates for the strengthening capabilities of national statistical systems (NSS) for overcoming the big challenge to fill data gaps in the decade ahead to achieve the SDGs. The 2030 Agenda is guided by a set of principles, including that the review of progress towards the goals will be based primarily on national official data sources. Furthermore, annual progress reports on the SDGs to inform the follow-up and review at the high-level political forum follow the global indicator framework using data produced by NSS and information collected at the regional level.

UN-ESCAP has also established an SDG Help Desk in response to requests for capacity development support from member States. As its main function, the SDG Help Desk works as a gateway to resources and services, by linking users to other sectoral online platforms, focusing in areas related to the implementation of the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda. The SDG Help Desk serves as the primary modality for coordinating ESCAP's support to member States in specific priority areas such as integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development, stakeholder engagement, and effective follow-up and review.

In Vietnam, a substantial investment has been made for including the SDGs as a national policy for achieving economic and social development. In 2018, the country undertook a review of the implementation and monitoring progress towards SD Goals and targets. Lessons learned are presented in the box below.

Box V.1.1.8: Lessons learned from implementing SDGs in Viet Nam, 2018

Viet Nam emphasizes and is applying the “whole-of-society” approach which engages all stakeholders, with a special attention to mobilize participation and contribution of the private sector, NGOs, and other organizations. Viet Nam has established the National Council on Sustainable Development and Competitiveness Enhancement. The Viet Nam Business Council for Sustainable Development has been also formed to promote the business sector’s engagement in SDG implementation.

The Government of Viet Nam is fully aware that the SDG implementation comes at a significant cost. Therefore, a priority has been given to the allocation of Government budget for implementing the SDGs. (...) ODA, FDI, remittances are important sources for SDG implementation in Viet Nam. To achieve success in 17 SDGs, Viet Nam will continue to enhance mobilization of all resources, especially from the private sector and promote public finance. Viet Nam has been formulating the National Roadmap and Indicator System for SDG Monitoring & Evaluation.

A recent feasibility review of 231 global SDG statistical indicators shows that only 123 indicators are feasible in Viet Nam. Many SDG indicators do not have metadata, must be newly collected, with complicated calculation methods, and/or with data from non-conventional sources.

Despite the initial SDG achievements, Viet Nam is facing various difficulties and challenges in SDG implementation, such as climate change environmental degradation and others. SDG implementation demands huge financial inputs, while the State budget remains limited.

There are also challenges in monitoring and reporting SDG progress. Viet Nam identifies the following next steps for SDG achievement:

- Enhance SDG awareness among all stakeholders at all levels.
- Involve all stakeholders in implementing SDGs and promote coordination among stakeholders.
- Formulate a system of statistical indicators for SDG Monitoring & Evaluation.
- Enhance resource mobilization, especially from private sector.
- Integrate SDGs into annual and five-year Socio-economic development plans, strategies and sectoral and local policies.
- Strengthen international cooperation to promote technical and financial support and knowledge transfers for SDG implementation.

Source: Statement by the Head of Viet Nam Delegation to the High-level Political Forum of the UN ECOSOC, 2018

In Bhutan, the country is guided by the development philosophy of Gross National Happiness. In its main message for the 2018 Voluntary National Review, Bhutan reiterates its commitment to realizing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The country is gearing to graduate from the Least Developed Country category on completion of its 12th Five Year Plan period (2018-2023). The 12th Plan will be Bhutan’s transition plan to non-LDC status during which concerted national efforts will continue towards implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Despite progress made, Bhutan is still confronted with the following challenges in its development efforts:

- In ensuring that no one is left behind, by particularly addressing the needs of vulnerable groups, promoting gender equality and empowering women and girls.
- Enhancing productive capacity to develop economic resilience that is vital to sustainable graduation and achieving the SDGs.
- Further developing its human capital and needs to take advantage of its demographic dividend.
- Securing adequate and timely resources for sustainable graduation and effective implementation of the Agenda 2030.

Middle East and North Africa - Palestine

While the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UN-ESCWA) is supporting the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development especially at regional levels, the 2030 Agenda is primarily country-driven, with Member States taking the lead and adapting it to their national realities. The Agenda recognizes new forms of multi-stakeholder partnerships, including a stronger role for civil society, the private sector and other development partners. It also strongly focuses on accountability and clearly recognizes three levels of follow-up and review at global, regional and national levels.

Despite the tremendous challenges the Arab region has been facing in the last decades, several countries have already made notable efforts towards socio-economic development by implementing recommendations from other global frameworks. However, achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 SDGs will require tackling development issues in a new interdisciplinary way that addresses both national and regional challenges, especially linked to the effects of conflict. This online platform is therefore intended to capture national and regional efforts towards the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, and to serve as a hub for sharing knowledge, experiences, and best practices to build a better future for the Arab region and beyond.

The Arab Sustainable Development Report issued in June 2020 by the United Nations entities working in the Arab region, led by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), warned that the region would not achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. It then identified the barriers blocking transformation towards inclusive and sustainable development and suggested solutions to dismantle them.

One of the examples of best practices for identifying and implementing the 2030 Agenda at the national level, can be found in Palestine.

Box V.1.1.9: Lessons learned from implementing SDGs in Palestine

Based on the commitment of implementing the 2030 Agenda, the Palestinian Council of Ministries had formed a National Team that was mandated to follow up the implementation of the SDGs in cooperation with all related stakeholders, including representatives from NGOs and the private sector. The Council of Ministries decree also mandated the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) to lead the efforts on modernizing and monitoring the SDGs indicators in cooperation with all partners to provide the statistical data of the indicators and building the national system to monitor the progress in this regard.

Therefore, PCBS assessed the global framework of the SDGs indicators and its relevance with the national context and the extent of the priority to work on it based on the strategic plans and the methodologies of working on it to provide the data with all related mechanisms including the data sources.

As a result, PCBS launched the database of the sustainable development indicators available for public use with possible time series and disaggregation. This database was upgraded as an interactive one to facilitate and clarify the data presentation for the purposes of planning and decision-making as well as for reports writing, foremost the experience of preparing the first voluntary national review report that was submitted by the national team in 2018.

Within the framework of producing data that cover the sustainable development indicators, PCBS joined an international pilot project with only twenty countries on Statistical Data and Meta Data Exchange (SDMX) led by the United Nations Statistics Division, as well as the updating and using the Standardized Generic Statistical Business Process Model (GSBPM) framework.

The modernising and strengthening of statistical systems is the base for achieving the ambitious requirements of the SDGs. PCBS joined the High-Level Group for Partnership (HLGP), Coordination and Capacity Building for Statistics for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (HLG-PCCB) to represent the Arab countries. Moreover, PCBS participates in many international and regional initiatives to enhance this role, beside the active role on the national level.

Moreover, Palestine's National Policy Agenda - 2017–2022 (NPA), "Citizen First" is consistently aligned to the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The development of the agenda was followed by the development of an SDG-led National Strategy for the Development of Official Statistics NSDS (2018-2022). The NPA includes 128 SDGs indicators that are distributed on all goals.

The 2018 Voluntary National Review (VNR) sought to provide detailed information about the status of Palestine's path towards implementing and achieving the SDGs and was presented to the international community at the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF). The review highlighted the steps the Palestinian Government has taken to create an enabling environment for the localization and integration of the SDGs into national and cross-sectorial strategies, including the:

- Modernization of the National Statistical System.
- Creating Registers and Monitoring Directorate.
- Updating the Information Technology Infrastructure.
- Development of Geographical Information System.
- Development of Communication and Dissemination.
- Platform of SDGs Indicators on PCBS main website.
- Raising Statistical Awareness on SDGs.
- Data Science Initiative:
- Capacity Building on SDGs.

In 2019, Palestine issued its first statistical report on the Sustainable Development Goals. The report comes as a road map for decision and policy makers to draw the appropriate interventions which allow the achievement of the goals of the 2030 Agenda. The report describes and presents available statistical figures on the SDGs in a time series framework, as well as addressing the main domains of focus and the main issues within each goal that allow the readers to highlight situations in which we have to intervene the most and how we can reach all Palestinian individuals so that no one is left behind.

V.1.1.4. Analysing data quality and identifying problems

The quality of Sustainable Development Indicators (SDIs) includes the relevance to policy makers in their decision-making, and policy monitoring is central to SDI quality, as well as more traditional aspects such as accuracy, comparability and timeliness.

The Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) of the European Statistical System provides a template for the systematic assessment of the quality of indicators. Eurostat's mission is to provide high quality statistics for Europe. Accordingly, quality considerations play a central role in Eurostat's corporate management as well as in the day-to-day statistical operations.

Quality is a multi-faceted, relative concept that affects all aspects of the operation of an institution. Quality in official statistics covers not only the statistical outputs, but also the statistical processes that produce them and the institutional environment in which the statistical authorities operate.

This three-line approach is reflected in the quality framework of the European Statistical System (ESS) that is based upon the European Statistics Code of Practice (CoP). The European Statistics Code of Practice sets the standard for developing, producing and disseminating European statistics, along the lines of the institutional environment, statistical processes and statistical output. A short Glossary explains the main terms used in the CoP.

The main feature of policy driven indicators is their relevance to the formulation and monitoring of policy. This is a cornerstone of the assessment of the quality profiles, together with the indicator's contribution to an integrated policy analysis. The quality profile also documents the quality indicators with respect to the statistical quality dimensions most relevant to the indicator and its institutional framework (sources, legislation, etc.). As the ESS Quality Assurance Framework is generic and focuses on common key quality criteria for indicators, it is straightforward to adapt and implement in any statistical system, both in developing and developed countries.

V.1.1.5. Methods for constructing a set of SDI

V.1.1.5.1. PRINCIPLES FOR BUILDING AN SDG INDICATOR

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development requires each country to produce a large number of statistics-based indicators, the frequency of data depending on the indicator and the country's level of development. The data is intended for use as a development map to monitor how countries, regions and the world as a whole are progressing towards attaining the Sustainable Development Goals.

Although the previous Millennium Development Goals indicators stimulated demand and co-ordinated international support for sustainable national statistical capacity building, they also led to debates about the quantity and quality of the data and associated metadata (the description of the basis of the data). These questions fundamentally centred on data availability, comparability and national ownership of the indicators.

The IAEG-SDGs addressed a number of these issues in its work leading to the global monitoring framework and its indicators. However, the further process involves further development and critical review of these indicators, as well as the definition and implementation of work plans for this. Thus, in 2016, the IAEG-SDGs launched an open consultation on possible refinements to the global indicator framework. In January 2017, the UN and Statistics South Africa jointly arranged the first World Data Forum, bringing together public and private measurements experts, statistical producers, information system specialists, users and other key stakeholders to discuss data for sustainable development.

The UN Guidelines and Methodologies for Indicators of Sustainable Development provides both a global list of sustainable development indicators and methodology for developing such indicators within each area. This is a good basis for developing a national set of SDIs. However, each country must define which SDIs are most relevant for its own policy purposes, e.g. as defined by the national Agenda 21.

A basic approach is to start by analysing national policy information needs and which statistics and indicators are already available or easy to construct based on existing

sources. Policy makers and other stakeholders should be closely involved in this process, as the main goal of the SDIs is to inform policy makers and to monitor progress within the national sustainable development policies. Political support is vital; policy makers must need the SDIs for their planning, monitoring, evaluation and political dialogue.

Existing surveys and management information systems (MIS) are key data sources. On this basis, a first set of national SDIs and associated metadata may be established. Further development should be focused on improving the quality of these first SDIs and of constructing indicators in priority areas poorly or not at all informed by the initial set of SDIs. In this context, coordination and networking is vital, bringing household surveys, enterprise surveys, and administrative records together. The initial set of SDIs needs to be operationalised, the theoretical framework established, and the necessary policy documents developed.

Some countries and international organisations use the so-called composite indicators, such as the ecological footprint, genuine savings, and the human development index. This type of indicator attempts to combine different indicators into a single index. The lack of an empirical basis for weighting the different components implies that these indicators remain controversial.

In order to illustrate the method used for constructing specific indicators, an example is provided in the box below, focusing on how an SDG indicator is developed based on existing statistics. 'No poverty' is the first of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); more specifically, it is defined as "By 2030, eradicate extreme poverty for all people everywhere, currently measured as people living on less than \$1.25 a day". To measure progress towards this first SDG target, the Indicator 1.1.1 is labelled the 'poverty headcount ratio', defined as: 'The proportion of the national population living in households with per-capita consumption or income that is below the international poverty line of USD 1.25. This indicator aims at measuring progress in the "Proportion of the population below the international poverty line, disaggregated by sex, age group, employment status and geographical location (urban/rural)".

A continuously debated issue remains the consistency between data and indicators published by the countries themselves and indicators published by international organisations. Such international indicators may convert or transform national data in order to comply with international definition and increase comparability across countries, or they may be estimated for other reasons. The UN Statistics Division's country Data database provides concise comparisons between national and international estimates of development indicators.

V.1.1.5.2. EU SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT INDICATORS (SDI)

Following the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, Eurostat worked closely with the UN work programme on global indicators of sustainable development, and published indicator compilations in 1997 and again in 2001. A first EU-oriented set of SDIs was proposed following the adoption of the initial EU SDS of 2001. The European Commission foresaw the need for a regular review and adaptation of the set, in order to reflect emerging policy priorities, as well as improvements in statistical data collection.

Eurostat, with the assistance of the working group on SDIs, constantly reviews the situation regarding the development of appropriate indicators, so as to further improve the relevance of the set of indicators. This working group on SDIs comprises both statistical and policy representatives at both national and EU level. The issues addressed in these reviews are:

- **Policy relevance:** is the current SDI set providing the information needed to monitor progress under the latest version of the EU SDS and other relevant policy initiatives?
- **Efficient communication:** Is the current SDI set streamlined to communicate progress and priorities efficiently and does it take in the latest developments in indicator methodology with respect to communication.
- **Statistical quality:** Are the SDIs meeting current quality criteria, are they designed using the best available methods, are they taking into account the latest datasets available and are they stable over time?

V.1.1.5.3. QUALITY FRAMEWORK FOR SDIS

The quality of Sustainable Development Indicators (SDIs) is closely related to their purpose of monitoring progress in priority policy areas. Thus, the relevance to policy makers in their decision-making and policy monitoring is central to SDI quality, together with aspects such as accuracy, comparability and timeliness. The Quality Assurance Framework of the European Statistical System provides a template for the systematic assessment of the quality of sustainable development indicators. It is straightforward to adapt and implement in statistical system also in developing countries.

There are a number of other tools available for assessing data quality. Two tools provided by the IMF are the General Data Dissemination System (GDDS), and the Data Quality Assessment Framework (DQAF). Further quality frameworks are the Quality Framework for OECD Statistical Activities and the ISO 9000 quality standard not directly related to statistics.

Available statistics must meet users' needs. Statistics comply with the European quality standards and serve the needs of European institutions, governments, research institutions, business concerns and the public generally. The important issues concern the extent to which the statistics are relevant, accurate and reliable, timely, coherent, comparable across regions and countries, and readily accessible by users. These dimensions can be specified as follows:

1. **Relevance** refers to the degree to which statistics meet current and potential users' needs for information.

2. **Accuracy** refers to the closeness of estimates to the unknown true values including the respect for data confidentiality.
3. **Timeliness** refers to the length of time between the reference period (the event or phenomenon that the data describe) and the data release date, when data becomes available; and Punctuality refers to the length of time between the data release date and the target delivery date.
4. **Comparability** refers to the impact of the differences in applied concepts and measurement tools and procedures when statistics are compared between geographical areas, sectoral domains or over time; and Coherence refers to the adequacy of the data to be reliably combined in different ways and for various uses.
5. **Accessibility** and clarity refer to the conditions and modalities by which users can obtain, use, and interpret data.

More generally, statistical indicators should be:

1. Policy responsive.
2. Methodologically sound.
3. Easy to interpret.
4. Form a balanced set over the sustainable development themes.
5. Sensitive to the change they are supposed to measure.
6. Measurable.
7. Updated regularly.
8. Not involving huge costs or impose heavy statistical burdens.

It is not always possible to satisfy all these criteria simultaneously; compromises are often unavoidable. However, the main goal of SDG indicators is that they should monitor progress towards sustainable development strategies. Thus, they must be relevant to these policies and be comparable over time and space, i.e. across countries and regions.

V.1.1.5.4. SUPPORTING THE PRODUCTION AND DISSEMINATION OF SDIS

Investments in data and statistics are needed to maintain adequate coverage of all population groups as well as to guarantee the internal consistency, comparability and overall quality of data produced to advance implementation of the 2030 Agenda. For example, many countries would benefit from support to fully digitize their data collection instead of using traditional paper-based methods. This could include telephone and web-based surveys, and using administrative data along with newer, more innovative data sources to produce official statistics.

One important area of innovation is the integration of geospatial and statistical information. The integrated analysis and visualization of geospatially enabled data on SDG indicators enhances the ability of policymakers and the public at large to understand and respond to local circumstances and needs across geographic space and time. It also offers insights into data connections and relationships that can be further explored by combining traditional and non-traditional sources of data, statistics and information.

To find out more...

Policy documents

- World Commission on Environment and Development: [Our Common Future](#) (1987)
- United Nations Conference on Environment and Development: [Rio Declaration on Environment and Development and the Agenda 21 action plan](#) (1992)
- World Summit on Sustainable Development: [Johannesburg Plan of Implementation](#) (2002)
- [United Nations Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals](#) (2000)
- [UN High-level Panel on Global Sustainability: 'Resilient People, Resilient Planet: A Future Worth Choosing'](#) (2012)
- [UN Conference on Sustainable Development](#) (2012)
- [UN Resolution 70/1 \(2015\): Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#)
- [The Sustainable Development Goals](#)
- European Commission Communication COM(2016) 739: [Next steps for a sustainable European future - European action for sustainability](#)
- European Commission Reflection paper: [Towards a sustainable Europe by 2030](#) (2019)
- European Commission: [A European Green Deal](#) (2019)
- European Commission Communication COM(2019) 650: [Annual Sustainable Growth Strategy 2020](#)

Methodologies and frameworks

- [Report of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators \(IAEG-SDGs\) to the 47th session of the UN Statistical Commission \(including list of proposed SDG indicators\)](#)
- [SDG Indicators metadata repository](#)
- United Nations Statistics Division: [E-Handbook on SDG Indicators](#) and [SDG indicators website](#)
- Eurostat: [Monitoring report on progress towards the SDGs in an EU context \(2020 edition\)](#)
- Eurostat: [SDG indicators – Goal by Goal and Quality Assurance Framework \(QAF\)](#)
- European Statistical System: [European statistics Code of Practice with related Glossary](#)
- International Monetary Fund (IMF): [Enhanced General Data Dissemination System\(e-GDDS\) and Data Quality Assessment Framework \(DQAF\)](#)
- OECD: [Measuring Distance to the SDG Targets 2019, An Assessment of Where OECD Countries Stand and SDG Pathfinder](#)
- World Bank: [World Development Indicators dashboards to monitor SDGs](#)
- Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC): [SDG indicators](#)
- UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE): [Sustainable development and environment](#)
- UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP): [Sustainable Development Goals – Tracking Progress and Engaging Stakeholders in Review; SDG Helpdesk and Asia-Pacific SDG Gateway](#)
- UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA): [Implementation of SDG Indicators Framework](#)
- Examples of national frameworks: [Argentina, Vietnam, Bhutan, Palestine and South Africa](#)

Other resources

- The [Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators \(IAEG-SDGs\)](#)
- The [SDG Indicators Global Database](#)
- University of Oxford and the Global Change Data Lab: [SDG-Tracker](#); example [Bangladesh](#)
- United Nations [Division for Sustainable Development](#)
- United Nations: [World Data Forum](#)
- United Nations: [Sustainable Development Solutions Network \(SDSN\)](#)
- United Nations Statistics Division: [SDG country profiles](#)
- Eurostat: [Sustainable Development Indicators \(EU SDI\)](#)
- European Commission DG International Partnerships: [The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#)
- European Commission DG Environment: [Sustainable Development](#)
- European Economic and Social Committee: [Sustainable Development Observatory](#)
- OECD: [Development Co-operation Directorate \(DCD-DAC\) and Sustainable development](#)
- PARIS21: [National Strategies for the Development of Statistics \(NSDS\)](#)
- United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UN-ESCWA): [Arab Sustainable Development Report 2020](#)
- United Nations Development Programme and United Nations Environment Programme: [Poverty-Environment Initiative \(PEI\)](#)

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Guide to statistics in European Commission development cooperation 2021 edition

VOLUME 1: SDG AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT INDICATORS

The “Guide to statistics in European Commission development cooperation” provides extensive information on statistics in development cooperation, presenting key international initiatives supporting developing countries in building sustainable statistical systems that produce quality statistics. This new edition of the Guide is updated with information on key developments, including the Sustainable Development Goals and the SDG indicators framework, the UN World Data Forum and other significant initiatives.

The Guide explains the ‘statistical machinery’, covering the organisation, functioning and products of national statistical systems, as well as key international quality frameworks and principles. It presents tools for assessing statistical systems, strategic plans for developing statistical institutions, management of national projects/programmes in the field of statistics, training, as well as different aspects of statistical capacity building.

It presents a summary of EU support to statistics, including issues such as requests for support to statistical capacity building, indicators to feed result-based management tools, monitoring development partnerships or assessing the performance of policies and interventions.

The Guide can be used to identify and develop actions to support statistics and statistical indicators to define and follow-up cooperation programmes, including sector policies. It provides insight into the statistics in a wide range of specific sectors, from agriculture to social statistics, from sustainable development indicators to business statistics. This new edition of the Guide groups the previous sector chapters into four new thematic volumes on: the Sustainable Development Goals and indicators; Social statistics; Economic statistics (will be updated at a later stage); Environment and climate change.

Finally, it should be noted that this is the fifth edition of the Guide, the previous editions being done in 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2017.

For more information

<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/>