

ESAC recommendations for an improved indicator setting for *European action for sustainability translating the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)*

In view of the upcoming Communication of the European Commission on translating the Sustainable Development Goals into European actions, the **European Statistical Advisory Committee** would like to put forward the following recommendations:

1. The development of indicators for monitoring implementation of this complex political strategy needs to be inclusive from the very beginning, based on a systematic involvement of all relevant stakeholders. Specifically, statistical institutes must have the **responsibility to design and select** the relevant indicators, based on their expertise as data providers, to ensure measurability, reliability and timeliness. The final decision on the **target setting** is the responsibility of policy makers, who shall decide on policy goals including all levels of government on the basis of the partnership principle. Cooperative engagement with social scientists from academia should be ensured from the outset of the process.
2. **Measuring progress** on an on-going basis is more important than having an elusive target to meet in the mid or long term. Therefore, translating the SDGs into European target setting should avoid taking random snapshots of overall performance which could be very discouraging and also misleading over time. Instead, the strategy should give countries, regions and cities that are improving and implementing reforms the credit they deserve including measuring progress provides a more nuanced and robust evidence base for Country Specific Recommendations (CSR).
3. All indicators should be designed and selected in a way that clearly shows the direction for desired SDG progress. In this respect, indicators have to take a normative stance following the original intentions of the target setting. Moreover, the **dissemination and communication of indicators** requires explanation and interpretation to indicate clearly which direction of change means improvement, and from whose perspective and for whom this is an improvement; this is essential to avoid conflicting interpretations from different perspectives. Measures should account for both averages and of dispersion.
4. The **differences at local and regional level** need to be taken into account resulting in a territorialisation of indicators which should then feed into the European economic governance cycle, in particular into the CSRs. In the aftermath of the recent financial and economic crisis sub-national regional disparities are on the increase. In some instances gaps have widened more quickly between regions in the same country than between Member States. Indicators translating the SDGs in European actions need to measure such trends to address economic, social and territorial cohesion. Performance should be measured – as much as possible - on the output side. Using input indicators, as in the case of R&D spending for measuring innovation activities, can be highly misleading.