

**The 4th Meeting of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group
on the Sustainable Development Goal Indicators**

Geneva, Switzerland, 15 – 18 November 2016

Venue: United Nations Economic Commission for Europe,
Palais des Nations, Room VII

Report

I Introduction

1. The fourth meeting of the Inter-agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators (IAEG-SDGs) took place from 15 – 18 November 2016 in Geneva Switzerland. The meeting was hosted by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe and held at the Palais des Nations. An IAEG-SDG member meeting took place during the first two days 15-16 November. A plenary session, attended by all participants, was held from 17-18 November 2016.

2. The main objectives of the meeting were to 1) discuss the proposed refinements to the global indicator framework to be presented to the 48th session of the United Nations Statistical Commission (UNSC); 2) discuss mechanisms for moving indicators from one tier to another and for approving Tier III work plans; 3) discuss the proposed plans for future reviews of the indicator framework; 4) discuss issues related to data reporting between national, regional and international statistical systems; and 5) discuss issues related to the disaggregation of the global SDG indicators.

3. At the plenary session, the Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, Mr. Christian Friis Bach; the Director of the Statistical Division of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, Ms. Lidia Bratanova; the co-chair of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators (IAEG-SDGs), Mr. Enrique Ordaz; and Chief of the Statistical Services Branch of the United Nations Statistics Division, Ms. Francesca Perucci, opened the meeting. The meeting was attended by almost 200 participants, including representatives of 25 member countries of the IAEG-SDGs, 18 observer countries, almost 50 specialized agencies and regional and international originations, and over 40 civil society organisations, academia and the private sector.

4. The meeting was chaired by the co-chair of the IAEG-SDGs, Mr. Enrique Ordaz of Mexico.

5. All documents of the meeting, including all presentations and statements, are available on the website of the 4th meeting of the IAEG-SDGs (<http://unstats.un.org/sdgs/meetings/iaeg-sdgs-meeting-04>) and should be consulted for more detailed information.

II. Presentation of the updated tier system and mechanism for reclassification of indicator tiers

6. Agenda item 4, on the updated tier system and a mechanism for moving indicators from one tier to another was introduced by the Secretariat, which provided an overview of the process by which the IAEG-SDGs reached an agreement on an updated tier classification which resulted in the modification of the indicator tier for 25 cases (23 unique indicators). The Secretariat also outlined a mechanism proposed by the IAEG-SDGs to update the tier system based on methodological development of indicators and improved data availability.

7. The IAEG-SDGs proposed to review a set of indicators for re-classification at the fall physical meeting, once per year. Agencies would be invited to submit updated information (results of initiatives of work plans, metadata, data, etc.) that supports their request for re-classification at least one month before the meeting for review by members. In addition to these annual reviews, the IAEG-SDGs agreed to consider an initial review for some Tier III indicators during the first year of re-classification (2017), since many Tier III indicators are in their final stages of development and may be ready to move to Tier II (or Tier I) very shortly. The IAEG-SDGs will finalize this initial review of indicators during the 5th IAEG meeting that will take place at the end of March 2017.

8. The discussion on this agenda item focused on the criteria used for Tier II versus Tier I, and many participants requested the IAEG to develop more precise definitions of these tiers. The Secretariat explained that Tier II indicators are those indicators that have data available for less than 50 per cent of all countries or the population in every region where the indicator is relevant or data are not regularly produced. For an indicator to be Tier I, there must be sufficient data for global and regional aggregates. It was emphasised that indicators are all equally important and the establishment of a tier system is meant uniquely to help develop global implementation strategies.

III. Review of plans for Tier III indicators and review proposals of developments of indicators that currently do not have an agency involved in their development

9. Agenda item 7, on the review of plans for Tier III indicators, was introduced by the Secretariat, who provided an update on work plans for Tier III indicators and informed that work plans have been submitted for all but 15 indicators. The Secretariat also informed that the compilation of these work plans would be submitted as a background document to the 48th Statistical Commission. In addition to presenting on Tier III indicator work plans, the Secretariat also identified the ten indicators that were still without a custodian agency.

10. During the discussion on this agenda item, several topics were discussed. The first topic referred to those indicators that are currently without a custodian agency. Several agencies volunteered to act as the custodian agency for these indicators, reducing the number of indicators without a custodian agency to about four. A representative from UNISDR also made a brief intervention regarding the ongoing intergovernmental negotiations of the Sendai Disaster Risk Reduction Framework. There are five indicators in the global indicator framework that are to be updated based on the outcome of these negotiations, and the meeting was informed that the negotiations were in their final week and a definitive proposal would be provided to the IAEG-SDGs during the last week of November. Finally, several of the agencies that are responsible for indicators in Goal 13 on Climate Change raised the possibility of refining these indicators in light of the outcome of the Paris Agreement and further discussions at the recently concluded conference in Marrakesh.

IV. Reporting from national to international statistical systems

11. Agenda item 10, on reporting from national to international statistics systems was introduced by the Secretariat, which provided a presentation on different data reporting scenarios identified by the IAEG. The group identified the main roles and responsibilities of the different actors involved in these reporting mechanisms: international statistical systems, regional organizations, national statistical systems and the United Nations Statistics Division. National statistical systems play a central role in the data reporting mechanism by collecting and providing data and metadata for global reporting. The Secretariat then reviewed the responsibilities of the international statistical system in this process: to compile data from national statistical systems; to provide internationally comparable data in their respective domains; to consult with national data producers/providers regarding any adjustments, estimates or modelled data that are included in the SDG Indicators Global Database; to support increased adoption and compliance with internationally agreed standards, and to strengthen national statistical capacity.

12. The Secretariat also presented several recommendations that the IAEG-SDG members had discussed for improving the reporting mechanisms from the national to international level. It recommended that international and regional entities should harmonize their data collection in order to reduce the reporting burden to countries. It was suggested that data for a particular indicator should be collected by only one international agency. According to the decision of the Statistical Commission and ECOSOC resolution 2006/6, estimates and data adjustments made by international agencies should always be carried out in full consultation with concerned countries and through transparent methodologies. It was recommended that data and metadata should be disseminated in a transparent manner at both national and international levels and quality assurance procedures at national and international levels should be followed.

13. In addition, IAEG-SDG members invited international agencies to share their data collection calendar and emphasized that national official data should be used to the greatest extent possible. It was recommended that a national data platform for reporting on the

Sustainable Development Goals is an important and useful tool for countries to develop and recognized that global reporting for the 2030 Agenda provides a good opportunity to improve the coordination amongst the international statistical community. The IAEG-SDGs also stressed the importance of adhering to the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics when developing and undertaking surveys. The group agreed that countries should have opportunities to provide their expertise in indicator development, especially for those indicators that are not yet fully developed and would benefit from best practices. In particular, development of some indicators that do not have a custodian agency can be initiated by countries. Finally, several IAEG members volunteered to provide country level data to UNSD to be included in a country data lab project that attempts to identify discrepancies between national and international data to facilitate dialogue between countries and agencies and build stronger coordination within national statistical systems.

14. After the presentation by the Secretariat, the discussion focused on three main issues: the reporting burden that many national statistical systems face; how to improve coordination both within a country's national statistical system and between the national statistical systems and the international statistical system; and the use of estimated, modelled or adjusted indicators for global reporting. Several countries mentioned that they would like the opportunity to validate any adjustments made to the data that are provided to international agencies and would like these agencies to share with them the methodologies used to make the data internationally comparable. Many agencies responded that they understand the concerns that the countries raised and will try to work to ensure better coordination in the future. At the same time, many participants highlighted that these issues are very complex and significant time will be needed in order to address these issues. It was pointed out that steps can be taken (and are already being taken) to address these concerns to make the data collection and reconciliation processes more transparent for all involved parties.

V. Refinement of indicators and future revisions of the indicator framework

15. Agenda item 9, on the refinement of indicators and future revisions of the indicator framework, included three separate components: the refinements that are to be presented to the 48th session of the Statistical Commission, a proposal for future revisions to the indicator framework that will also be presented to the UNSC, and a proposal for addressing the previously identified possible additional indicators.

16. The Secretariat introduced the proposed refinements that were discussed by the IAEG during both the members meeting that preceded the plenary session and throughout the previous months in a series of teleconferences and consultations. During the discussion, there was general agreement on each of the proposed refinements with the exception of two: the proposed refinement of indicators 2.b.1 and 3.b.1. In addition, there was some discussion on the proposed refinement of indicator 16.4.2, with two agencies presenting slightly different proposals, but ultimately the IAEG agreed on a compromise proposal that incorporated parts of each into the refined indicator. Please refer to the presentation on the refinement of

indicators¹ for more detailed information on the proposed refinements. For the two indicators where agreement was not reached, the IAEG will continue to deliberate in the weeks after the conclusion of the 4th IAEG-SDG meeting to try to reach on the proposed refinements to present to the Statistical Commission.

17. The Secretariat introduced the second component of this agenda item, on future refinements and reviews of the indicator framework. The Secretariat presented the IAEG's proposed schedule and plan for future reviews of the indicator framework. The results of these reviews would be presented at the sessions of the Statistical Commission in 2020 and 2025 and the IAEG's work on these reviews would commence approximately 18 months before these dates. The IAEG had drafted a paper detailing its plans for these reviews² that includes the criteria by which indicators would be included. The paper also outlines a proposal for annual, minor refinements of the indicator framework that would correct any editorial errors found in the indicators themselves. At the conclusion of the presentation, there was a brief discussion on the plan for the future reviews of the indicator framework and general agreement on the timing of the reviews and how it would take place.

18. The final component of this agenda item was a discussion on possible additional indicators identified by the IAEG during their consultations on the possible refinements to the indicator framework. The Secretariat introduced this item, which focused more on the process by which any additional indicators would be considered, rather than on what additional indicators should be included in the global indicator framework. After this introduction, there was a discussion on the plan for additional indicators and many agencies highlighted some targets where additional indicators may be needed and even put forward some new proposals for additional indicators. At the same time, some members expressed concern about adding too many indicators. The co-chair of the IAEG thanked everyone for these suggestions and commented that the IAEG would take note of these additional proposals to ensure that progress is monitored fully and equally on all targets.

VI. Work plan on data disaggregation and discussion of strategies and best practices for increasing the levels of disaggregation for SDG indicators

19. The Secretariat introduced item XII on data disaggregation and made a brief presentation on a proposal by the IAEG for this work stream. The IAEG proposed: to review each type of disaggregation separately in order to ensure a consistent use of terminology across the framework; to harmonize the categories for data disaggregation across the indicator framework; to review all indicators based on the harmonized data disaggregation categories. The data availability on each disaggregation dimension then will be reviewed for Tier I indicators, as those are the indicators where the most data are available and where data disaggregation work can begin. A more detailed work plan that will be shared publicly prior to the 5th IAEG meeting.

¹ <http://unstats.un.org/sdgs/files/meetings/iaeg-sdgs-meeting-04/9.%20Refinement%20of%20Indicators%20plenary.pdf>

² <http://unstats.un.org/sdgs/files/meetings/iaeg-sdgs-meeting-04/General%20Principles%20for%20Refining%20the%20Indicator%20Framework.pdf>

20. Several comments during the open discussion highlighted that in many cases, there is not much difference in data availability between Tier I and II indicators and the work on data disaggregation should begin on indicators in both groups. The co-chair agreed with this comment and stated that work will also take place on some Tier II indicators as well. Several other comments raised the issue of human rights, confidentiality and other rights and obligations under international law. The IAEG members responded that they are aware of these issues and will make sure they are taken on board and included in the future work on data disaggregation. The IAEG welcomed future inputs from these organisations for its ongoing work on data disaggregation. Finally, the IAEG member from the Netherlands commented on the ongoing work related with disaggregation at the city level and how this experience may prove useful to the group for its work on disaggregation.

VII. Statements by Civil Society Organisations, Academia and the Private Sector

21. Continuing with the collaboration with civil society organisations, academia and the private sector that the IAEG-SDGs has maintained since its first meeting in June 2015, these organisations were invited to provide statements on the various agenda items throughout the meeting. These statements highlighted, among other things, a concern that many environmental indicators are currently classified as Tier III, a request that stakeholders be included in the methodological development of Tier III indicators, emphasizing the need for the indicator framework to reflect the ambition of the Goals and targets, and a request to consider the use of third party data to monitor some SDG indicators. The statements made by these organisations can be found on the IAEG-SDGs website (<http://unstats.un.org/sdgs/meetings/iaeg-sdgs-meeting-04>).

VIII. Way forward and conclusion of meeting

22. The IAEG-SDGs agreed to both a short-term work plan (to cover the period from December 2016 until the 5th meeting at the end of March 2017) and a long-term work plan to cover the period from March 2017 through March 2018.

Work plan and next steps:

A: From November 2016 – March 2017

- November 2016: Finalization of the indicator refinements and preparation of the report to the Statistical Commission
- December 2016 – January 2017: Further development of work plans for Tier III indicators and preparation of a background document to the Statistical Commission
- December 2016 – February 2017: Harmonization of categories for data disaggregation for the global indicators
- December 2016 – March 2017: Review of work plan of Tier III indicators for possible re-classification to be discussed at the 5th IAEG-SDG meeting

B: From March 2017 – March 2018

1. Regularly evaluate the work plans for Tier III indicators based updates provided by custodian agencies
2. Review indicators for tier reclassification when needed
3. Initiate the consultation on possible additional indicators, review inputs and finalize a list of proposed additional indicators to present to the 49th session of the Statistical Commission in March 2018
4. Joint working group of the IAEG-SDGs and the HLG will review the data availability for Tier I and Tier II indicators and make recommendations for increasing data coverage of Tier II indicators
5. Harmonize the categories for data disaggregation and review the indicators based on the data disaggregation categories
6. Continue the work of the three working groups on SDMX, Geo-spatial information and interlinkages
7. Hold two physical meetings, the first in March 2017 and the second in the fall of 2017, at dates to be determined, and continue to interact electronically and via teleconferences, as needed.

24. The Co-Chair chair thanked everyone for their participation in the meeting and expressed their appreciation for the close collaboration among all involved parties that enabled this meeting to be a success and that he looked forward to seeing everyone at the upcoming 5th meeting of the IAEG-SDG that will take place in late March 2017.

Annex 1 – Agenda

Department of Economic and Social Affairs

Statistics Division

ESA/STAT/AC.327/1

8 November 2016

Fourth Meeting of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on the Sustainable Development Goal Indicators

17 – 18 November 2016

Venue: United Nations Economic Commission for Europe,
Palais des Nations, Room VII, Geneva, Switzerland

Plenary Session Provisional Agenda

Thursday, 17 November 2016

*Registration and collection of badges for IAEG-SDG observers and other stakeholders
(8:00 a.m. – 9:00 a.m.)*

Morning session (9:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.)

For information:

1. Opening remarks (9:00 a.m. – 9:30 a.m.)
 - Mr. Christian Bach, Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE)
 - Ms. Francesca Perucci, Chief of Statistical Services Branch, United Nations Statistics Division
 - Mr. Enrique Ordaz, Co-Chair of the IAEG-SDGs
2. Update on the outcomes of ECOSOC and HLPF on SDG indicators and follow-up and review (9:30 a.m. – 9:45 a.m.)
3. Update on the work of the High-Level group for partnership, coordination and capacity-building for statistics for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (9:45 a.m. – 10:05 a.m.)

Coffee Break (10:30 a.m. – 10:45 a.m.)

For discussion:

4. Presentation of the updated tier system and mechanism for reclassification of indicator tiers (10:45 a.m. – 11:45 a.m.)

5. Stakeholder Interventions (*11:45 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.*)

Lunch (12:00 p.m. – 2:30 p.m.)

Side Event on Household Surveys as a source of data for the SDGs (organized by the World Bank) (*1:00 p.m. – 2:30 p.m.*)

Afternoon session (2:30 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.)

6. Review of plans for Tier III indicators and review proposals of developments of indicators that currently do not have an agency involved in their development (*2:30 p.m. – 3:30 p.m.*)

Coffee Break (3:30 p.m. – 3:45p.m.)

7. Review of plans for Tier III indicators and review proposals of developments of indicators that currently do not have an agency involved in their development (*continued*) (*3:45 p.m. – 4:45 p.m.*)
8. Stakeholder Interventions (*4:45 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.*)

Friday, 18 November 2016

Stakeholder Briefing (8:30 a.m. – 9:15 a.m.)

Morning session (9:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.)

9. Refinement of indicators and future revisions of the indicator framework (*9:30 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.*)

Coffee Break (11:30 a.m. – 11:45 a.m.)

10. Reporting from national to international statistical systems (*11:45 a.m. – 12:45 p.m.*)
11. Stakeholder Interventions (*12:45 p.m. – 1:00 p.m.*)

Lunch (1:00 p.m. – 2:30 p.m.)

Side Event on Country guidelines for SDG reporting (organized by UNDP) (*1:45 p.m. – 2:30 p.m.*)

Afternoon session (2:30 p.m. – 5:30 p.m.)

12. Work plan on data disaggregation and discussion of strategies and best practices for increasing the levels of disaggregation for SDG indicators (*2:30 p.m. – 4:30 p.m.*)

Coffee Break (4:30 p.m. – 4:45 p.m.)

13. Work plan and next steps (*4:45 p.m. – 5:30 p.m.*)