

High-level Forum on Official Statistics 2 March 2026 – 15:00 – 18:00

“Beyond GDP: Rethinking Progress in a Changing World” Concept Note and Program

Synopsis

The High-level Forum on Official Statistics, an annual side event of the United Nations Statistical Commission official session, explores topics that address the evolving needs and emerging challenges faced by national statistical offices (NSOs) and national statistical systems (NSSs). The 2026 Forum will focus on the global movement to go “Beyond GDP” and explore how national and international data and statistical systems can support the development and implementation of measures of progress on sustainable development that complement and go beyond gross domestic product ensuring that what matters to people, the planet and the future is fully recognized.¹ While such measures have been discussed and advanced in different contexts, the work and expected recommendations by the High-Level Expert Group on Beyond GDP, appointed by the UN Secretary-General in May 2025, marks a pivotal moment in the effort to redefine how we measure progress.²

This Forum will bring together high-level policymakers, statisticians, and thought leaders to discuss how NSOs can respond to this global call and UN initiative, including by leading the way in producing, coordinating, and communicating complementary indicators that reflect economic, social, environmental, and institutional dimensions of sustainable development.

Overview

The measurement of gross domestic product (GDP), while useful for economic analysis, is not a comprehensive measurement of progress that fully aligns with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Through a narrow policy focus on income per capita and GDP levels, progress on all three dimensions of sustainable development can be obscured, distorting national policy making, international development cooperation, and engendering a growing disconnect between economic growth and other indicators of progress.

Efforts to move beyond GDP have gathered steam. The development of the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) indicator framework by the Statistical Commission and its adoption by

¹ SG’s policy brief ‘Valuing what counts’ (https://www.un-ilibrary.org/docserver/fulltext/27082245/10.18356/27082245-27/27082245-27-en_web.pdf?expires=1756415940&id=id&accname=ocid195767&checksum=06B184CC4F5398F26E-DDDD0F60B02D6B).

² Action 53 - Pact for the Future

the General Assembly³ in 2017, and many well-being and environmental indicator frameworks at national and international levels, show that there is a growing richness of data covering human progress and environmental sustainability. SDG target 17.19 of the 2030 Agenda aims to “build on existing initiatives to develop measurements of progress on sustainable development that complement GDP and support statistical capacity-building in developing countries” by 2030.

The Pact for the Future, adopted by Heads of State and Government in September 2024, provided further political momentum to develop metrics beyond GDP (A/RES/79/1). Member States mandated the SG to establish an independent high-level expert group (HLEG) to develop recommendations for a limited number of country-owned and universally applicable indicators that go beyond GDP. The work and recommendations being developed by the HLEG constitute a pivotal moment for the statistical community to lead the way in delivering on the Beyond GDP metrics and facilitating their uptake by policymakers. As requested in the Pact for the Future, the Expert Group has been consulting with Member States and key stakeholders, taking into account the work of the Statistical Commission, and building on the global SDG indicators framework. The Group’s report, to be submitted over the coming months, will be followed by UN-led intergovernmental and consultative process to consider its recommendations.

The HLEG has converged on a conceptual framework for equitable, inclusive and sustainable wellbeing. At the heart of this framework is to make the invisible visible (e.g. the destruction of the environment) and give voice to the voiceless (e.g. assessing the well-being of those left behind and future generations). The Group has identified several domains to form the core of the conceptual framework. The work of the HLEG has evolved to recognize that human rights, peace and security, and respect for the planet should be treated as foundational conditions for meaningful assessments of progress. The HLEG’s approach emphasizes parsimony, analytical clarity and rigor, and statistical robustness. It explores the use of a small dashboard of indicators, supported where appropriate by composite measures.

Within the Statistical Commission, as well as the global statistical community, there has been ongoing work in developing and implementing indicators that provide more holistic assessments than GDP and complement its use. There is deep methodological expertise as well as wide experience across diverse domains and country contexts embedded within the Commission’s technical groups. Without being exhaustive, these include the Committee of Experts on Environmental and Economic Accounting (since 2005), the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators (since 2015), the Friends of the Chair Group on Social and Demographic Statistics (since 2022), the Expert Group on Well-Being Measurement (since 2024) and many others⁴. The System of National Accounts 2025, adopted by the Commission in its 56th session (March 2025), also elaborated on wellbeing and sustainability.⁵

In the meantime, many countries have also proceeded to develop Beyond GDP dashboards and indicators and to insert a well-being lens in their policymaking. Their experiences, including developing national wellbeing measurement frameworks, provide valuable insights to other countries and policy makers.

³ *General Assembly Resolution on Work of the Statistical Commission pertaining to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/71/313)*

⁴ See a complete list [here](#). Updated accounts of their work can be found in the [documentation](#) for the 57th Session of the Commission.

⁵ <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/nationalaccount/sna2025.asp>

The 2026 High-level Forum on Official Statistics will provide an opportunity for the statisticians from the global statistical community attending the Statistical Commission and a broader set of stakeholders to take stock of and reflect upon the work of the Secretary-General’s HLEG on Beyond GDP, and associated work within the Commission as well as by other stakeholders. It will explore the connections with the wider statistical landscape and consider options and ideas to build on existing statistical frameworks, as well as country capacities and needs. The discussions can help inform future work in this area by statisticians and other stakeholders.

Expected Outcomes

- Shared understanding of the “Beyond GDP” agenda and its implications for NSOs.
- Promoting alignment and connections across frameworks and expert bodies, including the Commissions technical groups.
- Identification of good practices and challenges in developing and implementing measures of progress that complement GDP.
- Strengthened collaboration between global, regional and national actors and initiatives to address identified data and capacity challenges in this context.

Sessions

Opening Session [15:00 – 15:15]

Moderator:

Mr. Georges-Simon Ulrich, Director General of the Federal Statistical Office of Switzerland, Chair of the United Nations Statistical Commission

Opening remarks:

Ms. Amina J. Mohammed, Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations (tbc)

Keynote speech:

Intergenerational perspective on the Beyond GDP agenda

Ms. Nathalie Delorme, Beyond Lab

Session 1: The Global Push Beyond GDP – Frameworks and Principles [15:15 – 16:00]

Focus:

- Why GDP (was never, and) is no longer enough? Why must we go Beyond GDP?
- Outcomes of prior initiatives in going beyond GDP.
- The mandate, work and emerging recommendations of the HLEG.

Moderator:

Mr. Georges-Simon Ulrich, Director General of the Federal Statistical Office of Switzerland, Chair of the United Nations Statistical Commission

Speakers:

- Secretary-General's High-level Expert Group on Beyond GDP Experts
 - Ms. Martine Durand, member of HLEG
 - Ms. Nora Lustig, co-chair of HLEG

Open Floor [25 mins]

Session 2: The Role of the UN Statistical Commission in Advancing Beyond GDP – Partnerships, Cooperation and Standards [16:00 – 17:15]

Focus:

- Methodological development, coordination, communication and standard setting.
- Facilitating knowledge exchange and lessons from building capacity in developing countries.
- Aligning with global initiatives and avoiding duplication.
- Possibilities of integrating with non-traditional data and applying technological innovations.

Moderator:

Ms. Graciela Márquez, President of the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI) of Mexico, Vice-Chair of the United Nations Statistical Commission and co-chair of the Friends of the Chair Group on Social and Demographic Statistics (FOCG-SDS)

Speakers:

- Mr. Richard Heys, Deputy Chief Economist - Wellbeing, Innovation, and Productivity Division, Macroeconomics and Environmental Statistics and Analysis Directorate, Office for National Statistics of the United Kingdom and co-chair of the EGWM
- Ms. Live Margrethe Rognerud, Senior Adviser, International Secretariat, Director General's Office, Statistics Norway and co-chair of the Inter-agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators (IAEG-SDGs)
- Ms. Piedad Urdinola, Chief Statistician, National Administrative Department of Statistics (DANE), Colombia, and co-chair of the UN Committee of Experts on Environmental-Economic Accounting (UNCEEA)
- Mr. Risenga Maluleke, Statistician-General and Head of Statistics, South Africa and Chair of the UN Committee of Experts on Big Data and Data Science for Official Statistics (UN-CEBD)

Open Floor [30 mins]

Closing Session: Stocktaking and way forward [17:15 – 18:00]

Focus:

- Institutional and technical challenges.
- Fostering collaboration between national, regional and global actors to address data and capacity gaps.
- Ensuring impact: applying the beyond GDP lens to policymaking.
- Research agenda and open questions.

Moderator:

Mr. Samuel Kobina Annim, Director of the Africa Centre for Statistics, UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA)

Speakers:

- Session 1 Moderator: Mr. Georges-Simon Ulrich, Director General of the Federal Statistical Office of Switzerland, Chair of the Commission
- Session 2 Moderator: Ms. Graciela Márquez, President of the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI) of Mexico, Vice-Chair of the Commission
- Mr. Albert Kroese, Chief Statistician, IMF and upcoming chair of the Inter-Secretariat Working Group on National Accounts (ISWGNA)
- Mr. Shantanu Mukherjee, Director, Economic Analysis and Policy Division and Acting Director, Statistics Division, UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs