

General principles for refining the indicator framework¹

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The global indicator framework was agreed by the UN Statistical Commission at its 47th session in March 2016, as a practical starting point. The UN Statistical Commission also recognized that the development of a robust and high-quality indicator framework is a technical process that will need to continue over time. It asked the IAEG to report back to the Commission at its forty-eighth session on progress made in developing and improving the global indicators, especially on plans to develop methodologies for indicators in tier III, including for work on definitions and standards, to be agreed at the international level, with a view to guaranteeing international comparability. In order to ensure a high-quality indicator set in line with state of the art methodology and available data sources, technical refinements of the indicator list and resulting adjustments of indicators will be necessary in the future.

The present document describes the principles and criteria agreed by the IAEG-SDGs for refining the indicators and the process to conduct such refinements. The principles and criteria are defined in a way to take advantage of statistical developments while at the same time ensuring stability and flexibility so that reporting will allow policymakers to review the state of play and the progress towards the goals and targets of the 2030 sustainable development agenda. The principles are also intended to guarantee full transparency in the entire process.

This document will not be formally submitted to ECOSOC but will serve to brief Member States and policy makers on the work of the IAEG-SDGs and its plan of work moving forward.

Proposed Review Schedule

Minor changes, or refinements, will be considered as the result of a first review conducted by the IAEG-SDG before the next session of the UN Statistical Commission in March 2017, as requested by the Commission in 2016. Reviews will also be conducted on an annual basis to allow corrections on the indicators as the need arises (for example, issues that will not be visible until the data series are reported). Annual refinements should be initiated by the IAEG-SDGs. If there is no suggested refinement for a given year, then nothing will be presented to the Commission.

In addition, a more comprehensive revision of the indicators and the framework will be conducted by the IAEG-SDG for consideration and decision at the 2020, and 2025 UNSC sessions. These revisions will allow consideration of substantive changes or revisions.

For this first round of refinements, there will be a need for more technical improvements than in the regular yearly reviews. This round may, for example, introduce minor changes, additions or adjustments to the list when it is evident that the indicator does not cover some aspects of the target. These changes have to be widely agreed by the IAEG-SDG.

The refinements to be undertaken by the IAEG-SDGs for submission to the 2017 session of the UN Statistical Commission will also take into account the concerns raised by countries in the 47th session on UNSC. These include, for example, issues of non-alignment of indicators with the target and issues

¹ This paper was drafted by the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goals Indicators (IAEG-SDGs) and is presented as a background document for the 4th meeting of the IAEG-SDGs that is taking place 20 – 21 October in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

of methodological soundness. A work plan will be developed for identifying and adjusting such indicators, if deemed necessary by the IAEG-SDG and agreed by the UNSC.

Proposed Review Rules

The IAEG-SDG has agreed on 1) the kinds of changes² that will be considered as “refinements,” and therefore considered as part of the yearly review described above; and 2) the kinds of changes to be considered “revisions,” and therefore only considered for decision at the 2020, and 2025 UNSC meetings.

- **Refinements** include the following types of changes: specifying or correcting unit of measurement; simple clarification of terms used in the indicator; spelling and other obvious errors; “splitting” indicators into their components in multiple component indicators. A refinement can also be a minor change in an indicator or indicator list that will, in a simple way, solve a problem that is spotted when the collection of data has begun.
- **Revisions** include adding (when it is obvious that the indicator does not cover a particular aspect of the target), deleting, or changing indicators in a way that will disrupt the time series. (Note, very minor disruptions could possibly be exempted from this rule).

Examples of these are described in the table below.

² The possibilities for changes differ from indicator to indicator, as there are some indicators already almost fully defined by their name, while there are some with the main definitions in the metadata.

Refinement criteria and consequences

Criteria	Detail	Explanations and examples ³	Type of change	Consequence/s
A) Target coverage	1. Indicator does not map well to the target	10.5.1 Financial Soundness Indicators ⁴	Refinement or Revision (depending on the type of change)	→ Necessary adjustments of the indicator to map well to the target must be assessed. This could include adjustment of indicator (revision).
	2. Indicator(s) do(es) not cover all aspects of the target	3.8.2 Number of people covered by health insurance or a public health system per 1,000 population ⁵	Refinement or Revision (depending on the type of change)	→ Additional indicator/s or interlinkage/s to fully cover the target must be assessed
B) Technical Issues	1. Indicator comprises several indicators	3.7.2 Adolescent birth rate (aged 10-14 years; aged 15-19 years) per 1000 women in that age group.)- Idem 14.1.1 Index of coastal eutrophication and floating plastic debris density. The measurement of the indicator (3.7.2 first item Tier 3 and second Tier 1) and its interpretation become easier	Refinement	→ Indicators should be unpacked/ separated
	2. Unit of measurement of the indicator is unclear (or incorrect)	16.4.2: Proportion of seized small arms and light weapons that are recorded and traced, in accordance with international standards and legal instruments What is the denominator? (Proportion of what?)	Refinement	→ Unit of measurement should be clarified or corrected → Indicator cannot be Tier I/II
	3. Indicator is	17.13.1 Macroeconomic dashboard	Refinement or	→ Precision of the indicator

³ The examples given are just for illustration of the criteria. Mentioning them does not anticipate any kind of decision by IAEG-SDGs.

⁴ Target 10.5 asks for improving the regulation and monitoring not presenting the results of monitoring.

⁵ The Indicator 3.8.2 was one of the indicators brought up by Member States during the 47th Session of the UN Statistical Commission. Hence it will be one of the indicators discussed by IAEG-SDGs before the 48th Session of the UN Statistical Commission.

Criteria	Detail	Explanations and examples ³	Type of change	Consequence/s
	unclear	The indicator is not clearly defined. We have to select indicators	Revision (depending on the type of change)	is needed → Indicator cannot be Tier I/II → Refinement, adjustment or inclusion in the work plan for Tier III indicators.
	4. Indicator is not an indicator	14.b.1 Progress by countries in the degree of application of a legal/regularity/policy/institutional framework which recognises and protect access right for small scale fisheries 15.2.1 Progress towards sustainable forest management What is progress? How to measure this progress?	Refinement or Revision (depending on the type of change)	→ Precision of the indicator is needed → Indicator cannot be Tier I/II → Refinement, adjustment or inclusion in the work plan for Tier III indicators.
	5. New data sources available		Refinement or Revision (depending on the type of change)	→ Adjustments of the indicator and/or its metadata should be considered
C) Editorial issues		(e.g. spelling, nonsensical etc.) 6.4.1 Change in water use efficiency over time Replace by “Water use efficiency over time”. It is the analysis which will appreciate the change in water efficiency. Ambiguous: change from what?	Refinement	→ Editorial refinements necessary
D) Other issues		(noted by countries at the Statistical Commission)	Refinement or Revision (depending on the type of change)	→ Refinement, adjustment or inclusion in the work plan for Tier III indicators.

Decision procedures for refinements and revisions

The decision process for “*refinements*” and “*revisions*” could be initiated by the IAEG-SDGs or by one or more of the “custodian agencies”⁶. They would identify a new solution for a previously identified problem (according to refinement criteria or tier classification), as noted previously in the refinement criteria. The proposals would then be reviewed by the IAEG-SDGs and the relevant agencies. The IAEG-SDGs would then ask the secretariat to post the proposal/list of proposals on the website for an open consultation. After the inputs from the consultation have been analysed and reviewed by the IAEG-SDGs, the proposals will be tabled to the UNSC.

- In cases where very minor “*refinements*” are needed, members of the IAEG-SDGs and/or custodian agencies, can make suggestions which are then reviewed by the IAEG-SDGs and, if deemed necessary, by other stakeholders. Decisions on these minor improvements should then be taken by the UNSC for decision yearly, as needed.
- Indicator “*revisions*” refer to for instance situations where new types of data become available or when it appears clear that the indicator is not providing a meaningful measurement, or there are methodological issues with the current indicator that cannot be addressed. As a result, the revision of indicators may also include the addition, deletion, or adjustment of indicators during the review processes of 2020 and 2025. Members of the IAEG-SDGs and/or custodian agencies can make suggestions, which are then reviewed by the IAEG-SDGs and posted on the website for open consultation. Decisions on revisions will be taken by the UNSC.

⁶ In this context, a custodian agency refers to an international agency that has been identified by the IAEG-SDGs as a lead producer of international statistics in the domain referenced by the indicator being considered. More than one custodian may be identified by the IAEG-SDG.