

Zero draft

Criteria for the implementation of the Guidelines on Data Flows and Global Data Reporting for Sustainable Development Goals

Background

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

- Adopts the global indicator framework for the Sustainable Development Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, developed by the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators, ..., as a voluntary and country-led instrument, ..., and will be complemented by indicators at the regional and national levels, which will be developed by Member States;
- Stresses that official statistics and data from national statistical systems constitute the basis needed for the global indicator framework, recommends that national statistical systems explore ways to integrate new data sources into their systems to satisfy new data needs of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as appropriate, and also stresses the role of national statistical offices as the coordinator of the national statistical system;
- Requests the Secretary-General to continue to facilitate collaboration between national statistical systems and the relevant international and regional organizations to enhance data reporting channels and ensure the harmonization and consistency of data and statistics for the indicators used to follow up and review the Sustainable Development Goals and targets, within existing resources;
- Stresses that all activities of the global statistical system must be conducted in full adherence to the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics and Economic and Social Council resolution 2006/6.

The United Nations Statistical Commission, in its forty-ninth session in March 2017 (E/2018/24) welcomed efforts by the Inter-Agency and Expert Group to improve data flows and global reporting, and also welcomed the draft guidelines on data flows and global data reporting for the Sustainable Development Goals as an initial step to improve coordination and harmonization of national and international data systems and to ensure full transparency of data, metadata and data aggregates presented in the Global Sustainable Development Goal Indicators Database; and requested the Inter-Agency and Expert Group to work jointly with custodian agencies and establish a fruitful dialogue between all parties, to further refine the guidelines by taking into account concerns raised at the forty-ninth session of the Commission and to prepare criteria for implementation of the guidelines based on best practices and on ways to limit the burden that the envisaged procedures may represent in terms of time and resources for both national and international statistical systems, and resolve outstanding issues.

The present document hence intends to establish criteria for implementation of the Guidelines on Data Flows and Global Data Reporting for Sustainable Development Goals prepared by the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goals

Indicators. However, it should be clear this is a living document and further additions will be included as new best practices come up.

1. Overarching objective: SDG indicators that meet the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics.

All activities of the global statistical system must be conducted in full adherence to the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics and the Economic and Social Council resolution 2006/6, and in case of international and supranational statistical agencies (ISSAs) also the Principles Governing International Statistical Activities. In particular, Member States and ISSAs should:

- Utilize only concepts, definitions, classifications, sources, methods and procedures that meet professional and scientific standards; and
- Document fully and make available data sources and estimation or adjustment methods, in a manner that ensures the transparency of the methodology and the replicability and trust of the estimates;

2. ISSAs Commitment

As custodian agencies, ISSAs have accountability for the quality and accuracy of SDG global reporting. In order to maximize quality, transparency and trust in the SDG global reporting and adherence to the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics and the Principles Governing International Statistical Activities custodian agencies should:

- Base the compilation of the international series for SDG indicators on national official data sources in all cases where national statistical systems produce and release data or national estimates that are consistent with agreed indicator definitions and agreed international statistical standards;
- Consult with national statistical systems in identifying the most appropriate statistical methods and data sources, exclusively based on professional, scientific and statistically robust considerations and internationally agreed statistical standards. National Statistical Offices will be notified on these consultations;
- Provide an opportunity within a reasonable time frame of minimum one month, for national statistical authorities to review country-specific data and estimates of SDG indicators prior to their release;
- Ensure that data sources and methods are thoroughly documented and fully transparent to the public and in particular to national data providers in order to facilitate validation and the replicability of the data;
- Adequately explain possible discrepancies between national and international data;
- Provide complete and detailed metadata and methodological guidance in a timely manner to national statistical systems and notify changes made to these;
- Provide technical assistance to Member States, through their National Statistical Office, if requested, to improve the national reporting of SDG indicators and the application of agreed international standards;
- Ensure on-going dialogue with Member States on the national data reported for global monitoring of SDGs, particularly when there are disagreements related to

national data sources and country-specific estimates. Dialogue should focus on maximizing scientific rigour, international comparability, coherence and the implementation of the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics.

- Minimize the data reporting burden of National Statistical Systems by utilizing existing reporting mechanisms or national SDG indicator reporting platforms whenever possible, promoting the use of appropriate data transmission standards and tools, such as Statistical Data and Metadata eXchange (SDMX) and web Application Program Interfaces (APIs).
- Coordinating their data collection work and establishing effective and efficient data sharing arrangements among ISSAs to avoid duplication of efforts.
- In order to enhance the coordinating role of the NSO within the national statistical system and ensure the quality of country-specific data, ISSAs will copy the NSO in their SDG data requests and provide the NSO with a list of all national data providers and the data collection calendar.
- ISSAs will only address data requests to countries regarding a specific SDG indicator if they are the designated custodian agency. In cases where more than one ISSA is designated as custodian agency, data shall be collected through common means, such as joint questionnaires.
- Data collected by the custodian agencies shall be released publicly and shared, in a timely manner and at no cost, with the UN Statistics Division and other ISSAs that may be interested in the data for other reasons, such as for thematic reporting.
- Estimates of SDG indicators published in databases maintained by ISSAs shall be properly documented and sourced, with the provision of clear and comprehensive metadata.
- Maximise data availability by supporting open data access and public sharing of data pertaining to SDG indicators, by both ISSAs, and NSOs and NSSs.
- Support developing countries, particularly African countries, least developed countries, small island developing States and landlocked developing countries, in strengthening the capacity of national statistical offices and data systems.

3. Member States Commitment

Member States have the primary responsibility for follow-up and review, at the national, regional and global levels, in relation to the progress made in implementing the Goals and targets. National Statistical Systems, are the primary source of data and statistics for SDG global reporting, the quality of the data and statistics they report to ISSAs has a major impact on the overall quality of global reporting on SDG indicators. In order to maximize accuracy, transparency and trust in SDG global reporting Member States should:

- Collect data according to the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics.
- Produce the underlying data for global SDG indicators based on internationally agreed definitions and standards;
- Provide necessary data and metadata for global reporting to custodian agencies in a timely manner and according to quality standards through existing reporting mechanisms or national SDG indicator reporting platforms whenever possible;

- When data do not meet international standards, submit the necessary methodological information that allows ISSAs to adjust statistics to ensure international coherence and comparability;
- Review the information provided by custodian agencies and notify agencies if any issues are identified;
- Ensure on-going dialogue with custodian agencies on national data reported for global monitoring of SDGs, particularly when there are disagreements related to national data sources and country-specific estimates. Dialogue should focus on maximizing scientific rigour, international comparability, coherence and the implementation of the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics.
- Pursue support for strengthening data collection and capacity building in their own countries.

4. The role of NSO

In their capacity as data producers and as coordinators of their national statistical systems, National Statistical Offices have accountability for the quality and accuracy of SDG global reporting. Within a country, the NSO is often mandated also to provide quality assurance for the statistical data produced by other national data-producing entities, although some national statistics may remain under the supervision of specialized institutions. Arrangements for data reporting from national statistical systems to ISSAs vary considerably across agencies and countries. NSOs are the national data providers for many ISSAs. Depending on the governance structure of each ISSA, Member States may have designated other authorities, typically in line Ministries, as providers of national data. In those cases, internal coordination within the NSS is of utmost importance.

While respecting the existence of different data reporting arrangements among ISSAs, NSOs and other actors in the National Statistical System (NSS), Member States and custodian agencies should promote the coordinating role of NSOs in SDG reporting by:

- Keeping NSOs systematically informed on data collection and validation processes related to SDG indicators even when custodian agency's primary contact is in other institutions;
- Strengthening NSOs capacity to coordinate the production of SDG indicators within the NSS and apply a coherent quality framework;
- Supporting NSOs to become the national overall coordinator for SDG indicators;
- Support NSOs on the dissemination and advocacy of the data and statistical information collected for SDG's implementation at the national level.