

Planning, implementation, follow-up and review of the Sustainable Development Goals



Regional survey by UNECE and the Regional UN Development Group for Europe and Central Asia

Geneva and New York, 2 December 2015

Purpose

At the UN Sustainable Development Summit in New York (25-27 September 2015), the Heads of State and Government adopted the 2030 Agenda, including the ambitious and far-reaching 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Entering into force on 1 January 2016, they will guide sustainable development efforts in all countries in the 15-year period until 2030.

In this context, this survey is sent to the Governments of 56 UNECE member States¹ to collect inputs on three crucial topics:

- The plans and approaches of governments to integrate the SDGs and targets in their national strategies and to implement them in their countries.
- The plans of governments to build and conduct monitoring and review at the national level for the SDGs and targets.
- The expectations of governments towards the regional UN system in view of SDG implementation and follow-up.

The survey is jointly conducted by UNECE and the Regional UN Development Group for Europe and Central Asia. The information received will be summarized and shared by their secretariats. It will serve to share experiences and to provide a practical overview of the first steps on the path to achieving the SDGs. Once the results are available, it is further envisaged to organize dialogues with and among member States in Geneva and New York in early 2016 to discuss and take forward the results.

Questionnaire

Please complete

¹ The 56 UNECE member States are listed as follows. They include 17 countries in which the Regional UNDG (R-UNDG) works (marked with *). In addition, the R-UNDG is active in Kosovo (under UN Security Council resolution 1244). Albania*, Andorra, Armenia*, Austria, Azerbaijan*, Belarus*, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina*, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia*, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Kazakhstan*, Kyrgyzstan*, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Republic of Moldova*, Monaco, Montenegro*, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russian Federation, San Marino, Serbia*, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Tajikistan*, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*, Turkey*, Turkmenistan*, Ukraine*, United Kingdom, United States and Uzbekistan*.

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REMARKS:*	

Please return the completed questionnaire by **MONDAY, 15 FEBRUARY 2016** to:

UNECE, Sustainable Development and Gender Unit (SDGU)
E-Mail: sdgu@unece.org

*The electronic version of the questionnaire is available at:
www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/sustainable-development/Regional_SDG_survey_final.docx*

*The completed questionnaires will be posted on the websites of UNECE and the Regional UN Development Group for Europe and Central Asia (ECA R-UNDG). Please indicate under "Remarks" above if you prefer your reply not to be posted.

For questions or assistance, please contact:
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Note: At the current stage and shortly after the adoption of the SDGs, there may be no consolidated government position yet on many issues raised in the questionnaire. You are therefore kindly encouraged to share any preliminary thinking or tentative considerations you may have that will help provide an informal insight into the state of planning and debate in your Government.

Overall planning

Planning is a key step to embark on the path of SDG implementation. This includes the formulation of national (sustainable) development strategies and the integration of the SDGs in policy measures.

Question 1:

What are the overall plans of your Government to translate the SDGs and targets into action and measures at the national and subnational level and integrate them in national strategies and other policy interventions? In addition, will new planning tools or processes be developed in support of the SDGs or will existing structures be used?

Overview of the Action Plan:

1. Hellenic Aid is currently in the process of identifying the government body which will undertake the responsibility of coordinating our country's participation in the global process of implementation of the SDGs, and the overall policy coordination that will be necessary to achieve this implementation. A starting point might be to map and review existing strategies or plans to identify the most appropriate instruments for national implementation of the SDGs. This will be the basis for taking stock of where the country, sector, region or city stands with regard to achieving the global goals and targets, identifying gaps and proposing areas for change within the national context and set national targets that are achievable. The coordination process will be guided by the following concrete targets:
 - The "alignment" of national policies and priorities with the SDGs.
 - The identification of possible institutional adaptations necessary for the successful implementation of the SDGs and the establishment and promotion of cooperation mechanism among stakeholders at home and abroad to this end.
 - Coherent approach across sections (cross departmental coherence, synergies and interlinkages).
 - The adoption of a mechanism for effectively monitoring and evaluating progress towards achieving the SDGs and for providing feedback for the fine tuning of policies and practices.
2. Once established, the governmental coordinating body will, in the first instance, convene a broad meeting of representatives from different institutional stakeholders (including all relevant ministries, the Hellenic Statistical Authority (ELSTAT), local government, leading players from the private sector and civil society, academia etc), with the aim of drafting a "National Strategy" for achieving the SDGs.
3. Stakeholders will also contribute to the drafting of relevant sector specific "sub national strategies" for achieving the SDGs in the country and abroad, in their areas of competence.

Parameters that shall be factored into the drafting of both National and Sector Specific strategies include:

- Existing policies, objectives, priorities and commitments of our country (e.g. the "National Sustainable Development Strategy" Agenda 21, by strengthening the balance between economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development).
- The means of achieving sustainable development strategy in accordance to the current policy priorities and existing conditions,
- The need for policy coherence between the different stakeholders,
- The impact on state budget,

- The UN indicators which will be finalized in March 2016,
The above factors will be of primary importance in the formulation and establishment of National and sector specific strategies, given that the SDGs are universally applicable to all countries, but in the framework of different national circumstances, capacities and levels of development.

4. A Special Group of Experts will be established, staffed by leading experts from all relevant ministries, ELSTAT, academics and institutional stake holders, and will be tasked with compiling the final version of the 'National Strategy' (overall design, implementation modalities, monitoring and evaluation tools) in line with the drafting process referred to above. The same group will be tasked with reviewing of the 'Sub National Strategies' to ensure coherence and harmonization with the established 'National Strategy', with the aim of achieving the SDGs in Greece and abroad by 2030.

5. Implementation of the "National Strategy" and 'Sub National Strategies', by Ministries and other relevant agencies/bodies, will be performed within a framework of perpetual monitoring and evaluation by the Special Group of Experts, who will provide feedback for the fine tuning and adaptation of implementation strategies.

6. Regular progress reviews (tracking progress and reporting) will be conducted by the national coordinating institution (par.1), in cooperation with the Hellenic Statistical Authority (which will record statistical data towards achieving SDGs in accordance to UN indicators), with the support of the Special Group of Experts.

Prioritization

One distinctive feature of the SDGs is their universality, i.e. the entire SDG agenda should be implemented by all countries of the world. Nevertheless, particular topics and targets will be of higher priority than others given a country's specific circumstances.

Question 2:

What is your Government's approach to identify SDGs and targets that have priority for your particular country context?

The Greek Government has not finalized its approach yet. It is still at the process of drafting its strategy, which will be in close collaboration and consultation with all stakeholders.

ELSTAT as a member of European Statistical System (ESS) and of UNECE, has contributed with its feedback to several rounds of comments on the availability of the SDGs (Targets and Indicators).

Adaptation

When devising national and local policies, experience suggests that global goals and targets may be adapted to national circumstances and that objectives, targets and indicators are developed and chosen that are in addition or complementary to the global agenda.

Question 3:

How does your Government foresee to transform global SDGs and targets into local objectives, targets and indicators (“localization” or “nationalization”)?

According to ELSTAT’s view:

(a) The implementation of the SDGs is a country –led process.

(b) The indicator selection and especially a sound monitoring can only be done by independent entities – such as the statistical offices – and not by policy and interest driven organisations.

Governance and budgeting

The SDGs are widely seen as an integrated agenda that encourages holistic policy-making and cross-sectoral cooperation. As such, they may have an impact on institutional and governance structures as well as on processes for resource allocation.

Question 4:

Does your Government envisage any changes in the budgeting processes and governance structures due to the SDGs, and which institution in your Government will oversee SDG implementation in your country?

See question 1. Due to financial constraints, we will try to work with existing budget by redistributing funds.

SDGs are considered as an opportunity. However additional demand on data and indicators in a situation of limited resources could critically affect NSIs production and modernisation processes.

The existence of a legal basis on EU level would empower the national statistical systems to obtain the additional resources and funding required to cope with expanded responsibilities.

Moreover, according to the Commitment on Confidence (CoC) in statistics (signed by the Hellenic Government, Government Gazette 40/29.2.2012), the Hellenic Government has made the commitment to secure adequate and stable resources necessary to maintain and further improve the quality and coverage of Greek statistics.

Stakeholder involvement

SDG implementation will require forging partnerships and collaboration between a range of actors. This will also have a bearing on the work of governments with other stakeholders, including civil society, the private sector and academia.

Question 5:

How does your Government envisage to strengthen existing and build new partnerships with other stakeholders for the purpose of SDG implementation?

Close collaboration with the civil society, the private sector and the local government. It is envisaged through regular meetings and platforms of exchange of experiences and ideas.

UN role in planning and implementation

As recognized in inter-governmental fora, the UN will play a critical role in support of SDG planning and implementation. Some key UN functions and services include providing fora for policy dialogue and exchange; international legal instruments, norms, regulations and standards; policy advice and expertise; capacity-building and technical cooperation. Based on the feedback from its member States, the UN system at the regional level will work towards strengthening and improving regional UN structures and processes and inter-agency cooperation to provide the most 'fit for purpose' SDG-related services.

Question 6:

What are the expectations and needs of your Government regarding the role of the UN system in the region² in assisting with SDG planning and implementation? Please highlight possible areas of improvement as well as any suggestions you may have.

UN System can significantly contribute in assisting with SDG planning and implementation at the regional level. Concrete examples of this assistance could be the development of a region specific indicator framework as well as thematic indicators, which will help countries measure certain region related targets. UN Regional Commissions will undoubtedly play a crucial role in facilitating and coordinating UN System's assistance to the Member States as regards implementation and follow up of SDGs at the regional level.

A clear definition of what is meant by "regional monitoring" is required. If a regional monitoring is set up in addition to the global framework, coordination both within the ESS and with other bodies will be crucial in order to avoid unnecessary duplication of work and reporting.

Both the global and the regional monitoring should be based on a conceptual framework to guarantee the independence statistics and the measurement of the SDGs

Data and Monitoring

While the development of statistical indicators for the SDGs is ongoing, there are many calls for a "data revolution" to ensure that high-quality data will be available to monitor progress under the SDGs. This may involve more and better data, disaggregated data, new data sources, and building and strengthening statistical capacities on the ground.

Question 7:

How does your Government envisage to address the need for data, to strengthen statistical capacities and to monitor SDG progress?

² UNECE, R-UNDG, regional or subregional offices or units of UN entities, specialized agencies, funds and programmes, UN Country Teams active in the region.

The ongoing work conducted by Eurostat (ESS Big Data Action Plan and Roadmap), the UNECE (High-level Group for the Modernisation of Statistical Production and Services) and the Global Working Group on Big Data for official Statistics is generally supported. The World Forum on Sustainable Development Data could also play an active role to bridge the gap between official statistics and data scientists.

Assessment of progress

Based on a solid data foundation, it will be crucial to identify the reasons for SDG progress and shortcomings as well as to derive appropriate policy interventions and corrections.

Question 8:

How does your Government envisage to identify the drivers of satisfactory or unsatisfactory SDG progress and to draw the related policy conclusions?

See answer to question 1. Good governance, technical guidance and quality are necessary to insure comparability of the data at different levels. Otherwise, there is risk in data comparability.

Reporting

National reports are recognized as important cornerstones in the future SDG follow-up process. Typically, they will be government-led and involve a range of other stakeholders. The format and content of national reports is expected to depend on data availability and other constraints. Sharing national reports for discussion and mutual learning could be beneficial for all stakeholders, including at the subregional and regional levels.

Question 9:

What is the current (even preliminary) thinking of your Government regarding possible modalities for reporting on SDG progress at the national level in your country, what are the constraints, and what should be the channels used to share these national reports internationally?

There must be a common reporting template, defined by the international statistical community, referring to the quality and comparability of SDGs indicators. Special attention should be given to the quality aspects of administrative data.

UN role in follow-up and review

In addition to providing a possible regional platform (see question 11), the role of the UN in SDG follow-up and review could include statistical support, synthesis of national reports, preparation of thematic reports and other services.

Question 10:

What are the expectations and needs of your Government regarding the role and services of the UN system in the region² in SDG follow-up and review?

The scale and the ambition of the new Agenda require a revitalized global co-operation in order to ensure its implementation. There are challenges in ensuring the high quality of SDGs indicators consistently across countries and across indicators. There must be a clear and explicit way, defined by the international statistical community, on how to monitor and report the quality and comparability of SDGs indicators. Special attention should be given to the quality aspects of administrative data. Coordination at regional level is not enough to ensure the requirements mentioned, although it should be part of the solution. There is a need for the development of a robust governance structure at global level, responsible for regular monitoring and efficient coordination of statistical aspects of SDGs indicators. This governance structure would be able to assess that the minima of quality aspects are met, in order to safeguard the adequate and harmonized quality of SDGs indicators. Robust methodology and clear definition should be in force, in order to achieve the quality of the indicators. Finally, adequate resources and qualified staff are necessary to produce disaggregated indicators in the required analysis.

Regional platform

The 2030 Agenda highlights the opportunities of follow-up and review at the regional level for peer learning, including through voluntary reviews, sharing of best practices and discussion on shared targets. Regional reviews should draw on national-level reviews and build on existing review mechanisms. Member States are encouraged to identify the most suitable regional forum in which to engage, supported by the Regional Commissions.³ Earlier, the General Assembly had invited the Regional Commissions to hold annual meetings in preparation of the High-level Political Forum (HLPF).⁴

Question 11:

How could a regional platform for follow-up and review be designed that integrates national experiences and existing review mechanisms and channels the findings to the global level in a coherent manner?

A **communication platform**, preferably in the form of a **wiki**, where all the stakeholders can post or consult information, collaborate on outputs and comment or discuss processes and outputs of the SDGs;

A **website** presenting all documents and datasets and visualisations, preferably layered in such a way as to provide differential access to different categories of users (the target audiences identified above);

A **dissemination strategy** outlining in detail what should be disseminated to which audiences via which channels;

³ See outcome document of UN Sustainable Development Summit “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”, paras 80 and 81.

⁴ A/RES/67/290, para 13.
