



## UN Monitor: UN Statistical Commission – 2019

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The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has become a premier driver and justification for institutional and financial reforms along with the collection and analysis of more and more sophisticated data and statistics. Many UN Commissions are contributing to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). One of these is the UN Statistical Commission, which meets for its [50th annual session](#) 5 - 8 March 2019 at the UN headquarters in New York.

Big data, geospatial data, national statistical capacity, and common standards for the exchange of data are among some of the agenda items the Commission will address, along with progress on the SDG indicator framework.

### **SDG Indicator Framework**

The Commission will decide on the criteria for the implementation of the [guidelines on data flows and global data reporting for the Sustainable Development Goals](#), and on annual refinements of some indicators in the global indicator framework.

Four years into the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, concerns continue about stalled and missing SDG indicators, and proliferating and potentially competing data sources that make it difficult to assess progress. The [Inter-agency and Expert Group on the SDG Indicators](#) (IAEG-SDGs) has been criticized for its determination to 'leave no indicator behind', instead of trying to find a synthetic dashboard that could summarize the trends in all key areas covered by the SDGs and show both the complementarities and trade-offs between them. Increasing doubts have been raised about whether progress on many of the goals could be assessed properly by just the sum of the indicators (see [GPW briefings #22: "The Ups and Downs of Tiers: Measuring SDG Progress"](#); and [#23: "SDG Indicators-the forest is missing"](#)). The question has also arisen as to whether the statistics community, broadly defined, is increasingly identifying the implementation of the SDGs with the monitoring and reporting of data and statistics. (see [#27: "Desperately Seeking Indicators; different players, different priorities"](#)).

### **Geospatial Statistics**

The Commission is set to discuss geospatial statistics and the adoption of activities that support SDG implementation, including short- and longer-term statistical-geospatial interoperability projects, and the establishment of relationships with other relevant sources such as disaster- and climate-related statistics (see the [Report of the Expert Group on the Integration of Statistical and Geospatial Information](#)).

### **Big Data and Official Statistics**

The Global Working Group on Big Data and Official Statistics will present a paper on the business model of big data management on the "United Nations Global Platform of trusted data, methods and learning for official statistics" (Global Platform), drafted in cooperation with the national statistics offices of the UK and Canada. The paper will define the Global Platform's four basic pillars: trusted data, trusted methods, trusted partners, and trusted learning, as well as its corresponding data management issues, which include: agreement on the ownership of and access to the various large data sets, whether data and algorithms need to be "open", and how software, services and tools will be "Platform independent" (see [Report of the Global Working Group on Big Data for Official Statistics](#)).

## National Statistical Capacity

The Commission will “take note” of the Secretary-General’s report, “[Statistical capacity development](#)” in order to support countries “to better respond to the data challenges resulting from the 2030 Agenda”. Four of the five indicators under the section of Goal 17 on “data, monitoring and accountability” focus on statistical capacity, including one (17.19.1) to measure the total amount of resources devoted to statistical capacity building in developing countries.

The drive for better data to measure progress has spawned a plethora of independent initiatives to build the capacity of national statistical offices (NSOs). In addition to the Global Working Group on Big Data for Official Statistics, the Commission also agreed on the UN World Data Forum on Sustainable Development Data, which provides a platform for cooperation among various professional groups, such as NSOs, information technology and geospatial information managers, and data scientists along with government and intergovernmental organizations, and civil society (see [UN World Data Forum website](#)).

While Big Data can provide resources and capacity that could assist NSOs measuring progress on the SDGs, there is no common rules or guidelines or common approach about whether or how to engage in private sector partnerships and where the responsibility rests to set and ensure related standards (see [GPW briefing #19: “Data is the new gold – development players mine a new seam”](#)).

## Common Standards for Data Exchange

The 2030 Agenda has highlighted the importance of measurement, data and the data-policy nexus, but this has also led to marketplace dynamics without uniform standards and processes to determine what is a genuine and lasting contribution to the SDGs and what is just marketing and positioning for funding. According to the Secretary-General’s report “[Progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals](#)”:

In 2016, 82 percent of new development projects had objectives aligned with national priorities. However, more than half of the projects relied on parallel systems and data to monitor progress and development results, instead of integrating these efforts as part of national statistical and monitoring systems. In 2017, 102 countries or areas were implementing national statistical plans...however only 3 of them were fully funded.

To address these problems, the Working Group on Statistical Data and Metadata (SDMX) released “the first draft data structure definition” for the SDG indicators in February 2018. The Working Group is planning to present the first official data structure definition to the Commission. A draft metadata structure definition is expected to be released at the same time (see [“Progress report on statistical and metadata exchange”](#)).

Outcomes of the Commission in March will inform the [high-level political forum](#) (HLPF) and the HLPF at the summit level ([SDG Summit](#)) this year, which have a unique role to review progress, define policies and flag priorities at national, regional and global levels for implementing the 2030 Agenda.

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