2020 Report on Europe and the SDGs

Criteria for indicator selection

Five major criteria are retained to inform the final indicator set for the 2020 Report on Europe and the SDGs. They are the same as for the last 2019 edition. This is a simplified version of the “Principles for setting SDG indicators and an integrated monitoring framework” presented in the 2015 report to the UN Secretary-General by the Leadership Council of the Sustainable Development Solutions Network. The five criteria presented below are overarching guiding principles and aspirations. In practice, trade-offs between different criteria (e.g. high policy implications but low frequency of data collection) will need to be carefully assessed in order to make a final selection of indicators.

1. Limited to 100 indicators (plus or minus 15%) 

The Agenda 2030, the 17 SDGs and Paris Climate Agreement provide a comprehensive set of goals for sustainable development that cannot be monitored by very few indicators. Most goals cover different policy objectives which means that one indicator per goal is generally not sufficient. At the same time, covering all single aspects of the 169 targets would require a very large number of indicators which would make the findings difficult to communicate. As such, the 2015 report to the UN Secretary-General by the Leadership Council of the Sustainable Development Solutions Network proposed to limit the number of global indicators to 100. This rule of thumb will be retained for the 2020 Report on Europe and the SDGs with a flexibility of plus or minus 15 indicators.

2. Simple, single-variable indicators with straightforward policy implications

Indicators need to be simple to compile and easy to interpret and communicate. They must also have clear policy implications. Composite indices should be avoided where possible since they require more complex data collection methods, and often rely on imputation for missing variables and arbitrary weighting. Moreover, composite indices do not lend themselves easily to policy recommendations, and they expand the number of (underlying) variables that need to be collected through official statistical systems, which might undermine the feasibility of a monitoring framework. Indicators should rely as much as possible on metrics that consist of one variable only.

3. Allow for high frequency monitoring

Timeliness is crucial for data to be a useful management and policy tool. To align with national planning and budgetary processes, SDG monitoring should operate on an

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annual cycle. When possible, the indicators selected should be updated on an annual basis.

4. **Statistically valid and robust**

The indicators retained should be in line with international standards, recommendations, and best practices to facilitate international comparisons. Where possible, indicators should be broadly consistent with systems of national accounts, systems of environmental economic accounting, and other systems-based information. When possible, the indicators should have gone through rigorous data validation procedures either through international organisations or expert groups and peer reviewed processes.

5. **Indicators where we can identify distance to targets (what is best performance and what is worst performance).**

The indicators need to have a clear normative direction. In general, it is generally preferable for Indicators to track outcomes (or the ends) rather than means.