

**Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)**

Statistical Committee
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**Sustainable Development Goals: monitoring challenges****Summary**

The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) is mandated to support economic and social development in its member States, and assist them in monitoring and reporting on progress in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). ESCWA devotes a large number of its activities to fulfilling this mandate, many of which are aimed at making SDG-related statistical data and information available through a dedicated platform soon to be launched, the Arab SDG Gateway. ESCWA has also developed a monitoring and reporting dashboard, the Arab SDG Monitor, which provides statistics at the national and regional levels. ESCWA has taken further steps to assist countries in monitoring and reporting through the development of national reporting platforms, and an increased focus on enhancing quality, improving analysis, and reducing reporting costs and duplication of efforts.

The present document provides an overview of the Arab SDG Monitor and of national reporting platforms to track progress on SDG indicators and disseminate information about them. The Committee is invited to make recommendations on improving those tools for better national SDG monitoring and reporting.

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Introduction

1. The adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in September 2015 have increased the need to strengthen countries' statistical capacity in measuring and monitoring progress. The international community has adopted a related indicator framework, comprising over 232 indicators, to monitor the achievement of the 17 SDGs and their 169 associated targets.
2. The annual global progress report on the SDGs, prepared by the Secretary-General of the United Nations in collaboration with the international statistical system, is based on global indicators and data produced by national statistical systems. Member States have stressed the role of national statistical offices as coordinators of national statistical systems. The global SDG indicators are complemented by indicators at the regional and national levels, which will be developed by those offices.
3. Regional and national monitoring dashboards are a means to report and disseminate statistics, including SDG indicators and descriptive metadata. Simplicity, transparency, advocacy and visibility of access to data on reporting platforms facilitate tracing countries' and regions' progress in achieving the SDGs.
4. The objective of these platforms is to create sustainable pathways for sharing information, to reduce the potential duplication of work, and to support stakeholders in creating more interoperable data ecosystems for SDG reporting.¹
5. In line with the objective of strengthening statistical capacity to measure and monitor progress on the SDGs, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) has established the Arab SDG Monitor, which was welcomed by member States at the ESCWA sixth special session, held in Amman on 21 and 22 December 2019. The Monitor is an interactive practical tool for measuring progress in implementing the SDGs in the Arab region. Member States also requested its dissemination at the national level.
6. The present document provides an overview of the newly developed Arab SDG Gateway, with a focus on the Arab SDG Monitor and its functionalities. It also reviews work aimed at building member States' statistical capacity while developing their national reporting platforms.

I. Arab SDG Gateway

7. The [Arab SDG Gateway](#), expected to be launched in 2021, includes four SDG statistical products developed by ESCWA to support countries in producing quality data and enhancing their ability to monitor and report on the SDGs.
8. The following are the four SDG statistical products:
 - The Arab SDG Monitor, completed in September 2020, which places SDG data in a policy context;
 - The SDG Data Portal, completed in 2019, which is a data warehouse with country profiles on the SDGs that provides easy access to complete sets of data;
 - The E-Handbook on SDG Metadata, completed in 2019, which presents the standardized metadata for each SDG indicator along with available background resources in Arabic and English;
 - Leave No One Behind, is a storytelling dashboard on gender, disability, young people and older persons, which provides country comparisons and information on laws and policies. It will be completed in 2021.

¹ Centre for Open Data Enterprise, Achieving the SDGs with national reporting platforms, 2019. Available at www.data4sdgs.org/sites/default/files/2019-07/Lessons%20Learned%20from%20the%20SDG%20National%20Reporting%20Initiative%20%28Web%20Version%29.pdf.

Figure 1. Arab SDG Gateway homepage



II. Arab SDG Monitor

9. The Arab SDG Monitor is a user-friendly regional reporting platform dedicated to statistical monitoring and reporting on progress towards the SDGs, so as to enhance planning and decision-making at the national and regional levels. It was completed in September 2020 and can be directly accessed through the following link: <http://arabsdgmonitor.unescwa.org>.

10. The Monitor is aimed at all types of users: regional analysts, national experts, and stakeholders involved in national and regional high-level policy dialogues on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

Figure 2. Arab SDG Monitor homepage



11. The Arab SDG Monitor provides up-to-date information on Arab countries' progress towards the SDGs, based on the global indicator framework, data produced by national statistical systems and information collected at the regional level.

12. The Monitor provides information on self-readiness to produce and monitor the SDGs, as per the assessment of national statistical systems in the Arab region. It also shows the current situation and projections for 2030. The Monitor also provides information on data availability in the official global indicator framework and the [Global SDG Indicators Database](#), at both the national and regional levels.

13. The Monitor presents information at the Goal, target, indicator and country levels, and includes various functionalities through the employment of appropriate visualizations, such as heat maps, line, bar, pie and bubble and coxcomb charts, speedometers, and waffle visualizations.

14. The dashboard includes the following functionalities:

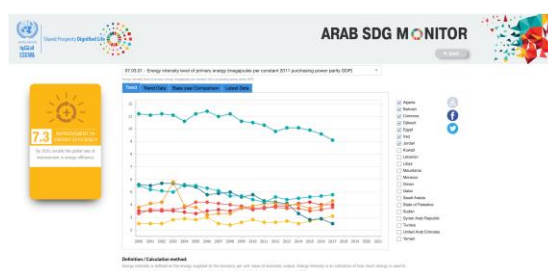
(a) *Progress by SDG*

(i) Country comparisons

a. Target: provides information at the target level, coverage with available data, number of indicators available under each target and the indicator coverage rate at the regional level. Access through each target leads users to a set of related indicators and metadata and allows comparability between Arab countries.



b. Indicator: once a target is selected, countries' progress can be visualized in three time-related dimensions: a country comparative line analysis on trend data since 2000, a comparative bar analysis at the 2015 base year, and a comparative bubble analysis on latest available data.



(ii) Regional comparisons

a. Provide latest regional averages for key indicators comparing the Arab region to a well-performing region and the world. Regional comparisons provide information on progress or regress in these three regions (the Arab region, a well-performing region and the world) since 2000, presented in traffic light colours. In addition, the performance of the Arab region over the years is shown in trend line analysis.



(b) *Progress by the 5Ps*

The SDGs are presented from the perspective of the 5Ps: people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnership. The progress of Arab countries is presented through a heat map in traffic light colours, expressing whether they are not on track, in progress, or have met the targets. Key indicators with no available data are also shown to reflect statistical capacity.

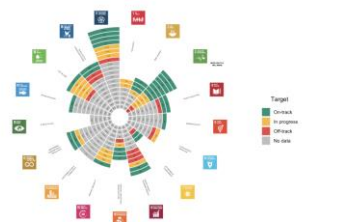


(c) *Country tracking*

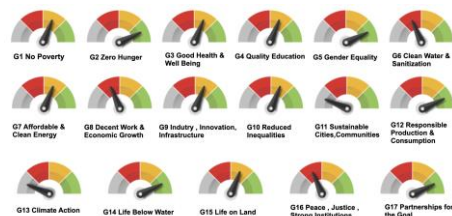
i. The Arab SDG Monitor provides a tracking dashboard for each of the 22 Arab countries at the Goal, target and indicator levels, along with information on data availability.



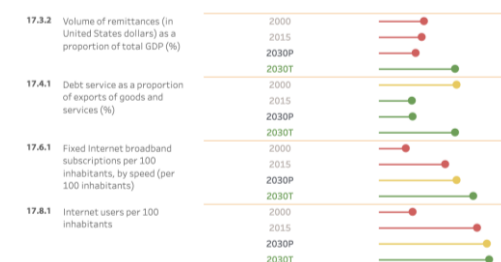
ii. Target Tracker: provides latest country performance and makes projections on status in 2030 against each target visualized in coxcomb charts, as per the latest data. It shows whether the country is off track, in progress, or has achieved the target.



iii. Goal Tracker: presents latest country performance on each Goal. It shows whether the country is off track, in progress or has achieved the Goal, visualized by speedometers.



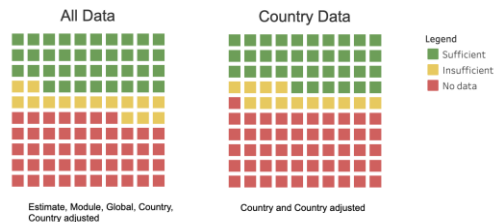
iv. Indicator Tracker: provides progress on key indicators based on 2000, 2015, projected value in 2030, and the target value that needs to be achieved, visualized in lollipop charts. It shows whether the country is off track, in progress, or has achieved the target.



v. Country score card: information is presented on each indicator to show the latest data, trend (increasing, decreasing, or no change), progress achieved, target set and the remaining gap to reach the set target, visualized in traffic light colours.

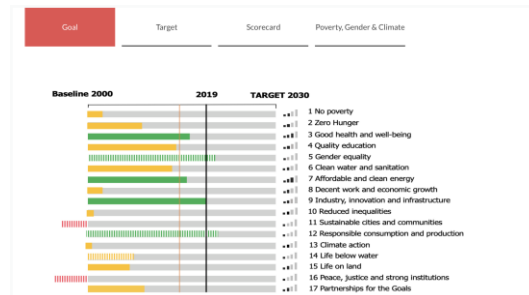
Level of water stress: freshwater withdrawal as a proportion of available freshwater resources (%)	137.9	↓	■	112.9
Proportion of population practicing open defecation, by urban/rural (%)	0.8	↑	■	0.0
Proportion of population using safely managed sanitation services, by urban/rural (%)	17.7	↓	■	82.3
Proportion of population with basic handwashing facilities on premises, by urban/rural (%)	83.7	↑	■	16.3
Proportion of safely treated domestic wastewater flows (%)	17.8	→	■	62.3

vi. Data availability: waffle charts easily track the percentage of data availability (sufficient, not sufficient, no data) for all data types (estimated, modelled, global, country, and country adjusted data), compared with only country and country-adjusted data. Progress is recorded every time new data are uploaded to show progress in data flow at the country and regional levels.



(d) Regional SDGs

i. Monitors SDG progress showing the current situation in the Arab region and projections for 2030.

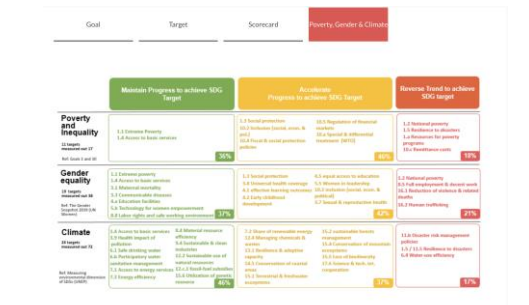


ii. At the Goal level: provides information on the progress of each Goal and the strength of evidence. It shows whether the country is off track, in progress, or has achieved the targets of each Goal.

iii. At the target level: provides progress on each target, whether a country is or will be off track, is in progress or will be in progress, or has achieved or will achieve the target, or whether the targets have no available data.



iv. Through the three key prisms of poverty, gender and climate, it provides information on target progress in terms of how well they are doing and will be doing in 2030. It shows whether the targets are off track, in progress, or have been achieved.



- v. Monitoring data availability in both the global indicator framework and in the Global SDG Indicators Database: sufficient data reflects availability of at least two data points, insufficient data have less than two datapoints, and no data.



(e) *Self-assessment*

- i. Countries' self-assessment provides information on SDG readiness to produce SDG data as per four main criteria: institutional environment, regulatory framework, dissemination and reporting, and data disaggregation.

Country	Institutional Environment	Regulatory Framework	Dissemination and Reporting	Data Disaggregation
Algeria	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Bahrain	No	Yes	No	Other
Egypt	Yes	Yes	Other	Yes
France	Yes	Yes	Other	Yes
Germany	Yes	Yes	Other	Yes
India	No	Yes	Other	Other
Japan	Yes	Yes	Other	Yes
Korea	Yes	Yes	Other	Yes
Libya	No	Yes	Other	Yes
Morocco	Yes	Yes	Other	Yes
Qatar	Yes	Yes	Other	Yes
Saudi	Yes	Yes	Other	Yes
Singapore	Yes	Yes	Other	Yes
Spain	Yes	Yes	Other	Yes
Sweden	Yes	Yes	Other	Yes
Switzerland	Yes	Yes	Other	Yes
Turkey	No	Yes	Other	Yes
UAE	Yes	Yes	Other	Yes
UK	Yes	Yes	Other	Yes
USA	Yes	Yes	Other	Yes
Yemen	No	No	Other	No

III. SDG national reporting platforms

15. Reporting and disseminating information on the 2030 Agenda entail significant data and statistical challenges. With one decade left until 2030, less than half of Arab countries have SDG national reporting platforms. This does not only impede the process of country monitoring and reporting at the national level, but also negatively impacts the regional and global levels.

16. Availability of county data in the [Global SDG Indicators Database](#) indicates the strength of national data dissemination and data flow. A regional assessment of the Arab region shows only 37 per cent of county data with sufficient data points in the global database, an increase of only 2 percentage points since January 2020. Data flow in the region is weak. Without access to sufficient data, policymakers cannot change the course of progress.

17. However, developing a reporting and monitoring platform for national SDGs should not be seen as the ultimate objective. The cost and effort required to develop a good, useful and user-friendly platform requires intensive collaboration on different fronts. National statistical offices are therefore facing numerous challenges in developing national reporting platforms owing to limited resources.

18. National reporting platforms should follow minimum technical criteria, as outlined in the ESCWA report on [Arab National Reporting Platforms for the Sustainable Development Goals: Assessment](#). Many countries have put more focus on developing the design of their platforms, and less time and effort on their content. While simplicity and attractiveness are important, useful content remains the main objective. The completion, accuracy and transparency in which data and metadata are presented to policymakers and other stakeholders should ensure a truthful account of the evidence.

19. ESCWA has developed a plan for a project entitled “Improving production and communication of SDG data to leave no one behind”. The first phase of the project is to develop national reporting platforms for member States. ESCWA offers ready-made free of charge platforms, built with similar functionalities as the Arab SDG Monitor.

20. However, the overarching objective of ESCWA is not merely to mirror national data, but to fully understand their sources, measurement and compilation methods so as to disseminate complete, accurate and transparent sets of national SDG data. In the second phase, ESCWA will carry out data verification, and correct errors in units, subpopulation or methods of calculation.

Figure 3. Iraq SDG Monitor



21. In this context, ESCWA has taken the initiative to invite a number of Arab countries to collaborate in this project, giving priority to those countries that do not have a national reporting platform or that have requested ESCWA technical assistance to review SDG data. ESCWA compiled national data for 11 countries,² and has been holding weekly meetings to provide technical assistance in validating and completing national data and metadata. Results of the review show that there has been a significant impact on data availability and quality, tripling the availability of indicators and datapoints for some Goals.

22. The process of validating indicators also facilitates the identification of strengths and weaknesses in the production of SDG indicator data, including data gaps and data discrepancies. In the third phase, ESCWA will assist countries in identifying missing indicators and data points, and facilitate the modernization of data collection tools from both administrative and survey sources. The process will also include holding focused capacity-building activities with United Nations specialized agencies at the national or subregional levels to address methodological challenges.

23. This work is expected to increase the availability of country data in the Global SDG Indicators Database, as a result of enhanced production and dissemination of national data and improved data flows to the global database.

IV. Conclusion

24. ESCWA recognizes that a significant share of data on the SDGs is available at the national level. It also recognizes that the United Nations data ecosystem is insufficiently robust, lacks timely and real-time data, and is made up of multiple data centres that coexist with limited coordination.³ ESCWA has therefore taken steps

² ESCWA is currently working on verifying SDG data with Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, the Sudan, Somalia and Yemen.

³ [A/74/73-E/2019/14](#), para. 107.

to urgently develop a regional statistical system, based on upgrading SDG regional datasets through data mining and ensuring quality of country data to invigorate data flow to the United Nations data ecosystem.

25. ESCWA will ensure a regional home for data and statistics relating to the 2030 Agenda, so that the regional level is not a “forgotten level”,⁴ and will use all available coordination mechanisms to foster collaboration. In doing so, ESCWA urges member States to pay attention to the content of their national reporting platforms. ESCWA also encourages countries to take the lead in data and metadata verification processes, so as to increase the flow of quality, transparent and disaggregated data as a vital tool for policymaking.

V. Action by the Statistical Committee

26. The Committee is invited to undertake the following:

(a) Note progress made by ESCWA in establishing SDG reporting and monitoring dashboards, including the Arab SDG Gateway and the Arab SDG Monitor;

(b) Discuss and make recommendations related to the content and data presentation of ESCWA SDG-related statistical knowledge products, with a particular focus on regional level presentation;

(c) Discuss and make recommendations on ongoing and future work by ESCWA and national statistical offices on national reporting platforms, and their effective use for policymaking;

(d) Discuss and make recommendation on the development of the Arab regional statistical system.

⁴ Ibid., para 108.