

4 SDG MONITORING FOR CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS

Monitoring the implementation of the SDGs, from national to global levels, is essential for the success of the 2030 Agenda because it allows determining whether or not we are on track. This gives the opportunity to direct, redirect or accelerate actions and policies where necessary.

To be effective, the evaluation needs to be based on sound and suitable monitoring techniques and data that allow painting a realistic progress picture which in turn will enable necessary policy decisions.

The use of statistical indicators is a common approach for this purpose. These indicators allow the elaboration of quantitative answers to politically relevant questions. They are a powerful tool to measure the distance of a quantified target or to a larger qualitative goal.

Besides quantitative indicator-based approaches, qualitative approaches also exist. Issue-focused or essayistic methods, for example. Both having their own strengths and weaknesses. Quantitative approaches could prove difficult due to data availability, while an essayistic approach might be a better option, but would appear to be less specific or comparable. Differences could also exist regarding to what the indicators actually measure. While some reports only measure if there is progress in the right direction, others provide a more accurate distance to target assessment, allowing to evaluate if a strategy is adequate to reach specific targets or not.

The use of indexes or composite indicators is another option, by which individual indicators are pooled into a single number that measures the overall progress from

a multi-dimensional concept. In doing so, the weighing of the different indicators is important because some data points contribute more than others and determine its significance and/or relevance. If poorly constructed or misinterpreted they could give a skewed image of 'the bigger picture' and invite users, especially policy-makers) to draw simplistic analytical or policy conclusions.

At UN level, the [global indicator framework](#) consists of 232 indicators, disaggregated, where relevant, by income, sex, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, geographic location or other characteristics. They are classified based on their level of methodological development and the availability of data into [three tiers](#). This framework includes indicators for which no internationally established methodology or standards are yet available. It is important to mention that the [2017 UN Report](#) presents the data for individual indicators, without providing overall indexes.

Civil society organisations have [criticised](#) that many of the UN indicators are actually more or only relevant for developing countries (e.g. number of people dying from Malaria). Or that they fall short in reflecting the universal ambition of the Agenda 2030 where all countries and regions of the world are called to action.

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The EU SDG [indicator set](#) consists of 100 indicators for the 17 SDGs. Each goal is covered by 6 indicators except SDGs 14 and 17 which only have 5; 41 are multi-purpose indicators, primarily assigned to 1 goal but used to monitor also other goals. 51 indicators are part of the UN global indicator list. The EU SDG indicators measure if the development is going in the desired direction or away from it and they represent their results through arrow symbols. Well defined and quantifiable targets are absent and the results reflect only the rate of change in the indicator. Consequently, there is not a clear view if Europe is actually advancing towards the SDGs or how big the distance to the target still remains, with the lack of a sound basis to redirect or improve European implementation activities or policies.

Civil society organisations [have criticised this approach](#) arguing it focuses on existing solutions rather than truly evaluating the achieving of the SDGs. Based on this methodology, the [2017 Eurostat report](#) paints a skewed picture of EU's performance. It does not measure the level of SDG achievement and does not measure the EU's impact on sustainable development globally as it fails to address the negative spill-over effects of the EU's internal policies.

The OECD has presented a methodology on '[Measuring Distance to the SDG targets](#)', which evaluates the distance countries need to travel to meet each target, providing a high level overview of strengths and weaknesses in performance across the SDGs and the 5 Ps. Applying this methodology the OECD has made [an assessment of where OECD countries stand](#). These criteria were presented in June 2017. This document identifies 131 indicators covering 98 targets spanning all 17 goals. It is, however, clear that many SDG targets cannot be measured adequately through data routinely collected by the OECD, and that significant statistical work is needed to fill some of these gaps.

European member states apply a variety of approaches. Up to now, there is no standard methodology. The UN indicators are not fully used given that on one hand many of them are not relevant for Europe, e.g. Malaria-rates. On the other hand, they have been criticised for not being ambitious enough for European

countries. Filling this gap, 2030 Watch in Germany has created its own [monitoring tool](#) for high income countries. The indicator set of 2030 Watch uses official indicators, proposed by CSOs, does its own research and discusses with experts from civil society and academia. Countries are rated in terms of the targets that should be attained by 2030. They only receive a very good ranking if the target is met.

The Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN), together with the Bertelsmann Stiftung, has created an [SDG Index and Dashboard](#) which takes into account the externalities generated by developing patterns of richer countries. In doing so, they consider environmental spill-overs, spill-overs related to the economy, finance or governance and security spill-overs. SDSN works with 83 global indicators that are then equally weighed to create a composite indicator for each goal and an overall index. This SDG index score then ranks countries relatively amongst each other between the worst performance (0) and the technical optimum (100) through the composite indicators. The SDG Dashboard seeks to highlight those SDGs that require particular attention in each country. Indicators are aggregated from each SDG by taking the average of the two variables where a country performed worst. To obtain the best rating (green) a country needs to score green on all indicators for a given SDG.

ASviS, an Italian network of civil society organisations, researchers and other stakeholders has developed a sophisticated alternative [SDG monitoring report](#). Their indicator set consists of more than 200 elementary indicators divided by goal. They are compiled into 14 composite indicators with 3 headline indicators. ASviS measures the progress and not the distance to achieving the targets of 2030.

An alternative to indicator based monitoring are essayistic approaches. GCAP Italy are focusing on current issues affecting Italian citizens by providing case studies where CSOs have been collecting data. A German network of CSOs writes a [yearly report](#) structured along the SDGs with input by expert organisations highlighting the challenges and gaps of the implementation of the SDGs.

RESOURCES

[Bond report on SDG implementation with some recommendations for CSO reporting](#)

[Eurostat: EU SDG indicator set 2017](#)

[Eurostat: EU SDG indicator set 2018](#)

[Eurostat: EU SDG indicator set 2019](#)

[OECD: Measuring Distance to the SDG Targets](#)

[OECD: Handbook on constructing Composite Indicators](#)

Background information

[ASviS monitoring system](#)

[2030 Watch Germany](#)

[2030 Watch Europe](#)