Part 3

Policy and Monitoring Frameworks for the SDGs

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This section assesses policy efforts to implement the SDGs. It presents new expert and public opinion survey data to gauge political leadership in support of the SDGs at the country level. As in other sections, our data does not account for the impact of Covid-19 in most countries. Results confirm that the SDGs have quickly become a widely used framework for many national statistical institutes and other data providers. Yet further efforts are needed to address persistent data gaps and data time lags in relation to the SDG indicators. The section therefore provides an overview of major data and statistics initiatives introduced globally since the adoption of the SDGs in 2015. We argue that more policy trackers are needed to increase visibility on how governments are pursuing the SDGs, strengthen accountability, and share data on best practices and lessons learnt, which will help other countries accelerate progress towards the SDGs.

3.1 Political leadership and policy environment

Performance and outcome data provide essential information to track the implementation of the SDGs, but they should be complemented by other, more qualitative, assessments of policy efforts and other actions in support of the goals. Performance and outcome data (e.g., poverty rate, life expectancy, CO_2 emissions) have limitations. There is typically a two- to three-year lag (sometimes more) in data reporting, particularly for cross-country comparisons. So tracking SDGs using outcome data alone means adopting a "rear-mirror view." Such a view tracks historic trends, which may be a poor guide to the future. Governments that have introduced major policy reforms might only see these efforts reflected in outcome data after many years. Similarly, the impact of Covid-19 will take a long time to feed into outcome data. We therefore need greater investments in real-time data. In addition, we need "forward-looking" assessments of policies that provide a better sense of where countries are heading and track the efforts of current administrations. As in previous years, this report therefore contributes to measuring the efforts made by governments in support of the SDGs.

Measuring government efforts in support of the SDGs is challenging, due to the broad and complex nature of the goals. In the SDR2019, we introduced three layers for measuring government efforts to implement the long-term objectives of the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement:

(1) High-level public statements by governments in support of sustainable development.

(2) Strategic use of public practices and procedures towards achieving the goals (coordination mechanisms, budgets, procurement, human-resource management, data collection and audits);

(3) The content of government strategies and policy actions.

Monitoring all three layers is important, but layer 3 provides the most actionable and valuable information on governments' efforts to achieve the SDGs. In this section we present primary data collected by the SDSN, combined with third-party data that help track policy efforts and commitments for the SDGs. For the first time, we present findings from two public opinion surveys, conducted by the SDSN in March and April 2020, on "SDG Progress and Challenges" and "Covid-19 and the SDGs."

Public statements and public management practices for the SDGs

The SDSN mobilizes its global network of experts every year to track public statements by governments (layer 1) and the strategic use of some public practices (layer 2) in support of the SDGs. Since 2018, this information has been collected through the *SDSN survey on national coordination and implementation mechanisms at the central/federal level of government*. The 2020 results and an indication of trends over time are presented in table 4. This year's survey covers 30 countries, including most of the G20 and OECD countries, as well as countries with a population greater than 100 million people.

We find a discrepancy between expressed political support for the SDGs and the integration of the SDGs in strategic public policy processes, including national budgets. As in previous years, a large majority of

governments (25 out of 30) have made public statements in support of the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda via heads of states, ministers, or other cabinet members. These statements often highlight implementation mechanisms and country initiatives to achieve key SDG transformations. We also find evidence in most surveyed countries that the SDGs are being integrated into a dedicated strategy or action plan, or into sectoral policies (e.g., health, education, industrial strategy, or economic development). Most countries have also identified a coordinating unit or agency responsible for coordinating implementation of the SDGs.

Yet only about a third of the countries surveyed (12/30) mention the SDGs or use related terms in their latest official budget document. Of these 12 countries, only 4 mention the SDGs in their national budget as a dedicated section or budget line. The other 8 mention the SDGs only in the overall narrative. In only half of the countries surveyed do the SDGs or related terms apply both to domestic implementation (e.g., national health, education, social protection, economic development reforms) and international cooperation (e.g., aid allocation, foreign policy). The cross-sectional budget analysis and tools developed by the Ministry of the Economy in Argentina provides a good example of how a country has linked its national budget with the SDGs.[1]

Over time, we find an increase in national monitoring efforts. Most countries covered in the survey (28 out of 30) have either identified a national set of SDG indicators or have launched dedicated platforms to report on the availability of SDG indicators at the national level. On average, countries that have developed national SDG indicator sets use about 112 indicators. These efforts to strengthen monitoring mechanisms for sustainable development are very much aligned with the SDGs. These findings are discussed in greater detail in section 3.2.

By contrast, we find a slight decrease in stakeholder engagement mechanisms for the SDGs. While many countries have launched stakeholder engagement processes for specific objectives and deliverables (e.g., for Voluntary National Reviews, or the development

of national SDG action plans), only some countries have adopted more permanent stakeholder engagement mechanisms to inform policies, indicator selection, or budgets (stakeholder engagement mechanisms at the subnational level – regions, provinces, municipalities – were not covered by the survey.) The Finnish Citizens' Panel for Sustainable Development, established in 2018, is a good example of a national stakeholder engagement mechanism for the SDGs.

Content of government strategies and policy actions

To improve assessments of government efforts, one needs to assess the content of policies – including national targets, long-term pathways, and intermediate objectives – to determine if they are consistent with achieving the SDGs (layer 3). Such assessments would also track policy implementation. Unfortunately, such "policy trackers" are complex and costly to undertake. Moreover, most international organizations do not have the mandate to assess their members' policies in such ways.

The Covid-19 outbreak saw a rapid increase in available policy trackers to track government responses to the health crisis, including but not limited to:

- The IMF Policy Response to Covid-19 (IMF, 2020*b*)

- The OECD Country Policy Tracker (OECD, 2020*a*)

- The Oxford Covid-19 Government Response Tracker (Oxford, 2020)

- The Yale School of Management Covid-19 Financial Response Tracker and Visualization (Yale School of Management, 2020)

- The IGC Covid-19 policy response tracker (IGC, 2020)

The Climate Action Tracker (CAT) provides the best example of an SDG Policy Tracker. Developed by a research consortium specialized in the field of climate mitigation, CAT uses a methodology that evaluates

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1. https://www.minhacienda.gob.ar/onp/presupuesto_ciudadano/seccion6.html

Table 4

National government efforts to implement the SDGs

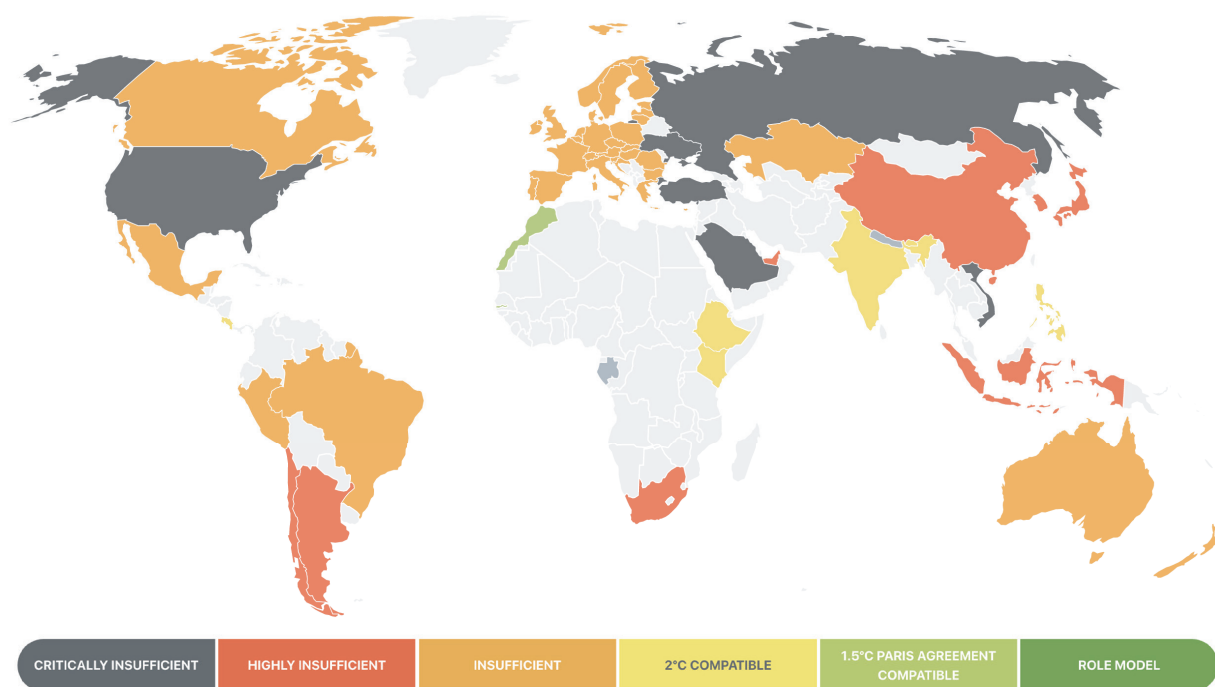|	VNR	High-level statements	SDG strategy/ SDGs into sectoral action plans	Budget			National monitoring		Stakeholder engagement
	Date submitted	yes/no	yes/no	yes/no	overarching narrative/section or budget line	*DI/IC	yes/no	no. of indicators	yes/no
Argentina	2017 and 2020	yes	yes	yes	section or budget line	DI and IC	no, but online reporting		yes
Australia	2018	no	no	no			no, but online reporting		no
Austria	2020	yes	yes	yes	section or budget line	DI and IC	yes	200	yes
Bangladesh	2017 and 2020	yes	yes	no			yes	40	yes
Brazil	2017	no	yes	no			no, but online reporting		no
Canada	2018	yes	yes	yes	overarching narrative	IC	yes	60	yes
Chile	2017 and 2019	yes	yes	no			yes	112	yes
China	2016	yes	yes	no			no, but it is planned		no
Denmark	2017	yes	yes	no			no, but online reporting		yes
Ethiopia	2017	yes	yes	yes	overarching narrative	DI	yes	60	no
European Union	not applicable	yes	yes	yes	overarching narrative	DI and IC	yes	100	yes
Finland	2016 and 2020	yes	yes	yes	overarching narrative	DI and IC	no, but online reporting		yes
Germany	2016	yes	yes	yes	overarching narrative	DI and IC	yes	65	yes
Hungary	2018	no	yes	no			yes	83	no
Israel	2019	yes	yes	no			no, but online reporting		no
Japan	2017	yes	yes	yes	section or budget line	DI and IC	no, but online reporting		yes
Mexico	2016 and 2018	yes	yes	no			yes	169	yes
New Zealand	2019	yes	yes	no			yes	100	no
Norway	2016	yes	yes	no			no, but it is planned		yes
Pakistan	2019	yes	yes	yes	section or budget line	DI	yes	46	yes
Poland	2018	yes	yes	no			yes	126	yes
Portugal	2017	yes	yes	yes	overarching narrative	DI	yes	146	yes
Russia	2020	no	no	no			no, but online reporting		no
Saudi Arabia	2018	yes	yes	no			yes	96	no
Slovenia	2017 and 2020	yes	yes	yes	overarching narrative	IC	yes	70	yes
South Africa	2019	yes	yes	no			yes	128	yes
Spain	2018	yes	yes	yes	overarching narrative	DI and IC	yes	125	yes
Sweden	2017	yes	yes	no			yes	294	yes
United Kingdom	2019	yes	yes	no			no, but online reporting		yes
United States	Not planned	no	no	no			no, but online reporting		no
TOTAL "yes"		25	27	12			28	112	20
Trend	...	=	=	=	...	...	+	...	-

Note: Trend calculated based on the results of the 2018 and 2019 SDSN surveys. A positive or negative trend denotes a change of +/− 2 in the totals.

Source: SDSN 2020 Survey on national coordination and implementation mechanisms at the central/federal level of government (April, 2020).

* Di = Domestic Implementation   Ic = International Cooperation

Figure 20

Comparative assessment of government strategies and policy actions for climate mitigation

| CRITICALLY INSUFFICIENT | HIGHLY INSUFFICIENT | INSUFFICIENT | 2°C COMPATIBLE | 1.5°C PARIS AGREEMENT COMPATIBLE | ROLE MODEL |

Source: Climate action tracker (March, 2020)

both the content of Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs) (*what governments propose to do*) and current policies (*what governments are actually doing*) to meet the objectives of the Paris Agreement. The latest CAT assessment covers 32 countries, including all G20 countries, and the European Union (Climate Action Tracker, 2020).

The conclusions from the latest CAT assessment are very clear: only six countries (Bhutan, Costa Rica, Ethiopia, India, Kenya, and the Philippines) have made sufficient commitments and efforts to hold global warming well below 2°C, and only two countries (Morocco and The Gambia) are on track to hold warming below 1.5°C. Government strategies and policy actions in the Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Ukraine, the United States, and Vietnam are "critically insufficient" (the worst label possible).

Similar evaluations are needed for other SDG transformations. The SDSN, in collaboration with partners, aims to promote the development of policy trackers for the six SDG transformations (Sachs et al., 2019*a*). As one example, as part of the Food and Land-Use Coalition, SDSN and partners are launching the Food, Environment, Land, and Development (FELD) Policy Action Tracker to measure progress on SDG Transformation 4 (Sustainable Food, Land, Water, and Oceans).

Covid-19 makes policy trackers even more relevant, given the long-term impacts of recovery strategies. As an example, the Climate Action Tracker has released a roadmap for addressing the climate impact of Covid-19 and emerging recovery strategies (Climate Action Tracker, 2020). Other organizations are proposing sustainability tests to assess recovery plans (Think Sustainable Europe, 2020). These need to be tracked across countries.

Box 3. Public opinion survey on SDG Progress and Challenges

In April 2020, the SDSN surveyed the SDG community on progress made and major challenges and barriers faced in implementing the SDGs. In total, 715 respondents from 104 countries participated. Respondents represented university and research organizations (32%), non-governmental organizations (22%), the private sector (14%), students (14%), governments (8%), international organizations (5%), and other (5%).
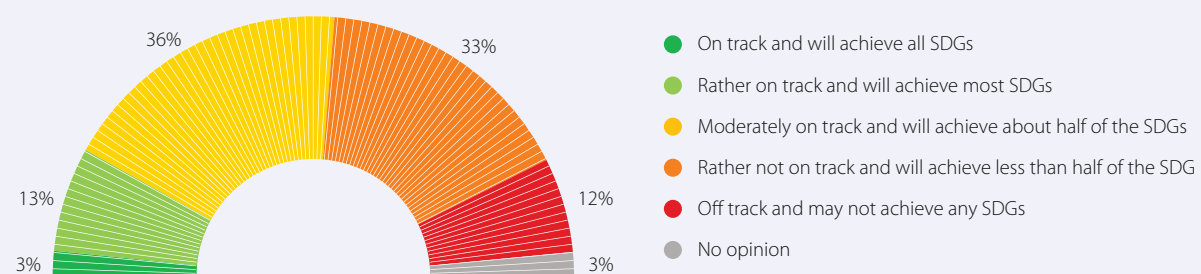
Overall, respondents considered that before the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, the world was not on track to achieve the SDGs. Two-thirds of the SDG community believed that their country would only achieve up to half of the goals. Only 16% of respondents believed that their country was on track to achieving all or most of the SDGs. This is broadly consistent with the findings of the SDR2018, SDR2019 and SDR2020.

According to the respondents, governments should strengthen efforts to respond to the climate and biodiversity crises. More than 50% of respondents considered that their governments had made only minor efforts over the past five years to implement Transformation 3 (Energy Decarbonization and Sustainable Industry) and Transformation 4 (Sustainable Food, Land, Water, and Oceans). These findings remain consistent when combined with the next survey question, which asked about the importance and relevance of each transformation in the respondents' countries. This resonates quite well with the findings of major reports (IPCC, 2019; IPBES, 2019). Of the six SDG Transformations, respondents perceived that their governments had made the greatest efforts towards implementing Transformation 6 (Digital Revolution for Sustainable Development).

Finally, respondents identified three major challenges that impede further implementation of the SDG Transformations and progress towards the SDGs. The first and most significant barrier in many countries is a lack of political leadership to implement the 2030 Agenda. A second barrier is a lack of awareness of the SDGs among policymakers and the general public. Lastly, short-termism and a focus on responding to immediate events over the pursuit of longer-term objectives such as the SDGs represents a third barrier. This third barrier is likely to increase in relevance as countries shift their focus to managing the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Figure 21

Q.1. In your view, is your country on track to achieve the SDGs by 2030?

36%   33%
13%   12%
3%   3%

- On track and will achieve all SDGs
- Rather on track and will achieve most SDGs
- Moderately on track and will achieve about half of the SDGs
- Rather not on track and will achieve less than half of the SDG
- Off track and may not achieve any SDGs
- No opinion

Box 3. (continued)

Figure 22

Q.2. Since 2015, how do you perceive government efforts and actions to implement the six transformations in your country?

Legend: Major efforts · Moderate efforts · Minor efforts · No opinion
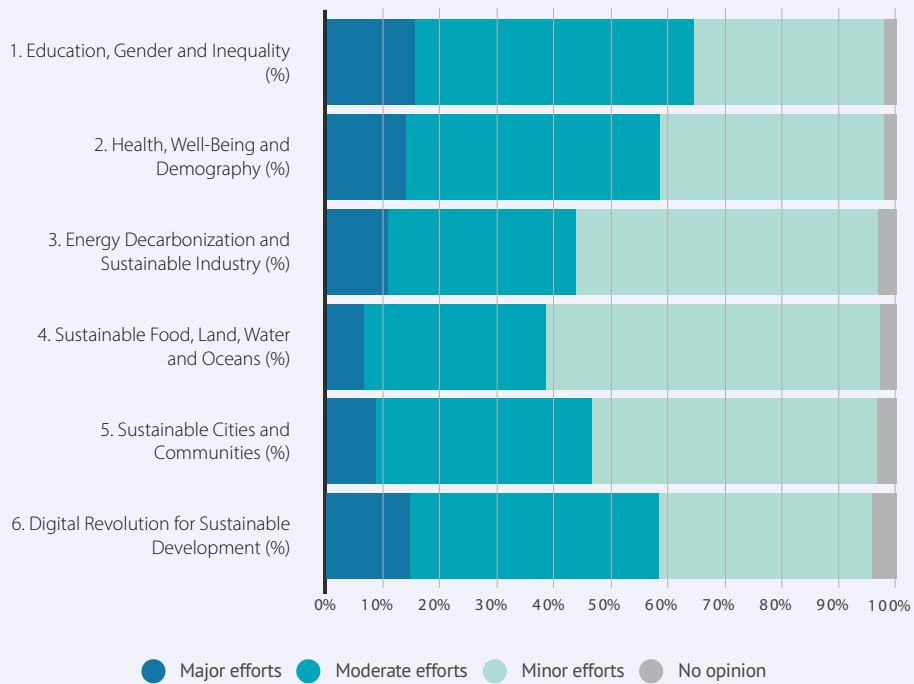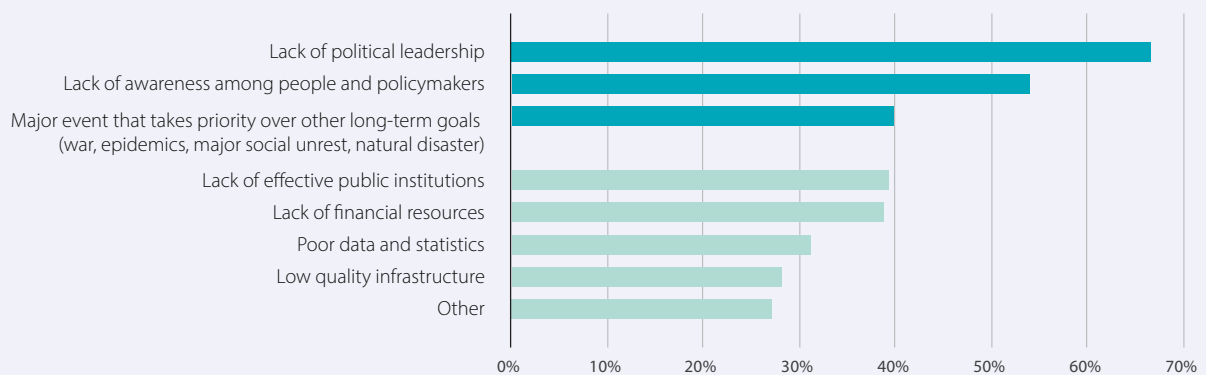
Figure 23

Q.4. In your view, what are the main barriers to achieving the SDGs in your country?

Source: SDSN Public opinion survey on SDG Progress and Challenges (April, 2020). n=715.

Box 4. Public opinion survey on Covid-19 and the SDGs

In April 2020, the SDSN surveyed the SDG community on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the achievement of the SDGs. A total of 1,034 respondents from 110 countries participated in the survey. Respondents represented university and research organizations (28%), the private sector (20%), non-governmental organizations (16%), students (14%), governments (11%), international organizations (6%), and other (5%).
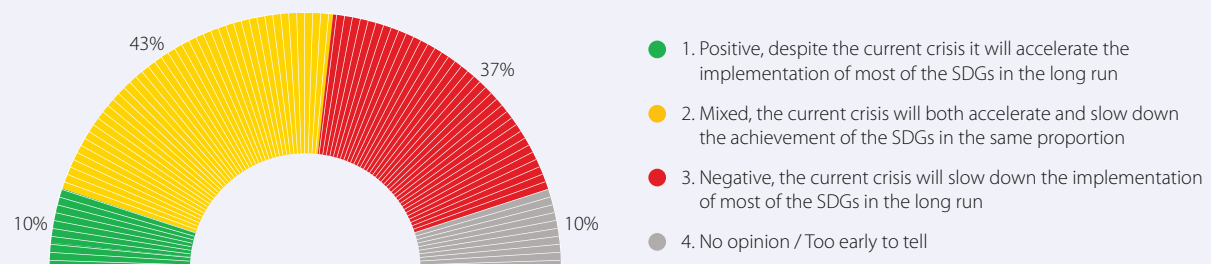
While the short-term impacts of Covid-19 on most SDGs were expected to most likely be negative, a majority of respondents considered that in the long run there might still be certain positive impacts. In total, 53% of respondents considered that the impact of Covid-19 would not be negative *across the board* for the achievement of the SDGs by 2030, and that positive transformations might occur on some SDGs. Respondents also felt that uncertainty prevailed. Close to 10% of respondents mentioned that it was too early to tell what the long-term impact of Covid-19 on the SDGs would be.

Respondents also expected differentiated impacts of Covid-19 on the six SDG Transformations. The greatest negative impacts were expected on Transformation 1 (Education, Gender, and Inequality) and Transformation 2 (Health, Well-Being, and Demography). At the same time, many respondents felt that the Covid-19 crisis may provide an opportunity to strengthen healthcare system preparedness and resilience, as well as improving prevention programs in the longer term. Respondents expected more mixed impacts on Transformation 3 (Energy Decarbonization and Sustainable Industry), Transformation 4 (Sustainable Food, Land, Water, and Oceans), and Transformation 5 (Sustainable Cities and Communities). Respondents considered that the short-term benefits that the lockdown measures had on air pollution and CO_2 emissions might be offset in the long run by unsustainable recovery plans, the low cost of fossil fuels, and the lack of enforcement of environmental and biodiversity conventions. Finally, respondents expected more positive impacts on Transformation 6 (Digital Revolution for Sustainable Development), pointing to the growth of e-commerce, remote working, digital health services, and online education services.

Finally, most respondents considered that the SDGs provide a framework that could help inform the recovery phase and contribute to preventing future global health and other crises. Only 28% of respondents considered the SDGs completely useless in helping to prevent and mitigate major global risks (e.g., pandemics) in the future. Yet even those who believed that the SDGs could be a useful framework mentioned that monitoring and reporting processes must be strengthened. Respondents also felt that the SDG reporting process, including voluntary national reviews (VNRs), should have a stronger focus on the resilience of health and other systems, as well as on crisis prevention. Finally, respondents considered that political leadership will be crucial to retain the SDGs as shared global priorities when countries recover from the Covid-19 outbreak.

Figure 24

Q.1. In your view, in your country, what will be the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the achievement of the SDGs by 2030?

1. Positive, despite the current crisis it will accelerate the implementation of most of the SDGs in the long run

2. Mixed, the current crisis will both accelerate and slow down the achievement of the SDGs in the same proportion

3. Negative, the current crisis will slow down the implementation of most of the SDGs in the long run

4. No opinion / Too early to tell

Box 4. (continued)

Figure 25

Q.2. In your view, in your country, what will be the impact of Covid-19 on each of the six SDG Transformations?
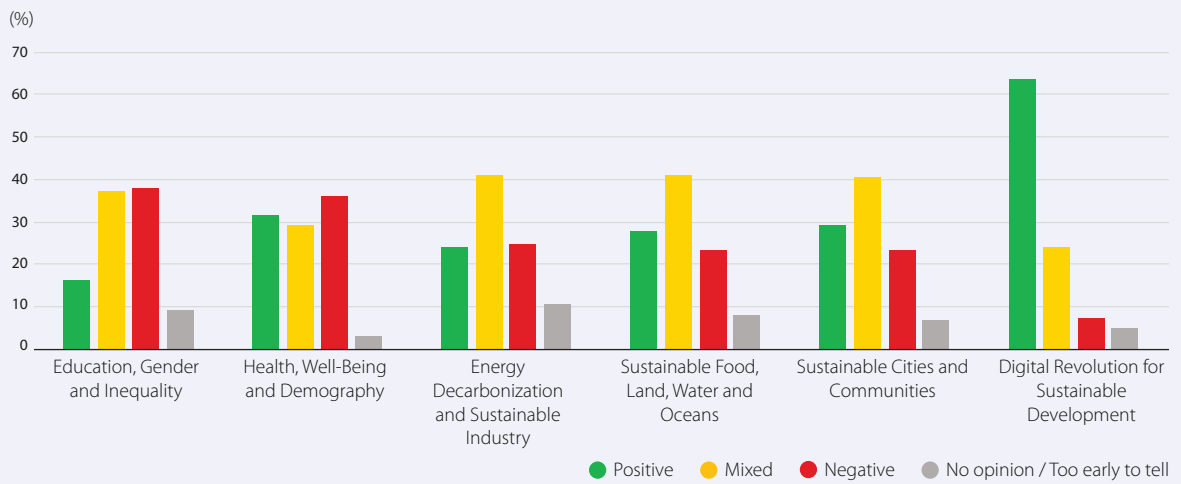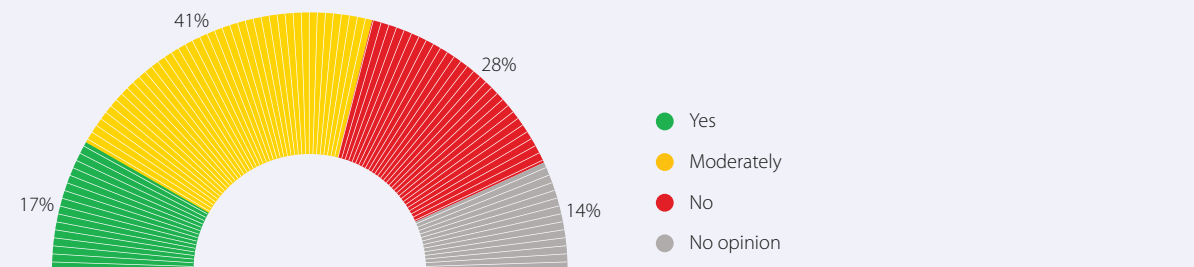

Figure 26

Q.3. In your view, is the current SDG framework and reporting process suited to help prevent and mitigate major global risks (e.g., pandemics)?

Source: SDSN Public opinion survey on "Covid-19 and the SDGs" (April, 2020). n=1,034.

3.2 Data, statistics and monitoring

Data and monitoring initiatives

The 2030 Agenda emphasizes the importance of reliable data and statistics. The focus on data and statistics is stronger than that of the MDGs (SDSN, 2015). The 2030 Agenda states that "the goals and targets will be followed up and reviewed using a set of global indicators," while a dedicated section provides key principles of tracking progress and contextualizes SDG assessment processes and instruments at all levels. The Agenda mandates that the Inter-agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators (IAEG-SDGs), the Statistical Commission, and the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) are to develop and frequently update an SDG indicator framework. As of March 2020, 231 official SDG indicators, classified in three tiers, are used to monitor the 17 SDGs and 169 targets (IAEG-SDGs, 2019).

National governments, multilateral organizations, civil society, and businesses have also launched numerous initiatives to monitor progress on the SDGs since 2015. We identify seven major types of SDG data initiatives below, but there are probably many others.

1. **International SDG monitoring reports** focus on all 17 SDGs and provide comparative assessments of SDG performance and progress across countries. At the global level, such initiatives include the *SDG Index and Dashboards* (Sachs et al., 2017, 2018, 2019), the *UN Sustainable Development Goals Report* and Progress Cards (United Nations, 2019), and the *OECD Measuring Distance to the SDG Targets reports* (OECD, 2017, 2019). Several regional reports have also become available. In the European Union, for instance, Eurostat publishes *Sustainable development in the European Union*, the official SDG monitoring report (Eurostat, 2017, 2018, 2019). The SDSN, in collaboration with partners, has supported the production of SDG baseline assessments for several regions since 2015 (SDG Center for Africa and SDSN, 2018, 2019; Luomi et al., 2019; SDSN and IEEP, 2019; Sachs et al., 2019*b*) – see also box 2.

2. **National SDG indicator and monitoring reports** are based on a national set of indicators identified by the government and/or civil society. Voluntary national reviews (VNRs), the main annual and government-led SDG review mechanism, typically assess a country's key challenges to and priorities for achieving the SDGs. VNR indicators are not harmonized internationally and lack comparability (Schmidt-Traub et al., 2017). Some countries publish annual SDG reports, led by government and/or civil society (National Sustainable Development Council of Australia, 2019; NITI Aayog, 2019).

3. **Goal-specific monitoring initiatives** focus on monitoring progress towards individual SDG outcomes. Examples include the Global Hunger Index (GHI) tracking SDG 2, and Goalkeepers, tracking SDGs 1 to 6 (Concern Worldwide and Welthungerhilfe, 2019; Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2019). Equal Measures 2030 focuses on data and metrics to track progress on the "leave no one behind" principle of the 2030 Agenda (Equal Measures 2030, 2019), and the Global Slavery Index monitors progress on SDG 8.7 (Minderoo Foundation Walk Free Initiative, 2018). Other goal-specific SDG monitoring initiatives include *Tracking SDG7: The Energy Progress Report* (World Bank et al., 2019) and the *SDG 11 Synthesis Report 2018 on Cities and Communities* (UNHABITAT, 2018).

4. **Policy trackers** are needed to create forward-looking assessments of countries' trajectories towards the SDGs. As discussed in the previous section, the Climate Action Tracker tracks national commitments and policies relating to SDG Transformation 3 (Energy Decarbonization), in support of SDG 13 and the objectives of the Paris Agreement (Climate Action Tracker, 2018*a*). SDSN is launching the Food, Environment, Land, and Development (FELD) Action Tracker as part of the Food and Land-Use Coalition. Similar policy trackers are urgently needed for the other SDG Transformations.

5. **Subnational and city-level SDG assessments** track the efforts and performance of cities, provinces, and regions. The SDSN has released monitoring instruments for cities in Italy, Spain, the United States, and across the European Union. The Local Data Action Solutions Initiative (LDA-SI) – a project

run by the SDSN's USA-Sustainable Cities Initiative (USA-SCI) and TReNDS – supports sub-national actors in engaging with the SDGs through local monitoring. The OECD has launched *A Territorial Approach to the Sustainable Development Goals*, which assesses the distance of SDG targets for more than 600 cities and regions (OECD, 2020). Local Governments for Sustainability (ICLEI), C40 Cities, and UN-Habitat have also launched SDG monitoring initiatives in cities. The European Commission, through its Joint Research Centre (JRC) and the Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy (DG REGIO), is also working on monitoring the urban dimension of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

6. **Corporate benchmarks and sustainability metrics.** The SDGs are increasingly used by large companies as the underlying framework for environmental, social, and governance (ESG) reporting. The World Benchmarking Alliance is developing corporate benchmarks for major industries, while in close collaboration, the "Fixing the Business of Food" coalition initiated by the Barilla Center for Nutrition is developing monitoring frameworks for the food sector (World Benchmarking Alliance, 2019); SDSN and BCFN, 2019). The World Business Council on Sustainable Development (WBCSD) facilitates the exchange of best practices on SDG data (WBCSD, 2018). Many financial institutions and development banks have also developed SDG tools and procedures to track the SDG impact of their investments.

7. **Capacity-building and partnerships to develop alternative data sources.** PARIS21 has been named the custodian agency to support statistical capacity-building in low- and middle-income countries (PARIS21 and Partners for Review, 2019). The Thematic Research Group on Data and Statistics (TReNDS) supports better SDG monitoring, evolving data governance, and new data-sharing policy and practice standards (TReNDS, 2019). The Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data (GPSDD) was established to help stakeholders across countries and sectors fully harness the data revolution for sustainable development. Together they are implementing DATA4Now to increase the timeliness of SDG metrics (GPSDD et al., 2019).

Data availability and timeliness for the SDGs

Timely data is crucial for accurate monitoring of SDG progress and for evidence-based policymaking. This is even more true after Covid-19. To assess the current state of data and monitoring, we assessed data availability and timeliness of the indicators included in this SDR2020. Our analysis highlights three major findings.

First, the inclusion of non-official statistics, including model-based estimates, helps fill data gaps and can reduce time lags in official statistics. Using only official statistics from United Nations custodian agencies, data availability varies significantly among regions, from 95% in OECD countries to 54% in Oceania (table 5). The average year of reference is 2016 for most regions (Eastern Europe and Central Asia, East and South Asia, Middle East and North Africa, Oceania, and Sub-Saharan Africa) and 2017 for OECD countries. Both data coverage and timeliness improve when adding model-based estimates (e.g., from IHME and the World Data Lab) and population surveys conducted by analytics companies (e.g., Gallup World Poll).

Non-official statistics obtained through modelling, population surveys, or other techniques come with limitations. While they increase data availability and timeliness, they do remain predictions. The accuracy of the underlying models have been questioned, and significant discrepancies have been found between model-based estimates and official statistics obtained several years after (Boerma, Victora, and Abouzahr, 2018; Shiffman and Shawar, 2020). Also, the models and underlying assumptions are not always made transparent. Finally, the availability of such estimates may reduce incentives to strengthen statistical capacity. Large-scale household surveys conducted by analytics companies typically have much lower sample sizes (usually 1,000 people) than national statistical offices require, which in turn will affect the reliability of the data. Data are not always collected face-to-face and the questions and scales used may not represent the most valid and reliable measurement approaches (OECD, 2017; Praia City Group, 2020).

Second, it remains difficult to assess if the adoption of the SDGs has had a positive impact on the availability and timeliness of official statistics. On one hand, we find that there is now more data available to measure sustainable development than there was in 2015. Improvements have been particularly pronounced in Oceania and Sub-Saharan Africa. On the other hand, many of the data points available now have a year of reference that predates the adoption of the SDGs. When comparing data availability of 2010–2015 vs 2015–2020, we find that availability has declined in all regions except in OECD countries (+0.3%). The slight increase in data availability for OECD countries is primarily due to new data on freshwater withdrawals (FAO) and mortality from air pollution (WHO).

There are several ways to interpret these findings. First, it might be too early to evaluate the impact of statistical projects and programs launched since the adoption of the SDGs in 2015. It takes many years to collect and standardize official statistics in collaboration with national statistical offices, especially when there are no agreed definitions or methods. Second, it is possible that datapoints collected and published between 2015 and 2020 have reference years before 2015. We could not trace from international data portals the date when the data was collected. So, a data point obtained in 2016 with a reference year of 2014 is counted under data available for 2010–2015 but not for the SDG period (2015–2020). Hence these findings may just reinforce the point made earlier on significant time lags in official data reporting. Third, we have limited our analysis to data from official sources that is presented in the SDR2020. A similar analysis conducted for all official UN indicators might yield other findings.

Finally, we find that data availability and timeliness vary extensively across the SDGs. Using both official and non-official data sources, we find that data coverage and timeliness tend to be better for socioeconomic goals such as SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being) and SDG 5 (Gender Equality). Data availability and timeliness to track SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) is more problematic, with many countries reporting outdated information or no information for the GINI coefficient. At the global level, data availability and timeliness are also low for environmental and biodiversity goals, including SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) and SDG 14 (Life Below Water).

Table 5

Non-official data sources help address data gaps and time lags in official statistics

Data availability and year of reference by sub-regions (official data sources), including and excluding model-based estimates

	Official data sources (excluding model-based estimates and subjective measures)		Official data sources (including model-based estimates and subjective measures)	
	Coverage (%)	**Avg. Year**	**Coverage (%)**	**Avg. Year**
Eastern Europe & Central Asia	76.6	2016	78.3	2017
East and South Asia	82.3	2016	84.7	2017
Latin America and the Caribbean	76.7	2016	77.9	2017
Middle East and North Africa	73.3	2016	76.8	2016
OECD	95.0	2017	96.1	2017
Oceania	54.5	2016	53.1	2016
Sub-Saharan Africa	80.1	2016	82.9	2017

Note: This table focuses on indicators from official sources (e.g., UN custodian agencies) included in the SDR2020. It does not cover all official SDG indicators. Model-based estimates include data from the World Poverty Lab and IHME. Subjective measures include population surveys conducted by the Gallup World Poll.

Source: Authors' analysis

3. Policy and Monitoring Frameworks

Figure 27

Overall, there are more official data available in 2020 than between 2010–2015 to measure sustainable development globally…

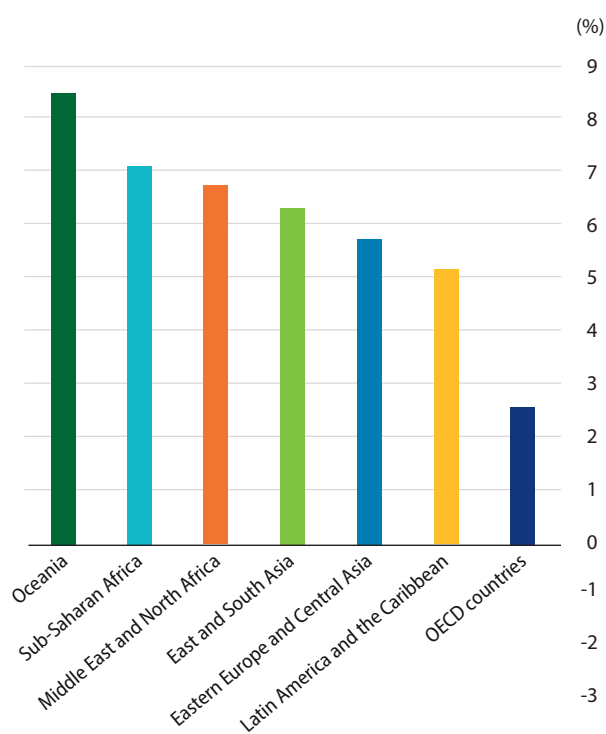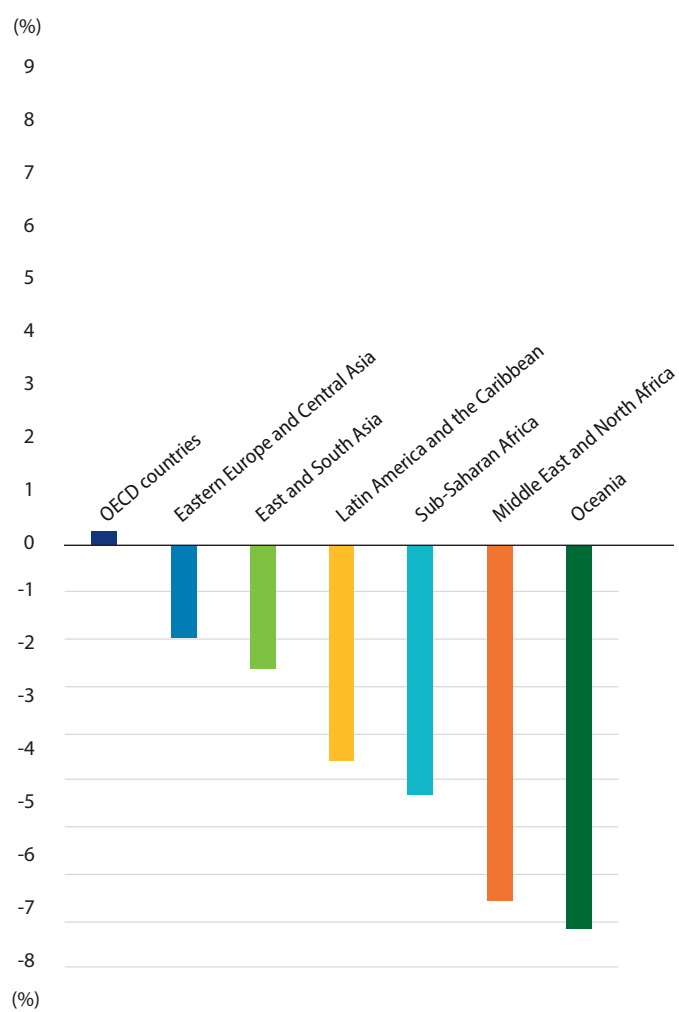Change in data availability (official data sources[1]), 2010–2015 vs 2010–2020 (%)

Figure 28

…Yet, it might be too soon to see an "SDG effect" on data availability and timeliness

Change in data availability (official data sources[1]), 2010–2015 vs 2015–2020 (%)

Note: (1) Excluding model-based estimates and other non-official statistics.
Source: Authors' analysis

Figure 29

Data availability and timeliness vary extensively across the SDGs

Global data availability (in %) and average year of reference (in years) by SDGs (official and non-official data sources)
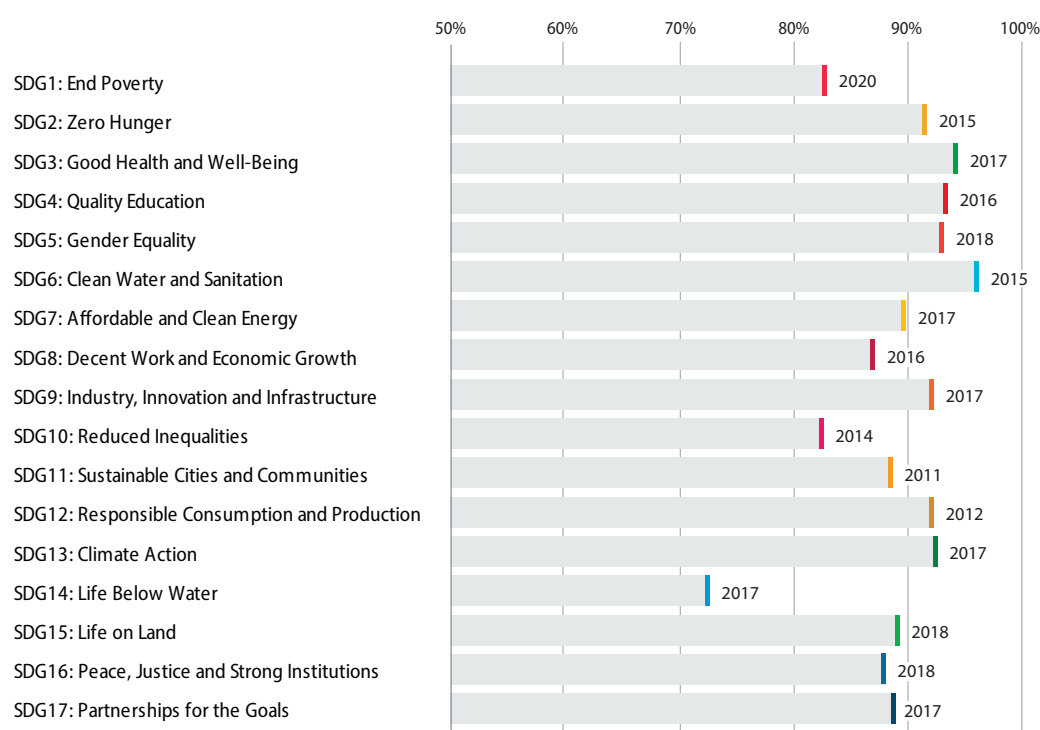
Source: Authors' analysis

The outbreak of Covid-19 underlines the need for more timely and disaggregated data. Beyond data needed on incidence, hospitalization, mortality, and the effective reproduction rate (ERR), countries need timely, accurate, and disaggregated data to design policy interventions that address the needs of their most vulnerable population groups (Dahmm, 2020; Marks, 2020). For comparison, the average time lag for data reported in the SDR2020 is three years.

At the same time, Covid-19 and its aftermath pose serious challenges for statistical systems. These include delays in planned censuses and surveys and reduced funding for

and capacity within national statistical offices. The need for real-time contact tracing also brings to the fore ethical and other concerns about new sources of data and the role private providers play in generating and using the data (Orrell, 2020; Marks, 2020; Espey, 2020). The SDSN TReNDS network and Data4Now support partnerships between governments and other stakeholders (including the private sector) to increase data availability and timeliness for the SDGs (GPSDD et al., 2019), while the Contract for Data Collaborations (C4DC) project supports governments in developing and executing data-sharing agreements for cross-sector data initiatives (GOVLAB, University of Washington, World Economic Forum and TRENDs, 2020).