PULSE OF PROGRESS: THE STATE OF GLOBAL SDG DATA IN 2023

GLOBAL SDG DATA AVAILABILITY AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR PROGRESS AT THE MIDPOINT OF THE 2030 AGENDA
KEY INSIGHTS

WE NEED MORE DATA ON URGENT PRIORITIES

While we have seen a general improvement in the availability of SDG data in recent years, data for some of the most pressing Sustainable Development Goals – including Gender Equality (Goal 5), Climate Action (Goal 13), and Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions (Goal 16) – remains limited. We need to further invest in data collection processes and national statistical systems to effectively measure progress. Such investments will yield dividends well beyond SDG reporting.

Check Chapter 01 for more information.

DEVELOPING COUNTRIES ARE AMONG THE TOP PERFORMERS

Of the 30 Member States with the highest data availability, 18 are developing countries. South America is especially well-represented. This goes to show that reaching a high level of data availability is possible across a wide range of contexts. At the same time, we have to acknowledge that data availability is also a function of national priorities and capacities. Possible pathways to improve data reporting include the strengthening of partnerships, the application of innovative concepts like citizen-generated or satellite data, and capacity building.

Check Chapter 02 for more information.

WE HAVE REACHED CONSENSUS ON MEASUREMENT

In 2020, we achieved a consensus on how to measure progress. Since then, all SDG indicators are conceptually clear. However, data availability varies among Custodian Agencies – partly due to external factors. These include the number of indicators a Custodian Agency oversees, the resources required to collect data on those indicators, and the year in which data collection methods for specific indicators were internationally agreed upon.

Check Chapter 03 for more information.

REPORTING SPEED IS GAINING TRACTION

Same-year data reporting increased by 150% between 2019 and 2022. However, in absolute terms, it remains limited. Leveraging SDG data for approaches like real-time policy making or programming at scale is therefore not possible at the moment. Developing specific use cases for SDG data could further enhance timely reporting, but a balance between speed and accuracy is essential. Quality should not be compromised for speed.

Check Chapter 04 for more information.

1 Defined as Member States from developing regions according to the Human Development Index 2021.
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THE GLOBAL INDICATOR FRAMEWORK

In September 2015, all 193 United Nations Member States came together and agreed on a plan of action for people, planet, and prosperity: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This Agenda outlined 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 associated targets to stimulate action in areas of critical importance for humanity and the planet.

To enable the measurement of progress towards the more broadly defined Goals and targets, the General Assembly tasked the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators (IAEG-SDGs), under the umbrella of the UN Statistical Commission, with developing a Global Indicator Framework. In 2017, the framework was adopted and has been reviewed on a regular basis since. As a result, there currently are 231 unique indicators that delineate the Goals and targets more closely.

Halfway through the 2030 Agenda, we perform a stocktaking of the data available in line with the Global Indicator Framework, i.e., the data that the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) publishes in the Global SDG Indicators Database. Although the Global Indicator Framework represents a breakthrough in data harmonization, its adoption by UN Member States is voluntary and influenced by national priorities.

Most analyses in this report measure data availability as the proportion of series for which there is data for at least two years since 2015 available in the Global SDG Indicators Database. Considering the time frame 2015 to mid-2023, that definition of data availability corresponds to requiring approximately one observation every four years on average. This approach aligns well with the three different data availability definitions that the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) is promoting.

Desired, e.g., by income, sex, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, geographic location, hazard, etc.

1https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/indicators/database/archive
3These are: (1) Data for at least one year since 2015, (2) Data for at least two years since 2015, and (3) Data for at least two years since 2015 and at least two years before 2015.
Some publications use indicator data availability as their baseline, rather than series availability. While the results between these methods are largely comparable, we opt for series availability because it gives equal weight to every series. For more information, please refer to the Methodology section in the Appendix.

THE OPPORTUNITY: ENHANCING DATA COLLECTION TO TURBO-CHARGE THE 2030 AGENDA

Data is critical to track progress, predict challenges, prioritize efforts, mobilize resources, and tailor solutions. If applied right, data is a catalyst for progress – driving more effective, efficient, equitable, timely, and transparent action for people and planet.

However, the available data paints an incomplete picture. For instance, we only have sufficient data – to attest progress, stagnation, or regression – for 17% of the series on SDG 5 (Gender Equality). For Goals 13 (Climate Action) and 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions) the situation is similarly dire. Without trend data, we are in the dark about where we are and what we need to do. Timeliness and disaggregation also remain areas of major concern. At the midpoint of the 2030 Agenda, we cannot afford to navigate with closed eyes.

The time to turbocharge SDG progress is now. Accelerating the pace of sustainable development requires addressing the critical challenge of insufficient data.

Investments in stronger national data systems have demonstrated substantial economic returns, yielding as much as USD 32 for every dollar invested\(^5\). Despite such impressive returns, data and statistics remain underfunded – particularly in developing countries. It is imperative for donors to recognize this opportunity and commit to elevate the share of Official Development Assistance (ODA) allocated to data to a minimum of 0.7% by 2030.

The SDG Summit in September 2023 offers a pivotal moment to refocus and accelerate progress towards the SDGs. It is a chance to surmount the challenges associated with data collection and seize the opportunity of data dividends – with effects that go far beyond the Sustainable Development Goals.

The path forward is clear. Progress is possible but will depend on Member States, Custodian Agencies, and public and private partners uniting in their efforts. Our goal is to secure data for at least 90% of the SDG targets in each country by 2027.

01

WE NEED MORE DATA ON URGENT PRIORITIES

DATA AVAILABILITY ACROSS THE SDGS
Monitoring the progress of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is crucial. The following analysis delves into the disparities in data availability across the SDGs, highlighting both achievements and challenges.

Figure 1.1 reveals substantial variation in data availability across the Sustainable Development Goals: Goal 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy) tops the chart with 90% data availability. At the lower end, we find Goals 5 (Gender Equality), 13 (Climate Action), and 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions). For these pivotal issues, having data on less than two years between 2015 and today greatly limits our ability to measure progress.

Overall, the ranking of SDGs according to data availability remains similar, even when limiting the analysis to specific country groups like Least Developed Countries (LDCs), Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs), and Small Island Developing States (SIDSs).

The implications of limited data are profound: not only are we unable to gauge progress, but we also cannot detect potential setbacks that demand immediate intervention. Data availability underpins our accountability to both humanity and the planet.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were adopted in 2015 as successors to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The SDGs address a broader range of challenges, which is reflected in the number of Goals and indicators. While the MDGs consisted of eight Goals and 48 indicators, the SDGs expanded to 17 Goals and 248 indicators. Some of that legacy is observable in our data availability analysis:

The biggest MDG in terms of number of indicators was MDG 8 on partnerships. Therefore, it is not entirely surprising that the corresponding SDG 17 has comparably high data availability. Conversely, while issues like poverty, hunger, and gender equality were already reflected in the MDGs, the number of indicators on these topics expanded considerably. For instance, the number of indicators on poverty and hunger increased threefold and almost fivefold for gender equality. Moreover, dedicated indicators on climate action and peace did not exist in the MDGs, offering a possible explanation for the low data availability on these issues.

Figure 1.1: Data availability (proportion of series with data for at least two years since 2015) averaged across all Member States for each Sustainable Development Goal.
In Figure 1.2 we complement these historic considerations by plotting the current number of series in each SDG against its data availability. This number is highly heterogeneous. For instance, Goal 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy) relies on only 6 series, while Goal 17 (Partnerships) requires data for almost 90 series.

Figure 1.3 offers more granular insights into data availability for the years since 2010. The key takeaway is the drop in data availability from 2021 on. However, this is not necessarily an issue of concern as it simply reflects a big proportion of SDG data being provided with a lag of at least one year. Another striking observation is that data availability for some Goals has been picking up. For instance, data availability for gender equality doubled when comparing the year 2022 to previous years – and it is timely. In Chapter 04 we provide information on the overall dynamics of SDG reporting.

SCALING TRAINING EFFORTS ON THE PATH TO ERADICATING CHILD LABOUR

Through dedicated training for national statistical offices, ILO supported an increasing number of Member States in their endeavors to systematically collect, analyze and report data on child labour – accelerating progress towards its global elimination. With more data readily available, policy makers globally can craft more evidence-based and targeted policies, directly benefiting children all over the world. The progress already achieved powerfully showcases how data availability can be the catalyst for more informed decision-making and, ultimately, tangible change on the path to eradicating child labour.

BOOSTING GENDER DISAGGREGATION BY LINKING DATA

UNCTAD developed a novel framework to link gender and international trade data to boost the availability of data on women’s economic empowerment – directly relevant to about 20 SDG indicators. In collaboration with UNECA and UNECE, UNCTAD ran pilot programmes in six partner countries: Cameroon, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Senegal, and Zimbabwe. The initial rollout proved a success resulting not only in new insights driven by gender-in-trade indicators – including on female participation in international trade and gender wage gaps – but also in innovative solutions. For instance, Kenya developed a new mechanism connecting data collected by the statistical office to that generated by customs. Overall, implementing UNCTAD’s framework led to an increased availability of gender disaggregated data on women’s and men’s participation in international trade as employees, managers, and entrepreneurs, salaries and wages by gender, and overall gender representation in trading companies.
FOSTERING INCLUSIVE DATA ECOSYSTEMS: CITIZEN-GENERATED DATA

DESA’s Statistics Division and its partners including international agencies, national statistical offices, civil society organizations and research institutions launched the Collaborative on Citizen Data in April 2023. The Collaborative is a platform for exchanging knowledge and experiences, informing methodological development and fostering collaboration among all players within the national data ecosystem, in particular, civil society organizations and citizens themselves. In the context of the 2030 Agenda, the Collaborative helps fill critical data gaps for marginalized populations and increase the extent to which their experiences are reflected in statistics. In addition, these efforts further advance important values such as fairness, inclusiveness, openness and transparency in data and public policy.

STRENGTHENING DISASTER AND CLIMATE RESILIENCE: SDG METHODS AND METRICS

While the application of SDG data is well-established, the methodological standards and metrics associated with the SDGs are emerging as vital tools. In the realm of disaster risk reduction, the Sendai Framework – reflected in SDGs 1, 11, and 13 – has seen influential applications. For instance, the Global Goal on Adaptation discussions have drawn from the methods and metrics developed for the SDGs, as have major UN initiatives like Early Warnings for All. At the same time, Member States are making concerted efforts to align and standardize their data collection processes on disaster losses and damages, leveraging these recognized metrics. Overall, SDG data standards are acting as a catalyst for improved decision-making, policy formulation, and actionable initiatives – both at the global and national level.

SUPPORTING CENSUSES FOR INCLUSIVE POPULATION DATA

For over 50 years, UNFPA has supported population and housing censuses which are a key source of socioeconomic and development data. In many low- and middle-income countries, censuses are the most comprehensive source of population data – vital to monitor up to 107 SDG indicators. UNFPA-supported censuses are critical, including for SDG data availability, as they ensure full coverage of the entire population and generate data on small geographical areas and population sub-groups with specific vulnerabilities such as migrants and displaced populations, indigenous peoples, Afro-descendant populations, and persons with disabilities. As a key source for the generation of Common Operational Datasets, census data also informs humanitarian response and anticipatory actions.

TACKLING CHILD MORTALITY WITH SHARED DATA

The United Nations Inter-agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation (UN IGME) was formed in 2004 to share data on child mortality, improve methods for child mortality estimation, report on progress towards child survival goals, and enhance country capacity to produce timely and properly assessed estimates of child mortality. UN IGME is composed of UNICEF, the WHO, the World Bank and United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division. This group is supported by an independent Technical Advisory Group, composed of leading academic scholars and independent experts in demography and biostatistics. UN IGME allows consistent and robust child mortality statistics to be disseminated and used across the UN system, countries and public health communities. This allows for the tracking of newborn, child, adolescent, and young adult mortality both at the national level and, for some countries and ages, at the subnational level – showing progress over time but also identifying data gaps and survival inequities. Routine and extensive country engagement has led to better data availability and quality and has also improved the ability to analyze, report on and advocate for country health policies that improve survival, promote good health, and leave no one behind.

EMPOWERING WITH GENDER DATA: MAKING EVERY WOMAN COUNT

Under the Women Count initiative, UN Women partnered with key stakeholders from national statistical systems across several countries to enhance gender data collection. These efforts resulted in policies that are grounded in solid evidence and that are closely tailored to women’s and girls’ needs. For instance, UN Women provided technical and financial assistance to Senegal’s National Agency of Statistics and Demography (ANSD) in 2021 for its first-ever time use survey. The insights from this survey not only quantified the value of Senegalese women’s unpaid labor for the first time, but have also supported women groups’ advocacy efforts. Moreover, the Ministry of Women, Family and Child Protection used these findings to review the existing national women’s empowerment policy to better integrate aspects related to time use and recognize women’s work. UN Women’s work on gender data is a testament to how increased data availability on urgent priorities can catalyze significant policy shifts that benefit those most at risk of being left behind.
Figure 1.3: Data availability (proportion of series for which we have data for the corresponding reference year and Goal) for reference years 2010 to 2023. Averaged across all Member States. Data is based on the publication year 2023, namely the most recent Q2.G.01 SDG Indicators Database release. Therefore, the column for 2023 only accounts for data published until mid-2023.
02

DEVELOPING COUNTRIES ARE AMONG THE TOP PERFORMERS

EXPLORING GLOBAL VARIATIONS IN DATA AVAILABILITY
DEVELOPING COUNTRIES ARE AMONG THE TOP PERFORMERS

Member States, as key stakeholders in the pursuit of the 2030 Agenda, are instrumental in tracking progress at the global level. In this endeavor, they tailor SDG data reporting to reflect their unique national priorities, realities, capacities, and circumstances.

Figure 2.1 lists the 30 Member States with highest data availability across all SDGs. Rather than delving into minor differences in data availability, our emphasis is on the characteristics of these countries: We find that 18 of the 30 best-performing Member States are developing countries. With Mexico, Colombia, Peru, Costa Rica, and Chile as the top performers, South America is well represented. These inspirational examples go to show that achieving a comparably high level of data availability is possible across a wide range of contexts.

At the same time, it is important to stress that there are a multitude of factors influencing data availability. Apart from national priorities, these can be: the availability of funding and other resources, previous experience with MDG monitoring, data collection foci of Custodian Agencies, access to technology and the capacity for innovation, e.g., through the use of citizen-generated or satellite data, as well as the breadth and depth of partnerships. Some of these factors are highlighted in the Journeys of Progress section later in this chapter.

An example for differences in national priorities and realities are indicators 1.1.1 (Proportion of the population living below the international poverty line…) and 1.2.1 (Proportion of population living below the national poverty line…). While developed economies overwhelmingly provide data relating to the national poverty line, developing countries do so with reference to the international poverty line.

The map in Figure 2.2 visualizes data availability across all Member States. Surprisingly, only 54 Member States have at least 50% data availability. This means they can monitor progress from 2015 to the present for at least half of the SDG series, leaving 139 Member States that do not meet this criterion.

Figure 2.3 complements our analysis, shedding more light on the distribution of Member States by plotting data availability percentiles against Human Development Index (HDI) percentiles.

Figure 2.1: Data availability (proportion of series with data for at least two years since 2015) for the 30 Member States with highest data availability.

6 Defined as Member States from developing regions according to the Human Development Index 2021.
Figure 2.2: Map displaying all UN Member States according to their data availability (proportion of series for which Member States have data for at least two years since 2015).

The boundaries shown on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations. The final boundary between the Republic of Sudan and the Republic of South Sudan has not yet been determined. The dotted line represents approximately the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir agreed upon by India and Pakistan. The final status of Jammu and Kashmir has not yet been agreed upon by the parties. A dispute exists between the Governments of Argentina and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland concerning sovereignty over the Falkland Islands (Malvinas).
DATA AVAILABILITY AND THE HUMAN DEVELOPMENT INDEX

Figure 2.3: UN Member States’ Human Development Index percentiles plotted against their data availability (proportion of series for which Member States have data for at least two years since 2015) percentiles. The Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, Monaco, Nauru, and Somalia are not depicted here as the HDI is not defined for them. For the Member States highlighted in this figure, you find Journeys of Progress later in this chapter.

→ Data Availability Percentile

→ Human Development Index (HDI) Percentile
Below, you find perspectives and success stories from Member States across the whole range of the Human Development Index.

**SOLVING COMPLEX CHALLENGES THROUGH STRONGER SDG DATA**

Colombia's journey exemplifies how readily available SDG data can be leveraged to design more effective and targeted policies that can tackle poverty, hunger, and urbanization with tangible benefits. For instance, to better understand the high rates of food insecurity households are facing, the National Administrative Department of Statistics (DANE) is employing machine learning and natural language processing techniques to gain novel insights from food price data. DANE has also made the availability of disaggregated data across all SDGs a priority, developing and adopting intersectional guidelines for data approaches. Colombia serves as a model for Member States seeking to advance sustainable development through better data, knowledge sharing, and best practices – not only between government agencies, civil society, and international organizations, but also regionally and globally.

**EMPOWERING PROGRESS WITH INCLUSIVE DATA DIALOGUES**

Costa Rica is making headway towards the SDGs with a well-crafted sustainable development strategy that considers SDG data a key catalyst for progress. In collaboration with international partners, Costa Rica hosted a pivotal 2018 National Forum on Data Roadmaps for Sustainable Development, providing a platform for high-level dialogue and discussions centered around geospatial and open data, as well as administrative records. With the creation of an integrated administrative data system emerging as a critical priority, Costa Rica has now engaged in extensive consultations with both regional and global partners to leverage existing know-how and expertise. To catalyze progress, an inclusive national dialogue was initiated by the University of Costa Rica, the Ministry of National Planning, and partners. This national dialogue brings together stakeholders from the public sector, civil society, and academia to learn from early successes and challenges and chart a path towards even stronger data governance, interoperability, and a more data-centric culture in Costa Rica.

**PUTTING DATA TO WORK FOR THE PEOPLE: OPEN ACCESS AND SMART SERVICES**

Strongly committed to the 2030 Agenda, Ghana has made progress in aligning national development plans to the SDGs with an emphasis on boosting data availability to strengthen monitoring. A dedicated indicator platform showcasing SDG progress across all goals is in place. Leveraging diverse data sources, the Ghana Statistical Service (GSS) – together with a wide range of national and international partners – has successfully implemented several high-impact projects across priority areas, including health, agriculture, environment, and education. For example, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, a national data hub was created, providing citizens with up-to-date data and trusted information on case counts, lockdown measures, and other key metrics, including situational maps. Similarly, with data from and in collaboration with diverse stakeholders, climate-smart agricultural services distributed via mobile phones now equip farmers in some locations in Ghana with real-time insights, improving land preparation, planting, and harvesting activities. Some of this progress has been driven by Ghana’s close collaboration with the World Bank and several other donor institutions. Through this partnership, initial financing via the World Bank’s trust fund for data and statistical capacity building helped catalyze a USD 150M loan for Ghana to modernize its data and statistics systems – a process now being scaled up through the Global Data Facility.

**REIMAGINING THE STATUS QUO WITH CITIZEN-GENERATED DATA**

The example of Kenya showcases how data-centric solutions – enabled by readily available, trusted SDG data – and transformative partnerships can accelerate sustainable development. First launched during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, a geospatial food staples dashboard continues to reshape Kenya’s approach to food security during complex, multi-faceted crises. Through a combination of official and grassroots efforts, Kenya’s National Bureau of Statistics, together with civil society organizations, worked towards enhancing SDG monitoring by leveraging citizen-generated data, attracting wide-scale interest for this novel approach. To help address some of the most pressing healthcare challenges, the Kenya Health Information Systems Interoperability Framework was created, enabling interoperability between health information systems. The goal is to improve overall health outcomes through more streamlined, joined-up, and patient-centric healthcare services. Kenya’s story underscores the potential of harnessing innovative data solutions to drive tangible improvements.
**MAKING (REAL-TIME) SDG DATA A PRIORITY**

The Philippines has taken a proactive approach to SDG data monitoring through its SDG Watch platform, steered by the Philippines Statistics Authority (PSA). Bolstered by official, high-level measures like the Presidential Proclamation on SDGs and PSA Board Resolution 4-2016, government agencies are now contributing vital data in real-time to the platform. Such systematic coordination not only boosts the robustness of the SDG Watch platform but also ensures that the Philippines’ overall progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals is accompanied by readily available and trusted data on each goal, enabling more effective monitoring.

**HARMONIZING DATA TO UNLOCK MORE USE CASES**

In Switzerland, over 300 people from 30 federal administration units are engaged in SDG data collection. To unite all involved parties and coordinate the data flow from Switzerland to the United Nations, the Federal Statistical Office (FSO) has created a platform called stats_agenda2030. This platform offers comprehensive information on each indicator, including focal points, metadata, past data requests, and more. Additionally, it hosts a notebook for sharing experiences and a ticketing system to coordinate the various data collection processes. As a result, stats_agenda2030 ensures efficiency, prevents administrative overload, and enhances transparency within the administration. Furthermore, the Swiss government has recently entrusted the FSO with responsibilities in the realm of data management and data science. Consequently, the FSO is ensuring that all data, not just statistics, collected by the Swiss administration is visible and, where legally permissible, made available to the public. It is Switzerland’s conviction that investing in harmonized data spaces is absolutely vital to facilitate the secondary use of data. Through the Unlocking the Power of Data Initiative, Switzerland aims to expand and adapt the Swiss model to an international scale. Harmonization, open access, and promoting secondary uses are fundamental to maximizing the returns of existing data investments.
WE HAVE REACHED CONSENSUS ON MEASUREMENT
Early on in the SDG monitoring, 39% of indicators were classified as Tier III – meaning no internationally established methodologies or standards were available. By 2020 there were no Tier III indicators remaining.

The definitions of the tiers are as follows:

**Tier I:** Indicator is conceptually clear, has an internationally established methodology and standards are available, and data are regularly produced by countries for at least 50% of countries and of the population in every region where the indicator is relevant.

**Tier II:** Indicator is conceptually clear, has an internationally established methodology and standards are available, but data are not regularly produced by countries.

**Tier III:** No internationally established methodology or standards are yet available for the indicator, but methodology/standards are being or will be developed or tested.

As illustrated in Figure 3.1, the development of so many conceptual and definitional frameworks in such a short space of time is remarkable. It stands out as one of the hidden success stories of the SDG measurement journey. In many cases, Tier III indicators dealt with politically sensitive and challenging topics like illicit financial flows. The 2030 Agenda and the SDGs provided the political setting that allowed standardization to progress despite these obstacles.

A prime example of these advancements deals with measuring South-South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTC) – a critical and longstanding gap in development economics. The lack of such a measure not only masked the contribution of the Global South to global development, it also threatened the measurement of target 17.3 (Mobilize additional financial resources for developing countries from multiple sources). Overcoming a number of political sensitivities and technical challenges, a sub-group chaired by India – with notable leadership from Brazil, China, Colombia, Mexico, and Member States from the Group of 77 – developed a measurement framework.

Another milestone was the development of a conceptual framework for illicit financial flows to support target 16.4 (By 2030, significantly reduce illicit financial and arms flows, strengthen the recovery and return of stolen assets and combat all forms of organized crime). This was especially challenging technical work, as illicit financial flows not only include flows of funds generated from criminal activities, but also illegally and illicit funds generated by legal economic activities. Reaching consensus involved balancing the perspectives of several international organizations and Member States with diverse economic structures and national statistical systems.

Enabled by these strides, a vast amount of data generation and collection ensued. In that process, Custodian Agencies are key stakeholders: In coordination with Member States, they collect and submit data on the set of indicators they are responsible for – sometimes in cooperation with other agencies as co-custodians. That data is then published in the Global SDG Indicator Database, overseen by the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD).

In Figure 3.2, we display data availability across custodians. It is crucial to recognize that numerous factors can cause variations in data availability, many of which are beyond the control of the custodians. For instance, Custodian Agencies are responsible for vastly different portfolios of indicators, each with different numbers of series (see Figure 3.3) and collection frequencies. Furthermore, as previously highlighted, different indicators advanced to Tier I/II at varying times. This means that some custodians could not rely on established standards, while others benefitted from them. Additionally, while some Custodian Agencies use models to generate data, others rely on more resource-intensive collection methods.
Figure 3.2: Data availability (proportion of series with data for at least one – or – two years since 2015) for the portfolio of indicators that each Custodian Agency is responsible for, averaged across all Member States.

Figure 3.3: The number of unique series each Custodian Agency is responsible for, plotted against the average data availability (proportion of series with data for at least one year since 2015) across Member States for these series. The horizontal axis uses logarithmic scaling.
REPORTING SPEED IS GAINING TRACTION
The timeliness of data is a major concern in the 2030 Agenda. Here, we analyze the lag in data provision and evaluate whether SDG data can be used for real-time decision making.

In this chapter, the term **reference year** refers to the year data reports on, while the **publication year** is the year in which data was published – normally with data on multiple reference years.

Figure 4.1 shows that, on average, we only receive data for 3% of all series during the year that the data reports on – so when the reference year equals the publication year. Data provision is increasing by 10.9 percentage points in year one after the reference year, peaking at an additional 19.2 percentage points in year two. This analysis is based on the average additions of data for the reference years 2017 to 2022 during the publication years 2019 to 2022.

Our comprehensive analysis, as depicted in Figure 4.2, indicates that the provision of data within the same year has surged by a remarkable 150% between 2019 and 2022. That achievement becomes even more notable when considering that the number of data series in the SDG framework expanded from 391 in 2019 to 625 in 2022. This makes the increase even more significant: On an absolute level, approximately 240% more data points were reported the same year when comparing the years 2019 and 2022.

While the dynamics of timeliness are a positive development, the overall amount of data provided in the same year is still comparably low, such that approaches like real-time decision making at scale are currently not possible with SDG data. Overall, same-year data was only provided for 35° out of 249 indicators between 2019 and 2022, with indicator 5.5.1 (Proportion of seats held by women in (a) national parliaments and (b) local governments) being reported on most frequently.

From discussions with Custodian Agencies, we know that data availability and timeliness increase when Member States have specific use cases that create immediate value from SDG data within the national context. Promoting more use cases could drive timeliness. However, increases in reporting speed must be carefully balanced against other objectives such as data quality.

Figure 4.1: Average additions to data availability (proportion of series for which data is delivered for a specific reference year) in percentage points by lag (= publication year - reference year) for reference years 2017 to 2022 during publication years 2019 to 2022.

Figure 4.2 Top: Evolution of same-year data provision (proportion of series for which data is delivered within the same year, so with a lag of 0 years) for reference and publication years 2019 to 2023*. Bottom: Evolution of the number of series from 2019 to 2023*. *Data for 2023 is estimated.
Halfway through the 2030 Agenda, it is clear that the world is not on track to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Progress is moving too slowly and, in some cases, even reversed. At the same time, critical information is missing. Data is crucial for delivering on the 2030 Agenda as we cannot achieve what we cannot accurately measure.

As we demonstrated in this report, reaching a high level of data availability is possible, but more collaborative action is needed everywhere. To boost data availability both at the global and country-level, we call on partners to:

**MEMBER STATES**

- **Ambition.** Commit to raising the percentage of available data on the SDG targets to 90% in each country by 2027.
- **Data partnerships.** Form innovative partnerships, including between public and private stakeholders, to drive timely and ethical data use and sharing.
- **Innovative approaches.** Encourage the application of novel concepts such as citizen-generated data or satellite data to increase national data availability across all SDGs.
- **Funding.** Commit to elevate the share of Official Development Assistance (ODA) allocated to data and statistics to a minimum of 0.7% by 2030. Investments in data have demonstrated substantial economic returns, yielding as much as USD 32 for every dollar invested.
- **Transparency.** Review OECD DAC CRS guidelines to ensure voluntary purpose codes for data and digital initiatives become a transparent part of development assistance in every sector – from agriculture, to education, water, and beyond.
- **Capacity building.** Enhance capacity building support to developing countries to strengthen national statistical systems and promote country-owned investments in data across all sectors.

**UN SYSTEM ENTITIES AND CUSTODIAN AGENCIES**

- **Skills and culture.** Upgrade organizational skills and culture – in line with the Secretary-General’s vision of a UN 2.0 – to better assist Member States in collecting SDG data and measuring progress.
- **Dedicated hubs.** Launch dedicated hubs or teams to accelerate sector-specific data collection where appropriate.
- **Accessibility.** Aggregate available SDG data in an accessible online portal – data.un.org – to increase transparency and empower stakeholders.

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**APPENDIX: METHODOLOGY**

Below we explain the methodology for the data produced in this report in more detail. Doing so, we assume familiarity with the introduction and the hierarchy of SDG data depicted in Figure I.1.

**DEFINING DATA AVAILABILITY**

Most analyses in this report measure data availability as the proportion of series for which there is data for at least two years since 2015 in the Global SDG Indicators Database. Considering the time frame 2015 to mid-2023, that definition of data availability corresponds to requiring approximately one observation every four years on average. This definition aligns well with the three different definitions that the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) is applying – for instance for the SDG API or the Data Availability Tool:

- Data for at least one year since 2015
- Data for at least two years since 2015
- Data for at least two years since 2015 and at least two years before 2015

Such a measure of data availability could be regarded as inadequate for some indicators or series. After all, there are indicators that have a data collection frequency that is lower than, e.g., every four years. At the same time, there are series that are supposed to be collected on an annual basis. In principle, one could measure data availability for every series based on the desired frequency of data collection. And indeed, the metadata repository for the SDGs defines a variable FREQ_COLL. Unfortunately, the entries for this variable are often vague. For instance, FREQ_COLL for indicator 3.7.2 states “Data are compiled and updated on a regular basis.” Therefore, we cannot benchmark sensibly against the desired collection frequency.

Fortunately, the effect of that simplification is the same across Member States such that a comparison on this basis is still fair. This is slightly different for Custodian Agencies.

**Custodian Agencies** have vastly different portfolios of indicators and series that they take care of. On top of that, some Custodian Agencies are responsible for indicators that were only classified as Tier I/II in 2020. Compared to that, Custodian Agencies whose indicators were already classified as Tier I/II in 2016 had a head start. Moreover, the nature of data can lead to differences.

1[https://unstats.un.org/sdgapi/swagger](https://unstats.un.org/sdgapi/swagger)
2[https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/dataportal/analytics/DataAvailability](https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/dataportal/analytics/DataAvailability)
For instance, some Custodian Agencies model data, whereas others have to collect it in cooperation with Member States. To account for such differences, we show data availability based on both “data for at least one year since 2015” and “data for at least two years since 2015.”

Our data availability measure aligns with the UNSD measure up to the indicator level. For data availability at the Goal and target level, you might see some differences, for the following reason: While we define data availability as average series availability, some entities calculate data availability, e.g., at target and Goal level, as the unweighted average across indicators. This gives the same importance to every indicator, irrespective of whether it comprises 20 series or just one. Collecting data for an indicator with 20 series is, on average, more challenging than for one with a single series. Therefore, we opted to equally weigh each series to produce a meaningful metric for data availability.

In our calculations, we furthermore account for the fact that some indicators are marked as not applicable (N/A) in the Global SDG Indicators Database for a specific country or area. On average, these are five indicators per Member State – at least one, 15 at the maximum. We provide a list of these indicators for every Member State in the Appendix. Judging from discussions with Member States, this list is underinclusive.

DATA VALIDATION
Due to our alignment with UNSD methodology, we can validate our results for indicator availability against the values that UNSD produces. We do that in an automated manner for all 248 indicators across the 193 Member States using the UNSD SDG API. That corresponds to 248 × 193 = 47,864 comparisons. Our results correspond exactly to the ones that UNSD produces.

TIMELINESS ANALYSIS
The difficulty with measuring the timeliness of data delivery is that the number of series changes significantly over the years. For example, the 2017.Q2.G.01 release of the Global SDG Indicator Database defines 466 unique series, while the most current 2023.Q2.G.01 release defines 659 unique series.

Therefore, it would be problematic to measure data published in 2017 against the list of 659 unique series in the current release – we would underestimate data availability significantly. Instead, we measure data published in a specific year/release against the list of series published for that year/release.

Moreover, the default data availability definition (the proportion of series for which there is data for at least two years since 2015) that we use in this report cannot be applied in the context of the timeliness analysis. Therefore, we calculate – for a specific year – the proportion of series for which data is published within the same year. Taking the year 2019 as an example, we measure timely data availability as the proportion of series for which data on 2019 was reported during the year 2019. The data reported in 2019 is benchmarked against the list of series that was current in 2019. It is important to stress that, for this analysis, trends are more relevant than the absolute values.

The basis for the timeliness analysis are the latest releases of the Global SDG Indicators Database for each year that are available to the public. Namely, these are: 2019.Q3.G.01, 2020.Q4.G.01, 2021.Q4.G.01, 2022.Q4.G.02, and 2023.Q2.G.01. There are no public archives for the fourth quarter of 2019 or any years before 2019, but the list of series valid for each release is accessible via the UNSD SDG API – including the ones for which no public archives exist. For the estimates for the year 2023, we multiply the data availability calculated from the 2023.Q2.G.01 release by a factor two.

DATA SOURCES
→ Global SDG Indicators Database
→ SDG Data Contacts
→ SDMX Global Registry
→ UNSD SDG API
→ Human Development Index
→ The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2023: Special Edition

12 https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/dataContacts
13 https://registry.sdmx.org
14 https://unstats.un.org/sdgapi/swagger
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Data Availability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
<td>AFG 42.3% 5.2.2, 14.1, 14.5, 17.2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albania</td>
<td>ALB 42.8% 5.2.2, 3.3.5, 4.8.1, 5.5.2, 6.1.x, 9.x, 10.6, 16.8.1, 17.19.x, 17.31, 17.32.1, 17.35.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Algeria</td>
<td>DZA 45.9% 17.2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andorra</td>
<td>AND 21.3% 2.x, 3.2, 3.3.5, 4.8.1, 5.5.2, 6.1.x, 9.x, 10.6, 16.8.1, 17.19.x, 17.31, 17.32.1, 17.35.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angola</td>
<td>AGO 45.9% 17.2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antigua and Barbuda</td>
<td>ATG 34.4% 5.2.2, 17.2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argentina</td>
<td>ARG 51.5% 5.2.2, 17.2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armenia</td>
<td>ARM 54.8% 14.1, 14.5, 17.2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>AUS 52.5% 5.2.2, 3.3.5, 4.8.1, 5.5.2, 6.1.x, 9.x, 10.6, 16.8.1, 17.19.x, 17.31, 17.32.1, 17.35.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>AUT 51.8% 14.1, 14.5, 17.2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Azerbaijan</td>
<td>AZE 40.5% 14.1, 14.5, 17.2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bahamas</td>
<td>BHS 53.6% 5.2.2, 17.2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bahrain</td>
<td>BHR 35.1% 17.2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>BGD 47.9% 5.2.2, 17.2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbados</td>
<td>BWI 38.6% 5.2.2, 17.2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belarus</td>
<td>BLR 41.9% 5.2.2, 14.1, 14.5, 17.2.1, 17.31, 17.32.1, 17.35.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>BEL 41.3% 5.2.2, 3.3.5, 4.8.1, 5.5.2, 6.1.x, 9.x, 10.6, 16.8.1, 17.19.x, 17.31, 17.32.1, 17.35.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Belize</td>
<td>BLZ 36.0% 5.2.2, 17.2.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Benin</td>
<td>BEN 42.2% 17.2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhutan</td>
<td>BTN 45.6% 5.2.2, 14.1, 14.5, 17.2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bolivia (Plurinational State of)</td>
<td>BOL 44.6% 5.2.2, 14.1, 14.5, 17.2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bosnia and Herzegovina</td>
<td>BIH 42.3% 5.2.2, 3.3.5, 4.8.1, 5.5.2, 6.x, 9.x, 10.6, 16.8.1, 17.19.x, 17.31, 17.32.1, 17.35.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Botswana</td>
<td>BWA 42.9% 14.1, 14.5, 17.2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>BRA 52.5% 5.2.2, 17.2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brunei Darussalam</td>
<td>BRN 34.9% 5.2.2, 17.2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulgaria</td>
<td>BGR 53.9% 5.2.2, 3.3.5, 4.8.1, 5.5.2, 6.1.x, 9.x, 10.6, 16.8.1, 17.19.x, 17.31, 17.32.1, 17.35.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burkina Faso</td>
<td>BFA 42.2% 14.1, 14.5, 17.2.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Proportion of series with data for at least 2 years since 2015.*
Niger 45.3% 14.a.1, 14.5.1, 17.2.1
NG 44.6% 17.2.1
North Macedonia 28.8% 17.2.1
Norway 49.6% 17.2.1
Oman 49.7% 17.2.1
Pakistan 49.3% 17.2.1
Pele 30.8% 17.2.1
Panama 48.5% 17.2.1
Papua New Guinea 52.0% 17.2.1
Paraguay 51.0% 17.2.1
Peru 58.6% 17.2.1
Philippines 55.8% 17.2.1
Poland 52.4% 17.2.1
Portugal 52.6% 17.2.1
Qatar 42.3% 17.2.1
Republic of Korea 50.4% 17.2.1
Republic of Moldova 44.3% 17.2.1
Roma 55.4% 17.2.1
Russian Federation 48.9% 17.2.1
Rwanda 44.6% 17.2.1
Saint Kitts and Nevis 26.9% 17.2.1
Saint Lucia 35.8% 17.2.1
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines 31.1% 17.2.1
Samoa 44.2% 17.2.1
San Marino 18.5% 17.2.1
Seao Tome and Principe 33.3% 17.2.1
Saudi Arabia 43.7% 17.2.1
Senegal 45.9% 17.2.1
Serbia 49.4% 17.2.1
Seychelles 36.4% 17.2.1
Sierra Leone 37.7% 17.2.1
Singapore 36.3% 17.2.1
Slovakia 45.5% 17.2.1
Slovenia 59.2% 17.2.1
Somalia 37.4% 17.2.1
South Africa 53.3% 17.2.1
South Sudan 24.8% 17.2.1
Spain 50.9% 17.2.1
Sri Lanka 47.6% 17.2.1
Sudan 40.5% 17.2.1
Suriname 35.5% 17.2.1
Sweden 52.6% 17.2.1
Switzerland 52.6% 17.2.1
Syria 26.6% 17.2.1
Tajikistan 42.4% 17.2.1
Thailand 55.4% 17.2.1
Timor-Leste 38.3% 17.2.1
Togo 47.5% 17.2.1
Tonga 41.4% 17.2.1
Trinidad and Tobago 40.6% 17.2.1
Tunisia 39.9% 17.2.1
Turkey 52.0% 17.2.1
Turkmenistan 28.6% 17.2.1
Tuvalu 29.3% 17.2.1
Uganda 52.5% 17.2.1
Ukraine 52.6% 17.2.1
United Arab Emirates 42.1% 17.2.1
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland 51.9% 17.2.1
United Republic of Tanzania 51.3% 17.2.1
United States of America 50.5% 17.2.1
Uruguay 51.0% 17.2.1
Uzbekistan 49.7% 17.2.1
Vanuatu 40.3% 17.2.1
Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) 29.9% 17.2.1
Viet Nam 44.8% 17.2.1
Yemen 30.7% 17.2.1
Zambia 39.2% 17.2.1
Zimbabwe 42.9% 17.2.1