

THE DANISH  
INSTITUTE FOR  
HUMAN RIGHTS

HUMAN RIGHTS  
AND DATA FOR  
SUSTAINABLE  
DEVELOPMENT



With the adoption of the complex, comprehensive and universal 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2015, states have committed to transformative goals of eliminating extreme poverty, reducing inequalities and securing jobs while ensuring environmental sustainability and addressing climate change.

Following the celebratory moment of the adoption of the Agenda, the focus is now on devising strategies that will enable 193 different countries to actually achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. A key component is to make sure that implementation departs from the right knowledge base, and is guided by the right information and data flows to continuously drive and adjust the necessary change.

This guidance paper provides a human rights perspective on data, focusing on:

- Human rights and the global SDG indicator framework;
- Disaggregation of data;
- A pluralistic ecosystem of data to ensure no one is left behind;
- Citizen-generated data, and;
- The contribution of human rights mechanisms to SDG monitoring.



Human Rights

## HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE 2030 AGENDA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is explicitly grounded in international human rights treaties. The pledge to “leave no one behind” reflects the fundamental human rights principles of non-discrimination and equality, and the majority of SDG targets are linked to elements of international human rights and labour standards.

In order to fulfil the promise of the 2030 Agenda to realise the human rights of all, and to leave no one behind, it is crucial that the **human rights aspects of the SDGs are upheld and measured** in the iterative planning, implementation and review processes. This is also reflected in the principles laid out for the Follow-Up and Review (FUR) mechanisms of the 2030 Agenda, which should, first of all, ensure **accountability** to citizens and **promote human rights**.

## GLOBAL INDICATORS FRAMEWORK

The 2030 Agenda emphasises that **quality, accessible, timely and reliable disaggregated data** is key to decision-making, measurement of progress and to ensure that no one is left behind. To this effect, a framework of **232 global indicators** has been adopted, which should be complemented by **additional indicators** at national level for measuring progress towards the 17 SDGs and their associated targets.

The **global indicators framework** should ideally be **universally relevant**, and generate **comparable data** across the globe. However, one major challenge is that many targets in the 2030 Agenda are **composite and multidimensional**, and reflect a variety of intentions and ambitions. In contrast, indicators need to be **specific and measurable** and **limited in number** in order to increase the feasibility of data collection.

Hence, there is a risk that indicators and statistical data can have a **reductionist effect** on the broader vision of the 2030 Agenda. This risk is evident when assessing a number of key human rights-related targets and their respective indicators. For example, **target 10.2** calls for the “social, economic and political inclusion of all”, yet the indicator solely takes into account economic deprivation as expressed through income inequality.

Another key challenge is represented by the gaps in data availability that exist so far due to shortcomings both at the conceptual stage of indicator development, as well as regarding data collection at the national level.

Only 83 out of the 232 indicators (36%) are currently classified as “Tier I”, meaning that the indicator has an established methodology and data is regularly produced. In turn, this means that data is not consistently available for about two thirds of the indicator framework, which are classified as “Tier II” (established methodology, but no regular data collection) or “Tier III” (no established methodology). At the country level, the actual capacity to collect data varies widely even for Tier I indicators. This means that it will require significant time and resources before most countries can monitor a majority of the global indicators.

## HUMAN RIGHTS RELEVANCE OF THE INDICATORS

From a human rights perspective, some parts of the indicator framework are more relevant than others. A qualitative analysis of the human rights aspects of the individual targets and the ability of the related indicators to measure these aspects, reveals that:

- Approximately half (49%) of the SDG indicators have the potential to yield data that is **directly relevant** for monitoring specific human rights instruments;
- Approximately 10% of the indicators will contribute data that has **indirect human rights relevance**, but can still be linked to the monitoring of specific human rights instruments; and
- Approximately 40 % of the indicators will generate **contextual information** that may be relevant for a broad analysis of factors that enable or limit the realisation of human rights.



While the above analysis can provide a general estimation of the human rights-relevance of the global indicators, it can, of course, not determine the relevance of the individual indicators in a specific country context. This will depend on the specific human rights challenges in a given country, and thus require an additional level of analysis.

## DATA DISAGGREGATION

In order to “leave no one behind,” data collection must be capable of capturing the disparities between different population groups or categories of persons. Data disaggregation is the main approach suggested in the 2030 Agenda to monitor the situation of different population groups, and their progress in the context of the SDGs.

The 2030 Agenda specifies that data should be “disaggregated by sex, age, race, ethnicity, migration status, disability and geographic location and other characteristics relevant in national contexts.” These categories for disaggregation reflect some of the **prohibited grounds of discrimination** in international human rights law, namely race, ethnic origin, sex, age and disability.

In many cases, **guidance for relevant categories** for data disaggregation in the **national context** can be drawn from an analysis of human rights bodies. These bodies systematically highlight significant gaps in the availability of data on vulnerable groups, and identify further areas where data disaggregation is needed due to discrimination or the specific situation of certain population groups. Further, they can also provide guidance on laws, specific policies and regulations that would allow NSOs and other data producers to collect the data needed for disaggregation, in order to ensure that the key principles of a human rights-based approach to data collection are respected.

The commitment of the 2030 Agenda to data disaggregation is reaffirmed in **target 17.18**, which explicitly aims, by 2020, to significantly increase the availability of such disaggregated data.

The strengthening of statistical capacity for disaggregation of data is key to enabling a systematic monitoring of the equality and non-discrimination dimensions of the entire 2030 Agenda. However, significant challenges remain in terms of building sufficient statistical capacity to significantly enhance data disaggregation by 2020 while many countries are still struggling with the most basic statistics. Opportunities should be pursued, however, for the incorporation of disaggregation (and a human rights-focused approach more generally) when developing statistical systems.

For a more thorough analysis of challenges related to limitations in the aspects measured by global indicators and the potential for data disaggregation, limited data availability and capacity constraints, see the report

Human Rights and Data: [bit.ly/humanrights-data](https://bit.ly/humanrights-data)

## **BUILDING A PLURALISTIC ECOSYSTEM OF DATA**

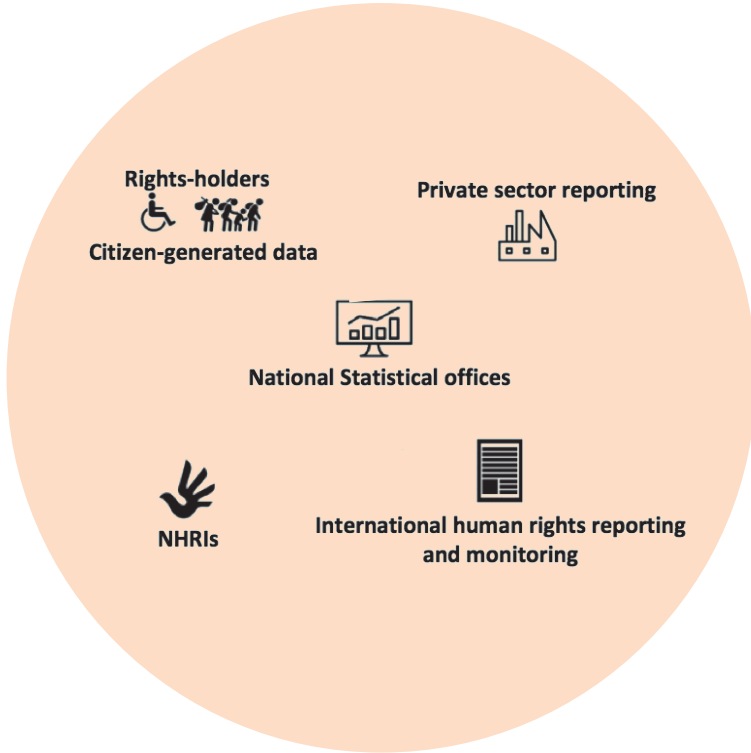
The global SDG indicator framework presents both opportunities and challenges for data collection that enables measurement of progress towards the SDGs and human right. These include:

- The relatively limited aspects of states' human rights obligations that are monitored through the global indicators (being mainly focused on long-term outcome), the challenges in measuring perceptions, and the reductionist effect of certain indicators.
- The limitations in the potential for data disaggregation related to the type of indicators, gaps related to disaggregation on the basis of grounds of discrimination in international law, and the limited capacity of National Statistical Offices (NSOs).
- The lack of conceptual clarity and/or limited data availability for many of the global indicators.
- The capacity constraints of many NSOs, and the limited resources available for capacity-building and data collection, meaning that other data sources may need to be considered to understand the full picture.

By building a pluralistic ecosystem of data, it is possible to close the above-mentioned gaps and, thereby, eventually “measure what we treasure”. This means moving beyond statistical data collection, and integrate a diversity of complementary data sources into a coherent system. In order to respond to challenges in data collection, integrate technological innovation, and ensure relevance in the future, such a dynamic data ecosystem should be subject to continuous and participatory re-evaluation and fine-tuning at all levels.



## A PLURALISTIC ECOSYSTEM OF DATA – EVERYBODY COUNTS



### KEY PRINCIPLES FOR AN ECOSYSTEM OF DATA THAT LEAVES NO ONE BEHIND

- Follow the general principles for a **Human Rights-Based Approach to Data** collection (HRBAD): participation, disaggregation, self-identification, transparency, privacy, accountability
- Identify complementary **national indicators** and **related statistical data collection**, including **context-specific initiatives** to capture the situation of particular groups,
- Include a **variety of credible data sources**; such as **citizen-generated data** and **private sector reporting**
- Build on **human rights monitoring mechanisms** that provide context-specific analysis and advice, as well as information about vulnerable groups and sensitive issues that are hard to capture through common statistical data

## A HUMAN RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH TO DATA (HRBAD)

The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has defined 6 main components of a Human Rights-Based Approach to Data (HRBAD), which should guide data collection in all circumstances:

**SELF-IDENTIFICATION.** All identity categories must be developed through a participatory approach. Data collection should not create or reinforce discrimination, bias or stereotypes.

**PARTICIPATION.** Participation is central to a HRBAD, which should ensure free, active and meaningful participation of relevant stakeholders, in particular the most marginalized population groups.

**DISAGGREGATION** on the basis of the grounds of discrimination enshrined in international human rights law is essential to reveal underlying disparities in the development process, and highlight the specific challenges that different population groups face, in particular vulnerable groups in a given context.

**TRANSPARENCY.** This principle is related to the right to seek, receive and impart information, enshrined in international human rights law. Ensuring transparency implies access of civil society to data on the monitoring and realisation of human rights.

**ACCOUNTABILITY.** In their capacity as duty-bearers, state institutions have a duty to ensure that they respect, protect and fulfil human rights in their conduct of statistical work. This includes ensuring the independence of statistical data gathering.

**PRIVACY.** Access to information must be balanced with the right to privacy. Data collected for statistical purposes must be strictly confidential.



## CITIZEN-GENERATED DATA – FILLING DATA GAPS

**Participatory data collection** by civil society can generally help fill data gaps by ensuring collection of data among otherwise excluded groups; contribute to relevance and disaggregation of data, empowerment of rights-holders and vulnerable groups; and help resolve privacy concerns.

Such data collection initiatives also offer opportunities to **capitalise on technological advances**, for example, by employing mobile phones for data collection. Ideally, such initiatives would be undertaken in the form of **partnerships** between concerned **citizens** and **population groups** and **National Statistical Offices (NSOs)**. In addition, **UN agencies**, **National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs)** and **civil society organisations** can be important partners by supporting the data collection process. NHRIs can also assist in vetting potentially sensitive data.

Since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, a series of **initiatives** have emerged to strengthen collaborative monitoring. Some of these include: the **Global Partnership for SDG Data**, the **Everyone Counts** initiative by Care, the **Data Shift Initiative** by CIVICUS, the **Transparency, Accountability and Participation (TAP) Network**, and the **Indigenous Navigator**.

## PARTICIPATORY DATA COLLECTION: THE INDIGENOUS NAVIGATOR

The Indigenous Navigator is an example of participatory data collection by a particular group of rights-holders.

It provides a framework and a set of tools for indigenous peoples to systematically monitor the level of recognition and implementation of their rights. It is designed to monitor:

- Essential aspects of the SDGs, including by collecting data for indigenous peoples related to the global SDG indicators as well as complementary indicators to capture indigenous peoples' rights and aspirations (for example, for bilingual and culturally-appropriate education, land rights and self-governance);
- The implementation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and other core human rights instruments, as they pertain to indigenous peoples; and
- The outcomes of the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples.

## EXISTING HUMAN RIGHTS MECHANISMS AND INSTITUTIONS

The high degree of convergence between human rights and the 2030 Agenda points to the potential of using national, regional and international human rights mechanisms to:

- Assess and guide SDG implementation at national level;
- Collect key data in areas where the SDGs are most closely aligned with human rights, and;
- Define approaches and indicators that are adapted to specific or cross-cutting issues that impact on sustainable development at national level.

As states are already required to report regularly to key human rights and labour law mechanisms, most have specific resources allocated for this purpose, as well as processes in place to undertake this work. There is thus an advantage of using the information fed into human rights bodies by states' reporting from an efficiency and cost-effectiveness perspective, as well as from the perspective of ensuring national anchorage of SDG FUR.

## NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS INSTITUTIONS AS DATA PROVIDERS

As independent State bodies, National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) monitor and analyse the national human rights situation against international standards. NHRIs often prepare annual status reports on the general human rights situation as well as analysis and research on specific topics.. Given their monitoring mandate, independent status and focus on the range of human rights that underpin the SDGs, NHRIs have a significant potential for serving as credible third party data providers for the monitoring of the 2030 Agenda, as well as for being key partners with other providers to contribute to a diverse ecosystem of data.



## MONITORING THE SDGS THROUGH HUMAN RIGHTS MECHANISMS

SDG targets 5.c, 10.3 and 16.b aim to promote and enforce non-discriminatory laws and policies for sustainable development. The related global indicator, as a tier III, perception-based indicator, faces many challenges and lacks any structural element to hold states accountable. This is where global, regional and national human rights mechanisms can be helpful.

- National Human Rights Institutes (NHRIs) have the potential to immediately monitor progress and serve as data providers regarding discriminatory laws and policies
- Similarly, international human rights mechanisms, such as the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) and various treaty bodies including the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) and the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention 111, can provide access to a wide array of data on discriminatory laws and policies

## WHERE TO FIND THE HUMAN RIGHTS DATA?

OHCHR's **Universal Human Rights Index** allows searches of Observations and Recommendations of UN treaty bodies, Special Procedures and the Universal Periodic Review (UPR). The Index is searchable in relation to key rights, countries and regions, and specific types of populations or population groups in accordance with grounds of discrimination enunciated in key international human rights instruments.

- The **Treaty Bodies Database**, maintained by the OHCHR, makes information available by treaty, by state and by type of report, hence comprising a wealth of information to inform the implementation and monitoring of the SDGs in specific countries or regions.
- **NORMLEX** is the ILO's Information System on International Labour Standards. This constitutes an enormous resource for qualitative and context-specific measurement of implementation and progress towards the targets.

- **The Human Rights Guide to the SDGs** is a searchable database which establishes links between core human rights instruments and specific SDG targets.

## **MORE ON A HRBA TO THE 2030 AGENDA**

Read more on a HRBA to the 2030 Agenda in the series of DIHR guidance papers:

Danish Institute for Human Rights, Guidance Paper on Human Rights and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, June 2017.

Danish Institute for Human Rights, Guidance Paper on Human rights and the Follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, June 2017.

Further reading:

Human Rights in Follow-up and Review of the 2030 Agenda:

[bit.ly/follow-review](https://bit.ly/follow-review)

Human Rights and Data: [bit.ly/humanrights-data](https://bit.ly/humanrights-data)

For more information, visit

<https://www.humanrights.dk/our-work/sustainable-development>