

Principles for the creation and maintenance of global SEEA databases on the SEEA website

In this short note, it is advised that the following principles are respected for the creation and maintenance of global SEEA databases on the SEEA website. These principles mimic the guidelines on data flows and global data reporting for the SDGs that the UN Statistical Commission (UNSC) has endorsed in March 2019¹, with some adaptations to the present context.

1. **Official statistics reported in global SEEA databases should meet the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics**². This implies, in particular, that these statistics utilise only concepts, definitions, classifications, sources, methods and procedures that meet professional and scientific standards, and that the underlying methodology is precisely documented.
2. **Official statistics are prioritised and estimation techniques are only used as a complement**³. Estimated SEEA data should only complement existing official statistical information produced and disseminated at the national level. They should not replace or duplicate such information, as long as it meets the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics. In cases where countries compile official statistics, and international organisations are able to estimate more granular breakdowns, the latter estimates should be perfectly aligned with existing official statistics at the level of the nationally published data.
3. **The subsidiarity principle between international organisations applies for the collection of official SEEA data and metadata**⁴. This principle ensures that countries do not have to report the same information several times, to different international organisations. It implies that once an international agency, member of the UNCEEA, has validated official SEEA data and metadata, the results are recognised by all other agencies. Should concerns arise over any aspect of the data, this concern should be addressed by the international organisation which conducted the validation. For example, if Eurostat collects and validates SEEA accounts for EU countries, other international organisations should take the corresponding data from Eurostat. In such cases, a data flow should be established between Eurostat and the SEEA website.

¹ See UNSC (2019), Annex I, available at: <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/50th-session/documents/2019-2-IAEG-SDG-E.pdf>

² These Principles were endorsed by the UN General Assembly in January 2014. See <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/dnss/gp/fundprinciples.aspx>. The UNSC also considers as an overarching objective that indicators for the monitoring of the SDGs should meet the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics (see UNSC 2019, Annex I).

³ See UNSC (2019), Annex I, Commitment of international and supranational statistical agencies: “Base the compilation of the international series for SDG indicators on national official data sources in all cases where national statistical systems produce and release data or national estimates that are consistent with agreed indicator definitions and agreed international statistical standards.”

⁴ See UNSC (2019), Annex I, Commitment of international and supranational statistical agencies: “Coordinate the data collection work of international and supranational statistical agencies and establish effective and efficient data sharing arrangements among them to avoid duplication of efforts.”

4. **Webqueries and SDMX are the preferred options for the supply of data into global SEEA databases⁵.** This principle aims at reducing the response burden of countries to the maximum extent. Questionnaires should only be used as a fallback option, when data are not available on the official website of government agencies, and when countries do not use SDMX.
5. **Estimation methodologies need to be precisely documented and their accuracy needs to be assessed.** Documentation on estimation methodologies applied by international organisations must be freely available (e.g. in the form of a working paper released on Internet). It also needs to include an assessment of the accuracy of the proposed estimation technique. For example, official statistics can be used as benchmarks to assess the accuracy of estimation techniques. This assessment is key in order to ensure that users trust estimates and are well aware of their limitations.
6. **Estimation methodologies need to be endorsed by the UNCEEA.** The endorsement by the UNCEEA is compulsory before estimates can be used in global SEEA databases. The UNCEEA decision should be based on a recommendation of one of the SEEA Technical Committees, or of relevant technical experts that the SEEA Technical Committee(s) invite(s) to contribute.
7. **Countries need to be notified before estimates are released to the SEEA website⁶.** Countries should have enough time to review the estimates produced by international organisations before they are uploaded to the SEEA website. It is recommended that the specific protocol used follows the one eventually used for the global data reporting of SDG indicators.
8. **Identified UNCEEA members are responsible for specific global SEEA accounts on the SEEA website⁷.** A division of tasks around the various SEEA accounts ensures efficiency and accountability in the maintenance of global SEEA databases. In particular, the designated UNCEEA members ensure an adequate coordination between the different agencies involved in data collection and validation (Point 3), and timely updates of official and estimated SEEA accounts on the SEEA website. The following division of tasks currently applies: the OECD is responsible for global air emission accounts, UN Environment for global material flow accounts, the FAO for global land accounts, and the UNSD for global energy accounts. The latter organisation is also responsible for the maintenance of the SEEA website from an IT point of view. Among the five priority accounts

⁵ See UNSC (2019), Annex I, Commitment of international and supranational statistical agencies: “Minimize the data reporting burden of national statistical systems by utilizing existing reporting mechanisms or national reporting platforms for SDG indicators whenever possible, promoting the use of appropriate data transmission standards and tools, such as Statistical Data and Metadata eXchange (SDMX) and web application program interfaces.

⁶ See UNSC (2019), Annex I, Commitment of international and supranational statistical agencies: “Provide an opportunity, within a reasonable time frame, for national statistical authorities to review country-specific data and estimates of SDG indicators prior to their release.”

⁷ See UNSC (2019), Annex I, Commitment of international and supranational statistical agencies: “International and supranational agencies will only address data requests to countries regarding a specific SDG indicator if they are designated custodian agency. In cases where more than one such agency is designated as custodian agency, data shall be collected through common means, such as joint questionnaires.”

identified by the UNCEEA, only water accounts do not yet have a designated responsible member of the UNCEEA.

9. **A unique focal point is identified in each country for all questions related to SEEA databases⁸.** It is proposed that the UNCEEA identifies a focal point for the SEEA in each country. This focal point will be the first point of contact within the National Statistical Office for all SEEA-related issues. In terms of data dissemination, this focal point will be notified before official statistics or estimates are released to the SEEA website.

⁸ A prominent role is given to National Statistical Offices (NSOs) in the SDG data validation process. See UNSC (2019), Annex I: “In their capacity as data producers and as coordinators of their national statistical systems, NSOs have accountability for the quality and accuracy of global reporting on progress towards the SDGs. [...] Member States may have designated other authorities, typically in line ministries, as providers of national data [for SDGs]. In such case, internal coordination with the national statistical system is of utmost importance.”