

Child Well-Being and the Sustainable Development Goals



Inclusiveness lies at the heart of the 2030 Agenda: improving outcomes for all nations and all people within society is a central theme of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). By signing the UN resolution “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” Member States pledged that no one should be left behind. In particular, the Agenda identifies the need to capture separately the experiences of children, youth, persons with disabilities, people living with HIV/AIDS, older people, indigenous peoples, refugees, internally displaced persons and migrants.

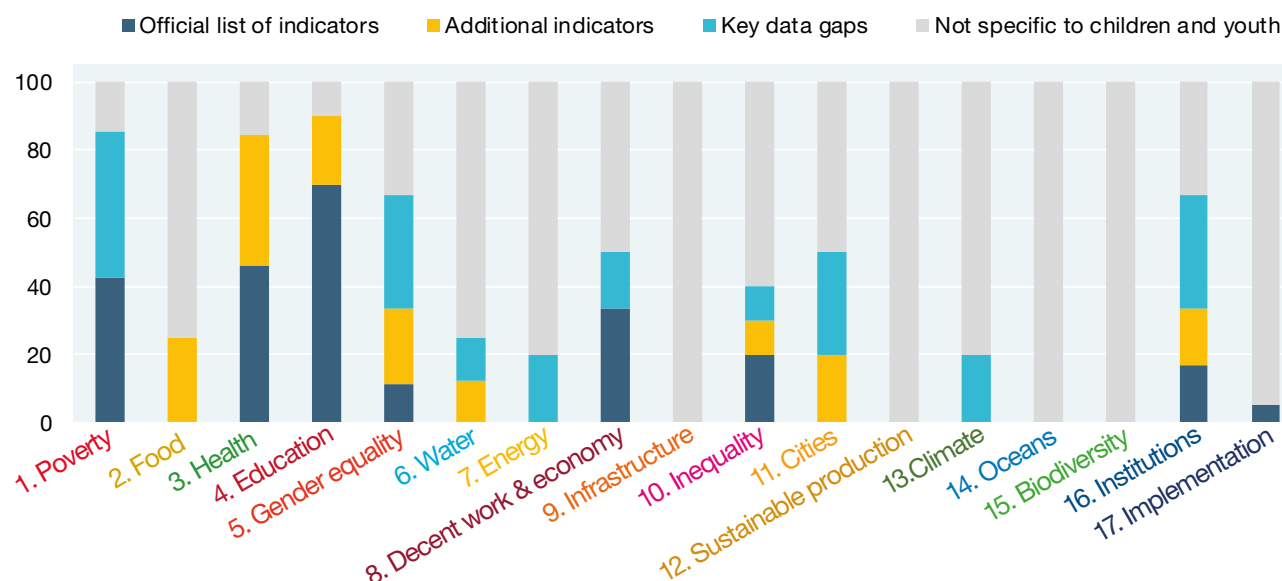
Monitoring a country’s average level of progress towards the 17 SDGs, and the 169 targets that underpin them, already poses major data challenges. Going beyond the average to measure outcomes for different population groups is harder still. As a contribution to this agenda, the OECD recently published **"Child well-being and the Sustainable Development Goals: How far are OECD countries from reaching the targets for children and young people?"** (Marguerit, D., G. Cohen and C. Exton (2018), <https://doi.org/10.1787/5e53b12f-en>). This Statistics Working Paper builds on the *Measuring Distance to the SDG Targets* Study published in 2017, and on a broad range of recent OECD work on child well-being. The analysis draws on a rich set of OECD and UN data sources, and aims to help countries navigate the complexity of the 2030 Agenda, providing an overview of key strengths and challenges faced in meeting the targets for children and young people.

Leaving no one behind: a huge measurement challenge

The UN resolution on SDGs emphasises the importance of accessible, timely and disaggregated data, with a focus on the poorest and those in the most vulnerable situations, such as children and young people. However, around two-thirds of the 169 targets refer to issues that concern society as a whole (e.g. target 14.5, on conserving at least 10% of coastal and marine areas; or target 9.5, on enhancing scientific research). Separate measures for children and young people are thus only feasible for around 62 targets. In practice, the data for assessing children’s positions relative to the SDGs remains patchy: based on the indicators for global monitoring agreed at the UN-level, OECD databases currently



Availability of data on children and young people, by goals



Note: "Key data gaps" refer to targets for which, in principle, it should be possible to assess at the child-level, but in practice, the data disaggregation needed is not available to do this. "Not specific to children and youth" refer to targets that are formulated at the economy- or society-wide level, which it might never be possible to measure separately for children and young people. Goal labels have been shortened for the purpose of this visualisation.

provide information for 26 of the 62 targets that can be disaggregated. When extending the analysis to child-related indicators that are not in the official UN list, 17 additional targets can be covered. As shown above, data coverage is most complete in the case of Goals 3 (health) and 4 (education), while substantial data gaps remain for Goals 1 (poverty), 5 (gender equality), 16 (institutions), and 11 (cities).

Child Well-Being and the SDGs for children and young people, two sides of the same coin?

Childhood is a critical period for the development of human and social capital, and is decisive in preparing societies to be prosperous, sustainable and inclusive in the future. The OECD has made child well-being the focus of several recent studies, including the "Child Well-Being Data Portal" launched in 2017, the PISA 2015 report on Students' Well-Being (2017); the chapter "How's Life? for Children" in the 2015 edition of How's Life? and "Doing Better for Children" (2009). Several SDG targets are also explicitly directed toward infants and children - for instance, some targets on "Quality education" (Goal 4).

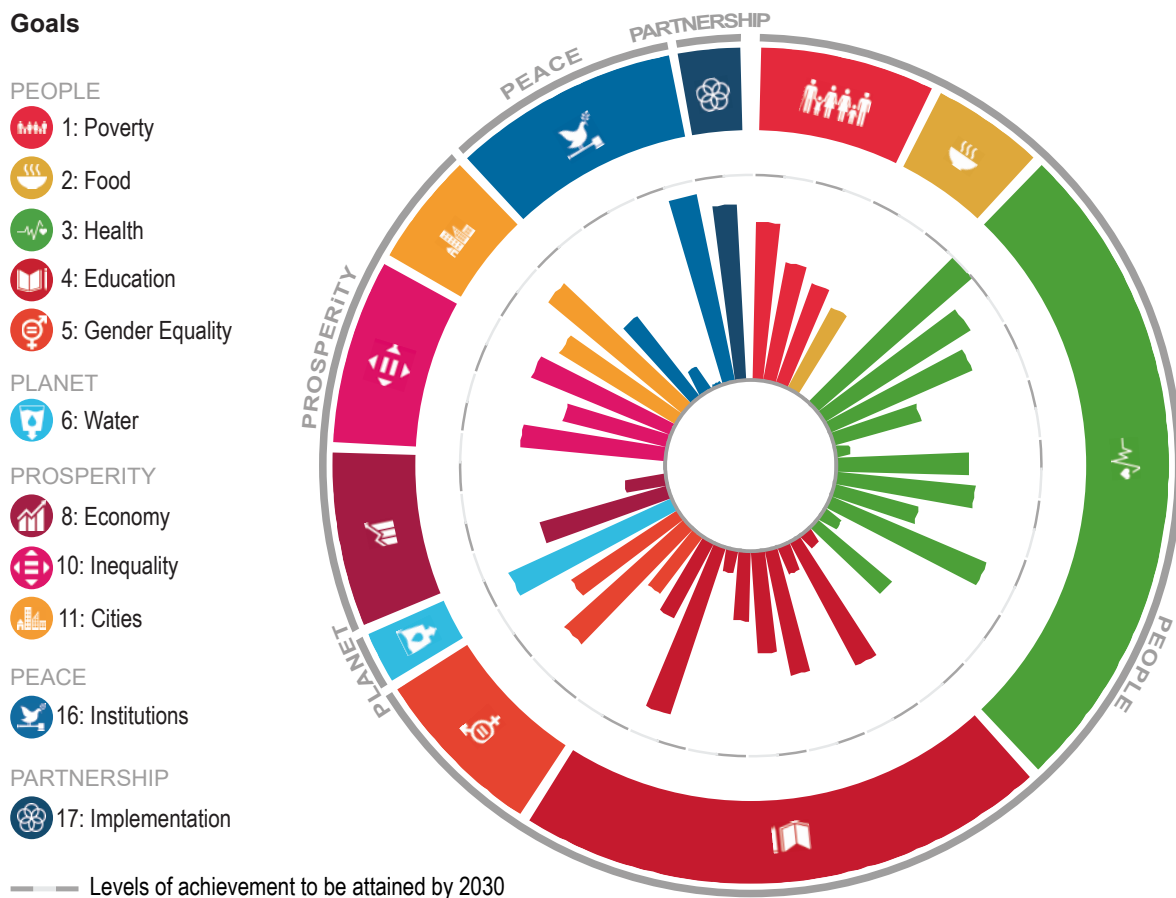
The 2030 Agenda is a list of policy commitments, agreed by national governments. It thus has a different scope and purpose from the OECD Child Well-Being framework, which is a diagnostic tool to assess the well-being of children. There is, however, some clear overlap in terms of the aspects of life considered. For instance children's basic material needs, housing conditions, health, and education are covered by both initiatives. The two also complement each other: on the one hand, the SDGs extend the perspective of the Child Well-Being framework towards other aspects of life that shape children's environments, such as Goal 17 "Partnerships for the Goals". On the other hand, the Child Well-Being framework provides additional information about aspects of life not captured in the SDGs, such as relationships between parents and children, leisure time and social activities, parental leave, and the quality of school life.

OECD countries still have a long way to go to achieve many SDG targets for children and young people

Based on available indicators included in the official UN list, OECD countries are on average furthest from reaching their targets for children and young people overall on Goal 4 (education), Goal 1 (poverty), and Goal 8 (decent work and the economy). Within these goals, performance varies from target to target, as illustrated in the wheel below. The distance to travel in education (Goal 4) is particularly large on targets 4.1 and 4.7, with more than 25% of 15 year old students in the OECD falling below basic proficiency levels in numeracy or literacy, and around 20% not achieving basic proficiency in environmental science skills. On Goal 1, target 1.2 is an area of poor performance, with 14% of OECD children living in relative poverty. For Goal 8, the share of young adults experiencing poor quality work environments (target 8.8), unemployment (target 8.5) and the share of young people not in employment, education or training (NEET) (target 8.6) all represent areas where OECD countries also have a large distance to travel to meet the target levels. It is however important to stress that this paper reports national average results, but the distance to target may also vary within countries. Some children and youth will be further from the targets than others.

When extending the analysis to indicators beyond the official UN list, which increases the coverage of both goals and targets, Goals 4, 1 and 8 continue to be highlighted as among those where OECD countries are furthest away from meeting their SDG commitments. However, extending the evidence base also highlights some additional priority areas, and in particular childhood obesity (target 2.2, under Goal 2), and young people's perceptions of corruption, and their trust in institutions (targets 16.5 and 16.6 respectively, both under Goal 16).

OECD average distance from SDG targets for children and young people



Note: The chart shows how far OECD countries have already progressed towards each available target for children and young people. The longer the bars the shorter the distance is to be travelled by 2030. Targets are clustered by goal, and goals are clustered by the "5Ps" of the 2030 Agenda (outer circle). This figure is based on the extended set of indicators, i.e. the set of indicators that includes indicators beyond the list agreed at UN-level, thus covering 43 out of the 62 children and youth related targets.

The study also offers some insights into whether OECD countries' performance on the SDG targets differs if the focus is put on children and young people, rather than on the total population. Although children tend to fare better in those countries where the total population also fares better, there are areas where the experiences of children do diverge from those of adults, in terms of the average distance to target for the two groups. For example, in most OECD countries, children are at greater risk of income poverty (Goal 1) than the overall population, and young adults are more likely to face unemployment and poorer quality working conditions than their older peers (Goal 8). Conversely, young people have better health conditions (Goal 3), higher literacy and numeracy skills (Goal 4) and better access to internet (Goal 17), relative to the total population.

The distance to targets for children and young people differs significantly between countries

There can be large differences between OECD countries in how far they need to travel to meet the SDG targets for children and young people. The variation in performance is especially large for food and nutrition (Goal 2) and income poverty (Goal 1). For example, in Denmark, the Netherlands, Switzerland and Norway childhood obesity (target 2.2) is between 10% and 15%, while it reaches more than 25% in Greece and Canada. Conversely, in the case of Goals 3 ("Good health and well-being") and 10 ("Reduced inequalities") OECD countries' performance is much more homogenous. For example, all OECD countries have already reached the targets on maternal mortality (target 3.1), mortality for newborns and the under-fives (target 3.2).

Further reading

- » Marguerit, D., G. Cohen and C. Exton (2018), "Child well-being and the Sustainable Development Goals: How far are OECD countries from reaching the targets for children and young people?", *OECD Statistics Working Papers*, No. 2018/05, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/5e53b12f-en>
- » OECD (2017), OECD Child Well-Being Data Portal, www.oecd.org/els/family/child-well-being/data/
- » OECD (2017), Measuring Distance to the SDG targets: An assessment of where OECD countries stand, OECD Publishing, Paris, www.oecd.org/std/OECD-Measuring-Distance-to-SDG-Targets.pdf
- » OECD (2017), PISA 2015 Results (Volume III): Students' Well-Being, OECD Publishing, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264273856-en>
- » OECD (2017), *How's Life? 2017: Measuring Well-being*, OECD Publishing, Paris. https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/how_life-2017-en
- » OECD (2015), "How's life for children?", in *How's Life? 2015: Measuring Well-being*, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/how_life-2015-8-en
- » OECD (2009), *Doing Better for Children*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264059344-en>
- » UNICEF (2017), Building the Future: Children and the Sustainable Development Goals in Rich Countries, Innocenti Report Card 14, www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/RC14_eng.pdf
- » United Nations (2015), Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; resolution 70/1. <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>

OECD Statistics and Data Directorate, October 2018

wellbeing@oecd.org