

Meeting Minutes – Expert Group on Well-being (EGWM) and Quality of Life

Date: 23rd October 2025 (07:00 to 09:30 New York time)

Chair: Richard Heys

Introduction:

1. The October sprint of the EGWM explored the indicator sets used in key wellbeing-related frameworks, including UN-Habitat's Quality of Life Framework, the UNECE Wellbeing Manual and Norway's SDG taxonomy with a use case from the Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities (KS).

Presentation 1: UN-Habitat – Quality of Life Initiative

Presenter: Eduardo Moreno | UN-Habitat

2. Eduardo presented on the Quality-of-Life Initiative, commissioned by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to bridge the gap between well-being and urban development measurement. The initiative aims to define and measure what truly matters to people in cities and support policymakers responding to global challenges.
3. The initiative was developed through discussions with 5 expert groups, 5 roundtable sessions, and pilot testing in 10 cities, now scaled to over 100 cities worldwide.
4. The Quality-of-Life Initiative integrates subjective and objective indicators, combining global aspirations with local realities. The indicators also covered nine domains used by the Quality-of-Life Initiative including governance, environment, housing, education and economy. The different indicators were used to measure the domains at local and global layers.
5. The initiative uses a data platform powered by AI to provide real-time insights and support policymaking. The platform visualises disparities between perceived and actual conditions, helping cities translate data into actionable strategies. The initiative is positioned as a decision-making ecosystem that supports integrated urban planning and policy coherence, with a strong emphasis on connecting local actions to global goals.
6. The presentation led to a discussion on how the nine dimensions could be beneficial for the EGWM. Emphasis was placed on the importance of enabling interaction with data at the local level, even though EGWM has primarily focused on national data. While the local layer allows flexibility, it still adheres to standards. The toolkit was highlighted as a way to support civic participation and align indicators with diverse policy goals. Participants also stressed the need for separate indices to reflect both factual and emotional aspects of wellbeing, with "values" and "synergies" seen as key to refining the framework.
7. Further points included the absence of indicators on employment and decent work, with limited gender disaggregation outside employment. The use of novel data sources like social media was seen as a promising area for scaling, supported by AI and collaboration with the UN. Attendees discussed the balance between objective and subjective indicators and the initiative's autonomy to include innovative metrics. The concept of using "lenses" was proposed to address differing societal approaches, while the framework's flexibility was seen as essential for adapting to both local and national agenda.

Presentation 2: UNECE – Guidelines on Well-being Measurement

Presenter: Dr. Edwin Horlings | Statistics Netherlands

8. Earlier in 2025, the UNECE presented newly published guidelines focused on measuring current well-being, developed by a task force of international experts. The aim of the guidelines was to synthesise existing well-being frameworks by evaluating:
 - (a) the core dimensions and indicators for current well-being
 - (b) methodology, measurement challenges and data sources
 - (c) examples of best practice in dissemination and communication
 - (d) adaptation to the needs of countries
9. The synthesis included looking at recommendations from the 2009 Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi report, as well as later frameworks on well-being developed by the OECD (2011), Conference of European Statisticians (2014) and Eurostat (2016). SDGs were also considered due to national reporting obligations; additionally, national frameworks provided relevant insights into best practice.
10. The UNECE's synthesis identified three common principles for well-being:
 - (a) distinguishing between current well-being and resources for future well-being
 - (b) emphasis on multidimensionality of well-being
 - (c) indicators are outcome-focused, including both subjective and objective measures.
11. The task force used consensus-based methods to select relevant domains and indicators, ensuring cultural sensitivity and international applicability. This identified 10 common (recommended) dimensions including subjective well-being, housing, health, and environmental conditions.
12. The recommended indicators were assessed against a selection criterion including accuracy, relevance, and interpretability. Indicator sets needed to be comprehensive and balanced across domains with both subjective and objective indicators. The UNECE also considered non-existent indicators that could be included to bring attention to data gaps and the need for future research.
13. The presentation concluded by examining whether dashboards or composite indices should be recommended in the manual. Dashboards provide detailed insights, whereas composite indices are frequently requested by media and policymakers. The UNECE recommends adopting both approaches, while maintaining full transparency regarding underlying assumptions and limitations.
14. The discussion praised the work that has been done so far. However, there was general agreement that further development is needed to establish a universal, global approach to well-being measurement, as maintaining relevance and subjectivity across different geographic regions remains a challenge.
15. Discussions also addressed concerns around recommending too many indicators and if composite indices could be used to mitigate this.

Presentation 3: Norway's SDG Taxonomy & user cases

Presenter: Live Rognerud | Statistics Norway
Statistics Norway and KS presented a taxonomy, developed to help local and regional authorities in Norway measure progress on the SDGs. This was initiated in 2020 following a request from KS to assist local implementation of the SDGs and improve the quality of SDG data. Moreover, the taxonomy was designed to address the disconnect between global SDG indicators and local needs, enabling municipalities to make informed data choices and identify gaps. The conceptual model requires 4 properties for an SDG indicator, including the 3 dimensions (data, perspective and quality) and the data/data owner.

16. The taxonomy was launched in 2022, classifying indicators based on three dimensions:
 - (a) goal - what the indicator measures (SDGs)
 - (b) quality - how reliable or developed it is (Class 1, 2 and 3)
 - (c) perspective - why the indicator is relevant, including strategic priority, development sector, evaluation type, and distribution.
17. The classification system allows SDG indicators to be assessed individually and as a set. By applying a common standard, it clarifies the usability of indicators on their own and in comparison to other indicators. These indicators can be used at local, national and international levels.

Presenter: Anna Romsaas | KS: The presentation demonstrated how the taxonomy was used to monitor SDG implementation in Norway on a municipal and local level. Specifically, the taxonomy helped contextualise data and enabled municipalities to make informed data choices and identify gaps.

18. The initial study that used the taxonomy, took 6 indicator sets with 1,100 indicators from global and national sources, revealing insights such as the dominance of social indicators and the lack of outcome-based measures. A further study involving 12 Norwegian municipalities classified 1,300 locally used indicators, 537 of these were unique. The taxonomy was used to create a shortlist of 42 indicators tailored to local planning and governance.
19. Norway's municipalities have used the taxonomy to identify the indicators most relevant to them. This has supported municipalities to develop data platforms that monitor the implementation of SDGs.
20. The discussions after the two presentations considered the benefits of having a large number of indicators against having an overall measure aggregating indicators for users. There was also interest in how Norway differentiated between inclusive and sustainable well-being at municipal and local levels. Comments were also made about how the indicator sets and application of measurement frameworks would differ when applied at the regional level in other geographical settings.