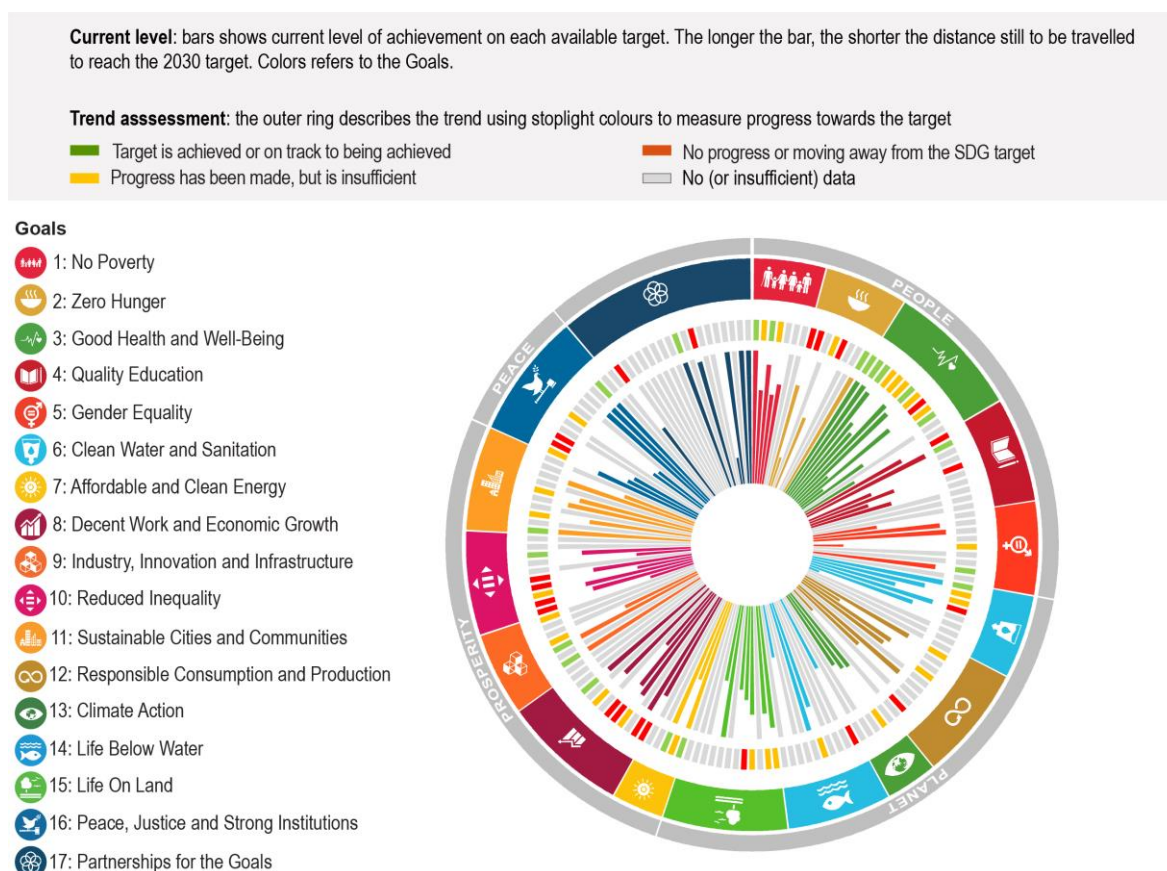# Measuring distance to the SDG targets – Ireland

Ireland has already achieved 23 of the 127 SDG targets for which comparable data are available and, based on most recent trends, is expected to meet 8 additional targets by 2030 (Figure 1). As virtually all OECD countries, Ireland has already met (or is close to meeting) most targets related to securing basic needs and implementing the policy tools and frameworks mentioned in the 2030 Agenda (see details in Table 1). Ireland's living standards remain high, supported by a strong economic performance. Yet challenges remain. Adults' skills could be improved and while violence against women appears to be lower than the OECD average, tackling unequal opportunities for women requires further efforts.

This country profile provides a high-level overview of some of Ireland's strengths and challenges in performance across the SDG targets. As such, it differs in nature from Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) or other reporting processes. To ensure international comparability, this assessment builds on the global indicator framework and relies on data sourced from the *SDG Global Database* and OECD databases. VNRs typically use national indicators that reflect national circumstances and are more up-to-date (See section How to read this country profile that provides some methodological details on country profiles).

Figure 1. Ireland's distance from achieving SDG targets included in this report

Source: All data is taken and adapted from (UNDESA, 2021[1]), *SDG Global Database,* https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/unsdg and (OECD, 2021[2]), *OECD.Stat,* https://stats.oecd.org/ (accessed on 29 October 2021).

Main strengths

The Irish economy is growing rapidly and has come a long way since exiting the EU-IMF financial assistance programme in late-2013. The full strength of the GDP rebound is however difficult to gauge as it partly reflected the decisions by a small number of multinational enterprises to relocate to Ireland part of their intellectual property assets in 2015. The labour market, which provides a better gauge of national trends, has shown a decline in the unemployment rate from above 15% to close to 6% in 2020 (Target 8.5). Irish employees report a high level of earnings (USD PPP 23 per hour). Ireland also shows one of the highest level of manufacturing value added (Target 9.2).

Air quality has improved and is generally good. The mean population exposure of Irish citizens to $PM_{2.5}$ decreased by around 20% over the last decade to 8 micrograms per cubic metre in 2019, well below guideline of the WHO and one the lowest in the OECD area (Target 11.6). As a result, the death rate attributed to household and ambient air pollution is also below the OECD average (Target 3.9). Ireland also reports good performance in some of the other dimensions of Goal 11 on Sustainable cities. Housing quality (Target 11.1) for instance, is generally good with only 2% of the population living in overcrowded housing. Still, more needs to be done on recycling (Target 11.6); while progressive increases of the landfill tax have contributed to diverting waste from landfills, recycling of municipal waste has stagnated.

Main challenges

While violence against women appears to be lower than the OECD average, tackling unequal opportunities for women requires further efforts. The proportion of ever-partnered women and girls subjected to physical and/or sexual violence by a current or former intimate partner in the previous 12 months is below the OECD average (Target 5.2), while Ireland also has a strong policy framework to prevent female genital mutilation (Target 5.3). Still, there is scope for progress. The legal framework that should promote, enforce and monitor gender equality is far from comprehensive (Target 5.1). In addition, caring responsibilities tend to fall more heavily on women: the gender gap in unpaid work hours (166 minutes per day in 2015, Target 5.4).) is one of the highest in Europe. Women are also underrepresented in the decision-making: they held only a quarter of the seats in the national parliament in 2021, and around a third of managerial positions (Target 5.5 and 16.7).
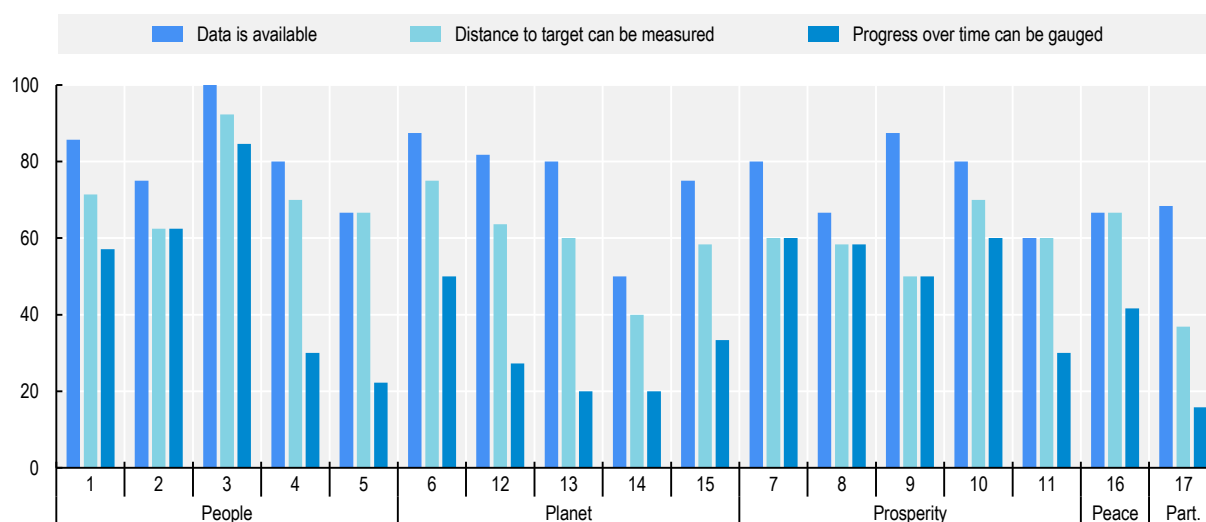
Adults' skills could be improved. Participation in lifelong learning (at 24% in 2011) is half the OECD average (Target 4.3). To realise the productivity gains made possible by new technologies, complementary skills need to be nurtured. Yet, one fourth of adults do not achieve a minimum proficiency in numeracy skills, while one fifth lacks the minimum proficiency in literacy (Target 4.6). In addition, the proportion of youth and adults with information and communications technology is below the OECD average on most dimensions (Target 4.4)

Statistical gaps

Like in many other OECD countries, data availability remains a challenge when measuring distances to targets (see the Overview chapter for details). For Ireland, available data on the level of the different indicators allow covering 127 of the 169 targets. As shown in Figure 2 below, indicator coverage is uneven across the 17 goals. While nine goals (within the People, Planet and Prosperity categories) have most of their targets covered (the indicator coverage exceeds 80%), coverage is lower for Goal 14 on life below water, with only half of its targets covered. Data gaps become starker when focusing on performance indicators, excluding those providing contextual information. In this case, coverage exceeds 80% for only Goal 3 on health. Moreover, for eight goals, mostly within the Planet category (Goals 12, 13, 14 and 15)

but also for Goals 4 on education, 5 on gender equality, 11 on cities and 17 on partnerships, data are lacking to monitor progress over time for more than two in three targets.

Figure 2. Ireland's share of the 2030 Agenda's targets covered by at least one indicator, by goal

Note: The figure represents Ireland's share of targets covered by at least one indicator for each SDG. Numbers from 1 to 17 stand for the goals: 1 No poverty, 2 Zero hunger, 3 Good health and well-being, 4 Quality education, 5 Gender equality, 6 Clean water and sanitation, 7 Affordable and clean energy, 8 Decent work and economic growth, 9 Industry, innovation and infrastructure, 10 Reduced inequalities, 11 Sustainable cities and communities, 12 Responsible consumption and production, 13 Climate action, 14 Life below water, 15 Life on land, 16 Peace, justice and strong institutions and 17 Partnerships for the goals. These goals are grouped under five broad themes (the "5Ps"): People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace and Partnership. Beyond data availability, other statistical gaps such as timeliness or granularity also need to be considered. For instance, given the lag in available data, the effects of the pandemic on current distance and trajectories may not be reflected in the estimates.
Source: All data is taken and adapted from (UNDESA, 2021[1]), *SDG Global Database,* https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/unsdg and (OECD, 2021[2]), *OECD.Stat,* https://stats.oecd.org/ (accessed on 29 October 2021).

Detailed information

While some SDG Targets are, on average, close to being met, performance is very uneven across the 17 Goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Table 1 presents an overview of Ireland's progress towards targets based on available data for each of the 17 Goals. It shows that distances to Targets and trends over time differ significantly even when considering a specific goal.

Table 1. Ireland distances to targets and recent trends

Goal	Target	Short Label	Distance to Target (s.u.)	Trend Assessment	OECD Average distance (s.u.)	OECD Trend Assessment
1	1.1	Extreme poverty	0.00	Target is achieved or on track to being achieved	0.00	Target is achieved or on track to being achieved
1	1.2	Poverty in all its dimensions	0.89	Progress has been made, but is insufficient to meet the target	1.41	No progress or moving away from the SDG target
1	1.3	Social protection coverage	0.31	Target is achieved or on track to being achieved	0.80	No progress or moving away from the SDG target
1	1.4	Access to basic services	0.97	Progress has been made, but is insufficient to meet the target	0.00	Target is achieved or on track to being achieved

Goal	Target	Short Label	Distance to Target (s.u.)	Trend Assessment	OECD Average distance (s.u.)	OECD Trend Assessment
1	1.5	Resilience to shocks	0.72	n.a.	1.00	n.a.
2	2.1	Hunger	0.64	No progress or moving away from the SDG target	0.28	No progress or moving away from the SDG target
2	2.2	Malnutrition	2.31	No progress or moving away from the SDG target	2.46	No progress or moving away from the SDG target
2	2.4	Sustainable production	1.29	Progress has been made, but is insufficient to meet the target	1.34	No progress or moving away from the SDG target
2	2.5	Diversity of seeds and livestocks*	3.56	No progress or moving away from the SDG target	3.59	No progress or moving away from the SDG target
2	2.c	Food prices anomalies	0.00	Target is achieved or on track to being achieved	0.00	Target is achieved or on track to being achieved
3	3.1	Maternal mortality	0.00	Target is achieved or on track to being achieved	0.00	Target is achieved or on track to being achieved
3	3.2	Death of newborns and children	0.00	Target is achieved or on track to being achieved	0.00	Target is achieved or on track to being achieved
3	3.3	Communicable diseases	0.07	Target is achieved or on track to being achieved	0.56	Progress has been made, but is insufficient to meet the target
3	3.4	Premature mortality	0.83	Progress has been made, but is insufficient to meet the target	1.26	Progress has been made, but is insufficient to meet the target
3	3.5	Prevention of Substance abuse	1.03	Progress has been made, but is insufficient to meet the target	0.63	Progress has been made, but is insufficient to meet the target
3	3.6	Road traffic accidents*	0.04	Progress has been made, but is insufficient to meet the target	0.78	Progress has been made, but is insufficient to meet the target
3	3.7	Access to sexual health-care	0.15	Target is achieved or on track to being achieved	0.58	Progress has been made, but is insufficient to meet the target
3	3.8	Health coverage	2.09	Progress has been made, but is insufficient to meet the target	1.79	Progress has been made, but is insufficient to meet the target
3	3.9	Deaths and illness from pollution	0.36	No progress or moving away from the SDG target	0.55	No progress or moving away from the SDG target
3	3.a	Tobacco consumption	2.37	Progress has been made, but is insufficient to meet the target	2.65	Progress has been made, but is insufficient to meet the target
3	3.b	Vaccination	1.31	Target is achieved or on track to being achieved	0.37	Target is achieved or on track to being achieved
3	3.d	Health emergency preparedness	1.68	n.a.	1.19	Target is achieved or on track to being achieved
4	4.1	Primary and secondary education	0.52	No progress or moving away from the SDG target	1.17	No progress or moving away from the SDG target
4	4.2	Pre-primary education	0.00	Target is achieved or on track to being achieved	0.24	Target is achieved or on track to being achieved
4	4.3	Lifelong learning	3.07	n.a.	1.25	No progress or moving away from the SDG target
4	4.4	Skills for employment	1.47	n.a.	1.23	No progress or moving away from the SDG target
4	4.5	Disparities in education	0.96	No progress or moving away from the SDG target	1.49	No progress or moving away from the SDG target
4	4.6	Adults' literacy and numeracy	1.62	n.a.	1.57	n.a.
4	4.7	Skills for sustainable development	1.11	n.a.	1.04	n.a.

Goal	Target	Short Label	Distance to Target (s.u.)	Trend Assessment	OECD Average distance (s.u.)	OECD Trend Assessment
5	5.1	Discrimination against women	1.54	n.a.	1.32	n.a.
5	5.2	Violence against women	0.13	n.a.	0.89	n.a.
5	5.3	Harmful practices	0.00	n.a.	1.37	n.a.
5	5.4	Unpaid care and domestic work	3.35	n.a.	1.79	n.a.
5	5.5	Women's participation	2.32	Progress has been made, but is insufficient to meet the target	1.89	Progress has been made, but is insufficient to meet the target
5	5.b	Women's empowerment	0.22	Target is achieved or on track to being achieved	0.53	Target is achieved or on track to being achieved
6	6.1	Access to drinking water	0.00	Target is achieved or on track to being achieved	0.15	Target is achieved or on track to being achieved
6	6.2	Waste water treatment	0.38	Progress has been made, but is insufficient to meet the target	0.35	Progress has been made, but is insufficient to meet the target
6	6.3	Water quality	0.82	Progress has been made, but is insufficient to meet the target	0.68	Target is achieved or on track to being achieved
6	6.4	Water-use efficiency	0.11	No progress or moving away from the SDG target	0.54	Progress has been made, but is insufficient to meet the target
6	6.5	Water resources management	0.54	n.a.	0.98	n.a.
6	6.6	Water-related ecosystems*	2.96	n.a.	2.18	n.a.
7	7.1	Access to energy	0.00	Target is achieved or on track to being achieved	0.00	Target is achieved or on track to being achieved
7	7.2	Clean energy	1.12	Progress has been made, but is insufficient to meet the target	0.62	Progress has been made, but is insufficient to meet the target
7	7.3	Energy efficiency	0.00	Target is achieved or on track to being achieved	0.98	Progress has been made, but is insufficient to meet the target
8	8.1	GDP growth	0.46	No progress or moving away from the SDG target	1.89	No progress or moving away from the SDG target
8	8.2	Productivity	0.00	No progress or moving away from the SDG target	1.77	No progress or moving away from the SDG target
8	8.4	Material footprint	0.19	Progress has been made, but is insufficient to meet the target	0.82	Progress has been made, but is insufficient to meet the target
8	8.5	Employment	0.35	No progress or moving away from the SDG target	0.97	No progress or moving away from the SDG target
8	8.6	NEET	1.42	No progress or moving away from the SDG target	1.69	No progress or moving away from the SDG target
8	8.8	Labour rights	0.32	Progress has been made, but is insufficient to meet the target	0.80	Progress has been made, but is insufficient to meet the target
8	8.10	Financial institutions	0.10	Target is achieved or on track to being achieved	0.45	Target is achieved or on track to being achieved
9	9.2	Sustainable industry	0.00	Target is achieved or on track to being achieved	0.95	No progress or moving away from the SDG target
9	9.4	Environmental impact	0.00	Target is achieved or on track to being achieved	0.87	Progress has been made, but is insufficient to meet the target
9	9.5	Research and development	1.20	Progress has been made, but is insufficient to meet the target	1.06	Progress has been made, but is insufficient to meet the target

Goal	Target	Short Label	Distance to Target (s.u.)	Trend Assessment	OECD Average distance (s.u.)	OECD Trend Assessment
9	9.c	ICT	0.74	Progress has been made, but is insufficient to meet the target	0.36	Progress has been made, but is insufficient to meet the target
10	10.1	Income distribution	1.98	No progress or moving away from the SDG target	1.23	No progress or moving away from the SDG target
10	10.2	Social inclusion	0.66	No progress or moving away from the SDG target	1.54	No progress or moving away from the SDG target
10	10.3	Inequalities of outcome	0.52	Progress has been made, but is insufficient to meet the target	1.27	Progress has been made, but is insufficient to meet the target
10	10.4	Redistribution	1.75	No progress or moving away from the SDG target	1.12	No progress or moving away from the SDG target
10	10.5	Financial markets	0.76	No progress or moving away from the SDG target	0.90	No progress or moving away from the SDG target
10	10.7	Migration	1.76	n.a.	0.69	n.a.
10	10.a	Tariff-lines	0.54	Target is achieved or on track to being achieved	0.93	Progress has been made, but is insufficient to meet the target
11	11.1	Housing	0.00	Target is achieved or on track to being achieved	0.80	No progress or moving away from the SDG target
11	11.3	Urbanization	0.68	Progress has been made, but is insufficient to meet the target	1.19	Progress has been made, but is insufficient to meet the target
11	11.5	Impact of disasters	0.13	n.a.	1.19	n.a.
11	11.6	Environmental impact of cities	0.37	Progress has been made, but is insufficient to meet the target	0.49	Progress has been made, but is insufficient to meet the target
11	11.a	Urban policies	0.00	n.a.	0.23	n.a.
11	11.b	Disaster Risk Reduction	1.31	n.a.	0.81	n.a.
12	12.2	Efficient use of natural resources	0.30	Progress has been made, but is insufficient to meet the target	0.87	Progress has been made, but is insufficient to meet the target
12	12.3	Food waste	2.04	n.a.	1.36	n.a.
12	12.4	Chemical and hazardous waste*	0.59	n.a.	1.02	n.a.
12	12.5	Waste generation	0.69	Progress has been made, but is insufficient to meet the target	0.66	Progress has been made, but is insufficient to meet the target
12	12.7	Public procurement practices	0.00	n.a.	0.00	n.a.
12	12.8	Education for sustainability	1.11	n.a.	1.04	n.a.
12	12.b	Tourism sustainability	2.38	No progress or moving away from the SDG target	1.87	No progress or moving away from the SDG target
13	13.1	Resilience to climate events	0.89	n.a.	0.73	n.a.
13	13.2	Greenhouse gas emissions	0.94	Progress has been made, but is insufficient to meet the target	1.15	Progress has been made, but is insufficient to meet the target
13	13.3	Education for sustainability	1.11	n.a.	1.04	n.a.
14	14.1	Marine pollution**	1.24	No progress or moving away from the SDG target	1.84	Progress has been made, but is insufficient to meet the target
14	14.5	Protected marine areas*	0.51	Progress has been made, but is insufficient to meet the target	0.38	Progress has been made, but is insufficient to meet the target
14	14.6	Harmful subsidies to fisheries*	0.00	n.a.	0.36	n.a.
14	14.b	Small-scale fisheries	1.80	n.a.	1.64	n.a.

Goal	Target	Short Label	Distance to Target (s.u.)	Trend Assessment	OECD Average distance (s.u.)	OECD Trend Assessment
15	15.1	Ecosystem protection*	0.23	Progress has been made, but is insufficient to meet the target	0.74	Progress has been made, but is insufficient to meet the target
15	15.2	Sustainable use of forest*	0.57	Progress has been made, but is insufficient to meet the target	0.60	Target is achieved or on track to being achieved
15	15.4	Mountain ecosystems	0.55	Progress has been made, but is insufficient to meet the target	0.73	Progress has been made, but is insufficient to meet the target
15	15.5	Threatened species*	0.88	No progress or moving away from the SDG target	1.20	No progress or moving away from the SDG target
15	15.6	Benefits from genetic resources	1.10	n.a.	0.78	n.a.
15	15.8	Invasive alien species*	0.00	n.a.	0.30	n.a.
15	15.9	National and local planning*	1.27	n.a.	0.54	n.a.
16	16.1	Violence and related deaths	0.55	Progress has been made, but is insufficient to meet the target	0.66	Progress has been made, but is insufficient to meet the target
16	16.2	Violence against children	1.23	No progress or moving away from the SDG target	0.65	No progress or moving away from the SDG target
16	16.3	Rule of law	1.34	No progress or moving away from the SDG target	2.33	No progress or moving away from the SDG target
16	16.6	Accountable institutions	1.65	Progress has been made, but is insufficient to meet the target	2.26	Progress has been made, but is insufficient to meet the target
16	16.7	Inclusive decision-making	1.72	n.a.	1.85	n.a.
16	16.9	Legal identity for all	0.00	n.a.	0.00	n.a.
16	16.10	Access to information	0.00	n.a.	0.00	n.a.
16	16.a	National institutions	0.00	Target is achieved or on track to being achieved	0.54	Target is achieved or on track to being achieved
17	17.2	Official Development Assistance	1.08	No progress or moving away from the SDG target	0.94	Progress has been made, but is insufficient to meet the target
17	17.10	Multilateral trading system	0.01	Target is achieved or on track to being achieved	0.45	Target is achieved or on track to being achieved
17	17.12	Market access for least developed countries	0.10	No progress or moving away from the SDG target	0.72	No progress or moving away from the SDG target
17	17.15	National leadership to implement policies for poverty eradication	2.40	n.a.	2.32	n.a.
17	17.16	Global Partnership for Sustainable Development	0.00	n.a.	0.89	n.a.
17	17.18	Statistical capacity	0.00	n.a.	0.09	n.a.
17	17.19	Statistical capacity-building	0.00	n.a.	0.11	n.a.

Note: * refers to targets with a 2020 deadline. ** refers to targets with a 2025 deadline. The OECD average is measured as the simple average across OECD countries with available data

Source: All data is taken and adapted from (UNDESA, 2021[1]), *SDG Global Database,* https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/unsdg and (OECD, 2021[2]), *OECD.Stat,* https://stats.oecd.org/ (accessed on 29 October 2021).

How to read this country profile

The OECD report *The Short and Winding Road to 2030: Measuring Distance to the SDG Targets* evaluates the distance that OECD countries need to travel to meet SDG targets for which data are currently available. It also looks at whether countries have been moving towards or away from these targets, and how likely they are to meet their commitments by 2030, based on an analysis of recent trends and the observed volatility in the different indicators.

As most authors and international organisations, this report adopts a rather simple geometric growth model for assessing the direction and pace of recent changes in the context of the SDGs. Yet, instead of making direct estimates of the value of the indicator by 2030, it models the likelihood of achieving a specific level using Monte Carlo simulations.

While the report provides an overview of where OECD countries, taken as a whole, currently stand, country profiles provide details of the performance and data availability of individual OECD countries.

How to read the OECD SDG Wheel?

Progress on SDGs requires a granular understanding of countries' strengths and weaknesses based on the consideration of the 169 targets of the 2030 Agenda. Figure 1 shows both **current achievements** (in the inner circle; the longer the bar, the smaller the distance remaining to be travelled) **as well as whether OECD countries are on track** (or are at least making progress) to meet their commitments by 2030 (in the outer circle).

The length of each bar shows current level of achievement on each target. As detailed in the Methodological Annex, countries' distance to target is measured as the "standardised difference" between a country's current position and the target end-value. For each indicator, the standardised measurement unit (s.u.) is the standard deviation observed among OECD countries in the reference year (i.e. the year closest to 2015). Therefore, the longer the bar, the shorter the distance still to be travelled to reach the target by 2030. The colours of the bars applied to the various targets refer to the goals they pertain to.

The outer ring shows how OECD countries are performing over time and how likely they are to meet the different targets by 2030 based on the observed trends of the various indicators. It uses stoplight colours to classify the progress towards the target:

- green is used to indicate those countries that (based on the change in the different indicators over a recent period) should meet the target in 2030 just by maintaining their current pace of progress (i.e. more than 75% of (randomised) projections meet the target);

- yellow for those countries whose current pace of progress is insufficient to meet the target by 2030 (i.e. less than 75% of randomised projections meet the target, while the correlation coefficient between the indicator and the year is high and statistically significant, implying that a significant trend could be detected); and

- red for those countries whose recent changes have been stagnating or moving them further away from the target (i.e. less than 75% of randomised projections meet the target and the correlation coefficient between the indicator and the year is low or statistically insignificant, implying that no statistical trend could be identified).

How to read the Strength and Challenges sections?

With the aim of helping its member countries in navigating the 2030 Agenda and in setting their own priorities for action, this report relies on a unique methodology for measuring the distance that OECD countries have to travel to achieve SDG targets. The identification of the main strengths and challenges proposed in this report relies on current performances only:

- A target is considered to be a strength when the distance to the target end-value is lower than 0.5 s.u. (i.e. the distance is deemed to be small) <u>or</u> when the country is closer to the target than the OECD average. For instance, while Korea's distance to Target 2.2 on malnutrition is 1.4 s.u. (i.e. classified as medium distance), the average OECD distance is 2.5 s.u. Therefore, Target 2.2 is categorised as being a strength for Korea.

- A target is considered to be a challenge when the distance to target is greater than 1.5 s.u. (i.e. distance is deemed to be long) <u>or</u> when the country is further away from the target than the OECD average. For instance, Estonia's distance to Target 4.2 on pre-primary education is 1.1 s.u. (i.e. medium distance), which is higher than the 0.24 s.u. distance for the OECD average. Target 4.2 is therefore classified as a weakness for Estonia.

While the lack of consistent time series often prevents an exhaustive assessment of trends, they are discussed when available and relevant in nuancing the assessment of current performance.

How to read the Statistical Gaps section?

In total, this report relies on 537 data series supporting 183 of the 247 indicators listed in the global indicator framework (or for close proxies of these indicators). These indicators cover 134 of the 169 SDG targets. Yet, target coverage is uneven across the 17 goals and among OECD member countries.

Figure 2 summarises data availability:

- darker blue bars indicate the share of *targets* for which at least one indicator (including indicators providing context information) is available

- lighter blue bars indicate the share of *targets* for which the available indicator(s) include those having a clear normative direction (i.e. allowing to distinguish between good and bad performance), which are the only ones used to measure distances to target levels.

- medium blue bars indicate the share of *targets* for which progress over time can be gauged (i.e. at least three observations are available over a five-year period).

All methods and concepts are further detailed in the Methodological Annex.