

Youth Moving Beyond GDP



**Contribution from the Youth Network on Beyond GDP
to an Elements Paper for the Intergovernmental Process on
Beyond GDP**

26 August 2026

Editor's note: On the nature of this contribution

This contribution reflects a diversity of perspectives, experiences, and priorities represented within the Youth Network on Beyond GDP. It compiles inputs and ideas from a diverse group of young people engaged through the “Youth Moving Beyond GDP” initiative and should not be understood as implying that every individual member endorses every proposal or formulation contained herein. Where appropriate, it distinguishes between recurring themes expressed across multiple contributions, proposals raised by individuals or smaller groups, and recommendations developed through the synthesis and drafting process. It should therefore be understood as a collective input reflecting diverse intergenerational perspectives across regions, backgrounds, and contexts.

INTRODUCTION: OBJECTIVE, SCOPE, AND VISION

This contribution provides a strategic, intergenerational input to the preparation of an Elements Paper for the intergovernmental process on Beyond GDP, synthesizing a survey-based written consultation by the Youth Network conducted through the “Youth Moving Beyond GDP” initiative.

Building on the Youth Network Policy Recommendations, which anchor progress in a human-rights-based framework, intergenerational justice, and country-owned yet globally relevant solutions, this contribution proposes principles and mechanisms for the intergovernmental process on measures of progress that complement and go beyond GDP, with a focus on national implementation and international policy applications.

The objective of this intergovernmental process should be to move beyond treating GDP as a sufficient proxy for development progress while recognizing its importance as a measure of economic activity. A broader understanding of progress should capture the multidimensional well-being of people and planet, including health, education, decent work and livelihoods, equality and social inclusion, environmental sustainability, peace and security, access to essential services, resilience, distributional outcomes, and the implications of present decisions for current and future generations. The Youth Network envisions a development architecture in which these dimensions are considered together, with progress assessed in ways that reflect national and local contexts and enable meaningful participation by those affected by decisions, including young and future generations.

The Youth Network calls for a deliberate and phased approach to this process: Member States should first establish a clear political and normative foundation for understanding and assessing progress, providing the basis for the subsequent development of indicators and their technically rigorous and participatory implementation through existing statistical and institutional systems. This sequencing should unfold progressively, allowing sufficient time to build political consensus, strengthen institutional ownership, and ensure that the resulting measures are robust, legitimate, and fit for long-term use.

I. A VALUES-BASED AND PARTICIPATORY INTERGOVERNMENTAL PROCESS

The legitimacy and applicability of the outcome will depend in part on the process itself. Member States should use the intergovernmental process to establish shared objectives, principles, and intended uses for measuring progress, alongside a clear pathway for developing and refining statistical measures.

The process should establish a values-based political and normative foundation while respecting the professional independence and methodological responsibilities of national and international statistical authorities. It should also meaningfully engage those affected by development decisions and those who will inherit their consequences.

The Youth Network supports an outcome that is politically ambitious, economically credible, statistically rigorous, institutionally realistic, intergenerationally equitable, participatory, and applicable across diverse national contexts.

- **Meaningful intergenerational participation:** Embed young people and other marginalized and underrepresented communities in policy discussions, metric co-design, implementation, monitoring, and review. Participation should be sustained beyond individual consultations through appropriate recurring structures and feedback mechanisms.
- **A platform for redefining progress:** Provide space for political and values-based discussion of what progress means, recognizing that economic activity remains important while economic output alone cannot capture well-being, sustainability, resilience, equity, or long-term prosperity.
- **Cultural pluralism and national ownership:** Establish common principles and a shared global reference point while allowing nationally and locally owned implementation reflecting different cultural, institutional, socio-economic, and development contexts. Measures should be capable of reflecting locally defined dimensions of well-being, including cultural values, traditional knowledge, community priorities, and livelihoods that may be poorly represented in national aggregates.
- **Political priorities and statistical production:** People and communities should have meaningful opportunities to shape discussions about which dimensions of progress matter and how measures are used. Statistical authorities should retain professional and methodological responsibility for the production, quality, comparability, and integrity of official statistics.
- **Human rights, intergenerational justice, and sustainability:** The framework should reflect human rights, equity, intergenerational justice, environmental sustainability, and the well-being and opportunities of current and future generations.

II. CALLS FOR ACTION ON NATIONAL IMPLEMENTATION & INTERNATIONAL POLICY APPLICATIONS

The Youth Network identifies four priorities for ensuring that Beyond GDP frameworks are operationalized nationally and can inform international cooperation in a coherent, equitable, and non-punitive manner.

1. Establishing a coherent framework balancing global comparability with national ownership

a. A common global reference framework with context-specific national extensions

Define a common, lean, universally relevant global reference framework that complements GDP and provides a shared basis for international dialogue and comparison, while enabling countries to develop national extensions according to their priorities, circumstances, data capacities, and institutional arrangements.

The framework should build upon and, where appropriate, provide coherence with the work of the High-Level Expert Group on Beyond GDP and its proposed dashboard, to which the Youth Network contributed through its Policy Recommendations, rather than creating a parallel indicator architecture. National frameworks should be able to extend the common reference set without reproducing identical national systems.

b. Coherence and interoperability across existing multilateral initiatives

The Beyond GDP process should promote coherence and interoperability across relevant existing initiatives, including the Sustainable Development Goals, the Multidimensional Vulnerability Index (MVI), the Sevilla Commitment, and other national, regional, and international frameworks.

Particular attention should be given to cumulative reporting burdens, especially for countries with limited statistical capacity. The objective should be to reduce unnecessary duplication and fragmentation while respecting the mandates, governance arrangements, and technical responsibilities of existing institutions.

c. A multidimensional dashboard rather than a single replacement for GDP

The common reference framework should use a multidimensional dashboard rather than seek to replace GDP with another single headline measure. It should capture, as appropriate, economic, social, environmental, distributional, and intergenerational dimensions of progress, including biodiversity, ecosystem health, natural capital, resource use, climate resilience, and access to essential environmental resources. Dimensions should not be assumed to be fully aggregable into a single index where doing so would obscure important differences or trade-offs.

d. Distribution, disaggregation, and visibility of inequalities

Beyond GDP measurement should consider both average outcomes and their distribution. Where data and privacy considerations permit, indicators should support appropriate disaggregation by characteristics such as income and wealth, age, gender, disability, geography, and rural or urban location.

Measurement should also make visible, where appropriate, the circumstances and contributions of Indigenous Peoples, pastoralist communities, remote populations, and other groups whose well-being and livelihoods may be obscured by national averages. Progress should therefore be assessed in terms of both levels and distribution.

2. Aligning Public Planning, Resource Allocation, and International Support with Multidimensional Well-Being

a. Integrating well-being and sustainability into public planning and fiscal governance

Support Member States in strengthening existing planning, budgeting, and evaluation systems so that decisions consider multidimensional well-being, distributional impacts, environmental sustainability, resilience, and long-term risks alongside macroeconomic and fiscal objectives.

Well-being and sustainability impact assessments could be integrated into existing expenditure and regulatory appraisal processes, particularly for major policies, programmes, and investments. They should be proportionate to the scale of decisions and avoid unnecessary administrative burdens. Beyond GDP measures should complement, rather than replace, existing public financial management and democratic budgetary processes.

b. Diagnostic tools for development cooperation

Develop principles for using Beyond GDP measures as diagnostic tools to identify structural vulnerabilities, development constraints, inequalities, resilience gaps, unmet needs, and dimensions of development obscured by GDP-based classifications, and to inform international support, including development cooperation and, where appropriate, discussions concerning concessional finance and vulnerability.

Such measures should not be used as punitive conditionalities, automatic eligibility criteria, or simplistic country rankings. Their use should account for national context, data quality, measurement uncertainty, structural constraints, and differing national capacities.

3. Institutionalizing Inclusive Data Governance and Co-Design Cycles

a. Institutional models for National Statistical Office engagement and co-design

Establish recurring dialogue and co-design mechanisms between National Statistical Offices, policymakers, civil society, young people, researchers, and other relevant data users and producers.

These mechanisms should connect statistical production with policy needs and lived experiences while preserving statistical independence. Participation should inform policy priorities, data-user needs, communication approaches, and areas requiring improved measurement, while statistical authorities retain responsibility for methodologies, standards, data quality, and the integrity and impartiality of official statistics.

Where appropriate, digital platforms and participatory data approaches could help make locally generated and intergenerationally led evidence more visible within national and international measurement systems, subject to appropriate standards for quality, privacy, and statistical integrity.

b. Meaningful local and intergenerational participation

Encourage Member States to establish structured and recurring opportunities for young people and other relevant stakeholders to contribute to national statistical planning and the development and review of measures of progress.

Participation should be meaningful rather than symbolic, with transparent feedback explaining how contributions were considered and, where they were not incorporated, the relevant reasons or considerations. Where appropriate, statistical systems should strengthen intersectional and intergenerational analysis and data disaggregation.

c. Political objectives guiding, rather than prejudging, technical work

Political agreement on the objectives, principles, and intended uses of a Beyond GDP framework should provide direction for subsequent technical work by the UN statistical system and other relevant bodies.

The technical development of indicators, methodologies, classifications, and statistical standards should proceed through established statistical governance processes, including the UN Statistical Commission, while preserving professional independence, methodological rigor, international comparability, feasibility, and data quality. Political agreement should therefore guide rather than prejudge technical methodologies.

d. Data capacity and measurement uncertainty

Recognize substantial differences in countries' statistical capacities, data infrastructures, institutional arrangements, and resources. Implementation should therefore include long-term technical assistance, capacity-building, financing, knowledge-sharing, and locally appropriate approaches, particularly for developing countries, least developed countries, small island developing States, and countries facing significant data constraints.

Support should strengthen nationally owned statistical and research capacity rather than create dependency on externally designed systems. The framework should also communicate measurement uncertainty and data limitations transparently and avoid presenting indicators as more precise than their underlying data and methodologies permit.

4. Fostering Iterative Learning, Piloting, and Global Solidarity

a. Country-level piloting frameworks

Develop a roadmap for voluntary country pilots across diverse regional, institutional, and economic contexts to test indicator relevance and feasibility, data availability, distributional measurement, integration into planning and budgeting, participatory approaches, communication, institutional coordination, and practical usefulness for decision-making.

Pilots should be learning processes rather than tests of conformity to a predetermined model. Where feasible, they should include use of Beyond GDP measures in actual planning and budget cycles to assess whether they are understandable, actionable, and useful in real resource-allocation decisions.

The consultation also highlighted the importance of accessible public communication. Future work could explore youth-led storytelling, creative and cultural initiatives, public education, and partnerships with artists so that Beyond GDP is not confined to technical or intergovernmental settings.

b. Multilateral peer-learning platforms

Establish or strengthen channels through which governments, National Statistical Offices, international organizations, researchers, young people, civil society, and other stakeholders can exchange experiences, evaluate pilots, identify unintended consequences, and refine approaches.

Peer learning should capture both successful practices and approaches that prove ineffective in particular contexts.

c. Safeguards for early adoption and high-stakes use

Ensure that early adoption focuses on learning and improved policy information and does not create adverse consequences arising from data gaps, methodological uncertainty, premature application, or inappropriate use in allocation, conditionality, or ranking.

Beyond GDP indicators should not be used automatically for high-stakes decisions before sufficient evidence exists regarding their validity, reliability, comparability, distributional consequences, and potential unintended effects.

d. Evaluation and review cycles

Establish periodic reviews to assess whether the framework is improving policy coherence, spillovers, decision-making, accountability, intergenerational equity, and sustainability, and whether indicators are actually being used effectively.

The process could also explore a voluntary national reporting or review mechanism for progress, potentially drawing lessons from the Voluntary National Review model under the 2030 Agenda. Such a mechanism could enable countries to share experiences and strengthen peer learning without creating a mandatory reporting requirement.

CONCLUSION

The Beyond GDP intergovernmental process should strengthen how progress is understood and governed without replacing one headline number with another or creating reporting requirements detached from policy realities. It should establish a shared framework through which economic prosperity, human well-being, environmental sustainability, distribution, intergenerational equity, and resilience can be considered together.

The Youth Network calls on Member States to establish a clear political and normative foundation, followed by technically rigorous and participatory implementation through existing statistical and institutional systems. The outcome should provide global coherence without uniformity, common principles without undermining national ownership, better measurement without excessive reporting burdens, and stronger policy relevance without compromising statistical independence.

Beyond GDP measures should illuminate rather than obscure policy choices by making distributional effects visible, identifying trade-offs and synergies, accounting for uncertainty and long-term consequences, and enabling meaningful participation by people, including young and future generations.

The Youth Network stands ready to continue contributing constructively in an institutionalized manner through the “Youth Moving Beyond GDP” initiative, bringing diverse intergenerational perspectives, sharing knowledge and experiences across contexts, and supporting the continued development, implementation, and review of approaches that strengthen how progress is understood and governed.