



# Sustainability concept United Nations World Data Forum 2021



BERN, SWITZERLAND  
3-6 OCTOBER 2021

# Foreword

## In cooperation with the United Nations, the Swiss Confederation is organising the United Nations World Data Forum 2021 (UNWDF), to be held from 3 to 6 October 2021 in hybrid format in Bern.

The UNWDF aims to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with high-quality, accessible, timely and reliable disaggregated data<sup>1</sup>. It enables dialogue between various stakeholders, and during its previous editions attracted some 1500 participants from more than 100 countries.

For the first time, this year's UNWDF has the particularity of taking place in hybrid format. Both the physical and virtual components will have to be well prepared. In particular, it is necessary to ensure that the event is environmentally friendly, socially responsible, accessible for persons with disabilities, inclusive and of course economically viable. It goes without saying that it is our responsibility to implement the necessary actions to address these challenges.

The Swiss Confederation has decided to ensure that this UNWDF is a sustainable international conference. To this end, we have drawn up a concept of practical and realistic actions and recommendations to organise this event in a sustainable manner. This means that the conference will respect the three dimensions of sustainable development, comprising economic, social and environmental aspects. Consideration has been given to defining how to manage the impacts related to CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, waste management and water consumption, without neglecting the social and economic aspects. Further aspects that the concept must encompass are gender equality, a balanced geographical representation, access for persons with disabilities as well as the economic benefit that this event can bring to the region of Bern and to Switzerland. The actions and recommendations presented are in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Switzerland's commitments to sustainability, meeting the expectations of both the public and of Swiss political actors.

This is the first time that a UNWDF has been organised with sustainability in mind. We hope that this conference will serve as a model for the sustainable organisation of other events, whether at national or international level.

The COVID-19 crisis has forced us to rethink the way we organise conferences. Thus, although the constraints of the virus are currently obliging us to conduct events virtually rather than face-to-face, this change will almost certainly remain in the future. The future will most probably consist of more and more virtual and hybrid events, rather

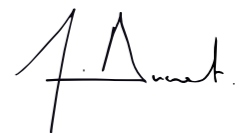
than solely face-to-face ones. We are therefore taking the plunge with this conference, with a hybrid format. Thanks to this, the Forum will be accessible to a wider audience, without the need to travel from one place to another. In this way, inclusion is enhanced, while environmental costs are diminished. Nevertheless, we are convinced that face-to-face meetings also have their advantages. Trust is built through in-person discussions and is necessary to tackle global challenges together.

In addition to the sustainability concept, we are interested in bringing together existing national and international knowledge at the Forum. For this reason, we launched the 'Road to Bern' with the intention of being able to adopt a data compact at the UNWDF. This will be fed into existing and newly founded initiatives and committees after the Forum. In this way, we can ensure that the knowledge gained is sustainable.

With everyone's contribution, we will be able to benefit from a UN World Data Forum full of discussions to improve the use of data and ensure that no one is left behind, while respecting the environment, human beings and the local economy!



Georges-Simon Ulrich  
Director FSO



Jacques Ducrest  
Delegate of the  
Federal Council for  
the 2030 Agenda

<sup>1</sup> Data should be disaggregated according to different socio-demographic characteristics, i.e. broken down by income, gender, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, geographic location and other characteristics relevant in national contexts.

# Introduction

## Sustainable development and the 2030 Agenda

As defined in the Brundtland Report where the term first appeared in 1987, 'Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'. It calls for concerted efforts towards building an inclusive, sustainable and resilient future for people and the planet.

Sustainable development is broader than environment and equality. It includes three dimensions, namely the economic, ecological and social aspects, all of which are interconnected. This sustainability concept has been developed with these aspects in mind.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is a major milestone in sustainable development. Since 2016, it has provided a globally applicable framework for national and international efforts to find shared solutions to the greatest challenges facing the planet and humanity, such as extreme poverty, climate change, environmental degradation and health-related crises. The 2030 Agenda includes 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which we intend to follow in the organisation of the UNWDF 2021 and in our own actions.

## Sustainability concept of the UNWDF 2021

The goal of this sustainability concept is to evaluate the possible impacts (environmental, social, and economic) that could arise from the organisation of the Forum and to propose actions and recommendations that can be implemented to minimise these impacts.

This sustainability concept will mainly concentrate on the environmental aspect of the UNWDF 2021, since the main (negative) repercussions of the conference will be on the environment. However, the hybrid format will help to significantly reduce these negative effects through a considerable number of participants taking part online.

With regard to the social aspect in particular, we will ensure good working conditions for volunteers and staff. We will also ensure accessibility to the conference so that everyone feels included and welcome to participate. As for the economic prospects, the organisation of the UNWDF in Bern will generate work and business for the city, which will be promoted during the build-up to the Forum and throughout its duration.

In establishing the actions and recommendations in this sustainability concept, we have focused on all impacts incurred due to the UNWDF, from the travel of participants to Bern, throughout the duration of the conference and including their travel back from the host city. However, when compensating for the emissions incurred, we have focused only on the holding of the event, i.e. the duration of the conference from the arrival of the participants until their departure from Bern. Mobility is a central issue with regard to environmental impact, so we raise awareness among future travellers and encourage them to compensate for their own travel if they choose to fly.

## The United Nations World Data Forum

The UNWDF was launched following the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda). In order to meet the data and information needs for the 2030 Agenda, it is necessary to bring together the different data producers and users and exploit the technological and innovative potential of these groups working together. These different data stakeholders, including representatives from business, academia, the media, national statistical offices, civil society, and other administrations and sectors, can engage in a constructive dialogue and find ways to mobilise the necessary resources for data development. The objective of the Forum is therefore to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda with high-quality, accessible, timely and reliable disaggregated data.

The situation in countries can only be assessed objectively if data producers – including those outside the public and traditional statistical systems – engage in a dialogue to modernise the compilation, processing and communication of data and statistics through innovative solutions.

It is also essential that users are able to understand and process these data and statistics. Events such as the UNWDF support this process.

Switzerland is therefore committed to ensuring that the data, statistics and information produced are internationally comparable, so that national and global challenges can be understood and resolved based on facts.

Switzerland is particularly sensitive to SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals of the 2030 Agenda. This goal is addressed to everyone, especially governments, the private sector and civil society organisations. Through the third UNWDF 2021, it aims to enhance partnerships for a better monitoring of data and for data accountability.



**Target 17.18: By 2020, enhance capacity-building support to developing countries, including for least developed countries and small island developing states, to increase significantly the availability of high-quality, timely and reliable data disaggregated by income, gender, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, geographic location and other characteristics relevant in national contexts**

**Target 17.19: By 2030, build on existing initiatives to develop measurements of progress on sustainable development that complement gross domestic product, and support statistical capacity-building in developing countries**

## Why hold a hybrid meeting?

As a reminder, the UNWDF was to have been held as a solely live event in Bern in October 2020. However, due to the COVID-19 situation, a virtual version of the Forum was held from 19 to 21 October 2020. The three-day event provided an opportunity to intensify cooperation in the area of data for sustainable development and once again to make an urgent appeal for more funding for better quality data. This virtual version, which did not replace the UNWDF, was a success and demonstrated the benefits of a virtual event.

The crisis has forced the professional world to reinvent itself and in particular, to organise virtual sessions and conferences as it was no longer possible to meet face-to-face. This has encouraged the development of new technologies but has also shown that there are limits to this type of meeting, particularly in terms of IT security and efficiency. While it appears that small groups and short sessions could easily be conducted by video conference and remain effective, longer sessions with large numbers of participants have proved difficult in this setting. Productive interactions are unlikely under such conditions, and it remains true that the best way to discuss topics in large numbers is to have conferences where everyone can participate in person. In this way, with a hybrid form, the UNWDF intends to take advantages of both formats. While fostering interaction thanks to face-to-face contacts, it will also enable all participants who want to take part to do so through the online component.

### Efficiency

On the one hand, a physical meeting still presents the most time-efficient and effective way of sharing thinking and know-how, identifying solutions and reaching agreement, while fostering face-to-face communication. Although technological solutions are developing quickly, personal interaction among participants as well as space for spontaneous exchanges remain rather limited in such settings. Moreover, it is known that during conferences, informal conversations between participants sometimes make it possible to achieve greater progress than formal sessions. On the other hand, the virtual part of the meeting will allow a broader audience to participate. As the virtual Forum showed, there were more than 10 000 registered participants, of whom more than 40% were aged under 40. More people, people of different ages, from any country, will therefore be able to participate in the Forum thanks to the virtual connection.

### Preparation of a Data Compact

The outcome document, a data compact, will conclude the work performed during the UNWDF 2021. To fine-tune and agree on such a document, the face-to-face component of the meeting is needed to quickly and efficiently exchange views and reach a conclusion. The online part will still allow more people to participate in this process and to give their inputs.

### Number of participants

About 600 people are expected to participate in person, while thousands of people will be able to join online. It is only possible to bring so many people together by means of a live conference with a virtual connection. Virtual meetings and video conferencing offer more flexibility, so that as many people who wish to participate can do so, whether it is for one session, one day, or for the entire duration of the conference. Thus, to have the greatest possible impact, the UNWDF 2021 cannot be fully substituted with an audio/video meeting or a webinar. It will therefore be partly physical and partly virtual.

### Targeted participants/ persons reached

The Forum brings together people from different professional backgrounds, cultures, generations, origins, etc. and offers a setting in which they can discuss and exchange ideas. The ideas sought through the Forum must have global reach and recognition. It is therefore important to have representatives from all continents and stakeholder groups. The 600 participants who will be physically present will be a very diverse audience, taking all those aspects into account. Additional participants, with limited financial resources or tight agendas, will be able to take part in the conference, thanks to its virtual channel.

### Encourage dialogue

This Forum is open to data producers and users as well as other stakeholders who do not usually interact and exchange with each other. The physical part will enable people from various backgrounds to interact with one another, and meet in small committees.

### Duration of the Forum

The Forum allows participants to gather for several days. The physical part will give the participants the opportunity to create stronger links and build trust in each other. The virtual part will allow participants online to join whenever they want to during these 3½ days, either for each session or only for the one(s) where they wish and are able to do so.

# Actions

The sustainability concept consists of actions and recommendations that will be implemented to manage the environmental, social and economic impacts of the Forum.

The proposed actions and recommendations will address the most important issues of the following aspects:

1. Carbon neutral event
2. Mobility
3. Sustainable catering
4. Logistics
5. Social aspects
6. Economic aspects
7. Sustainable conferences

In general, we have integrated climate protection into the global organisation of our Forum so that it is as carbon-neutral as possible:

- by mandating a company to evaluate the global impact in terms of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions produced by the UNWDF
- by offsetting CO<sub>2</sub>

In addition to the following measures described below, the hybrid format of the Forum will allow us to greatly reduce the negative impacts of the conference especially on the environmental dimension, by fostering online participation, therefore involving much less transportation traffic, a minimal use of material and less waste.

## 1. Carbon-neutral event

- 1.1. We aim to organise a carbon-neutral event by:
  - Reducing emissions
  - Mandating a company to evaluate the global impact in terms of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions produced by the UNWDF
  - Offsetting CO<sub>2</sub> emissions

A carbon-neutral event has a direct effect on the following goal:



## 2. Mobility

Means of transport are costly in terms of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and are a major issue on which we intend to act with the following actions and recommendations:

- 2.1. We encourage participants to travel by train if the distance is reasonable<sup>2</sup>; we encourage those travelling by plane to use public transport once they arrive in Switzerland
- 2.2. We recommend that participants offset the CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from their travel
- 2.3. We encourage participants to use public transport during their stay in Bern: we tell them where to find relevant timetables and walking itineraries and recommend them to download the free BernApp on which most hotels provide the Bern Mobility Ticket to access public transport for free
- 2.4. We promote the use of public bikes
- 2.5. We encourage participants to either choose a hotel within walking distance of the Forum venue or find accommodation located within the public transport network.

Mobility has a direct effect on the following goals:



<sup>2</sup> For the employees of the Swiss Confederation, for any destination that can be reached in less than six hours (door-to-door), the journey must be made by train. This rule could be used as a standard for the UNWDF participants.



### 3. Sustainable catering

- 3.1. We serve vegetarian buffets only:
  - Plant-based food is sustainable, seasonal, organic and locally produced
  - Products of animal origin are labelled and local (eggs, milk, etc.)
- 3.2. We order catering for a maximum of 80% of all registered Forum participants attending in person in Bern to avoid food waste
- 3.3. We provide tap water and use washable/reusable crockery
- 3.4. We encourage participants to bring their own refillable water bottle to the Forum, since all tap water is drinkable, even from the public fountains in the city streets
- 3.5. We provide Bio Fairtrade coffee and sustainably produced tea
- 3.6. We use reusable napkins and tablecloths
- 3.7. We reduce food waste by providing food boxes for leftover food and by reusing food, which has not been unpacked.
- 3.8. We ensure that all food service and seating are accessible for persons with disabilities, including for coffee breaks.

Sustainable catering has a direct effect on the following goals:



### 4. Logistics

- 4.1. Forum materials
  - 4.1.1. We have reduced the size of the printed Forum programme to a minimum (by excluding abstracts and biographies) and provide an accessible electronic programme for persons with disabilities for the Forum;
  - 4.1.2. We reduce the materials used to a strict minimum;
  - 4.1.3. We upload all documents needed in advance to the Forum website for participants to download on a portable device, which is fully accessible for persons with disabilities;
  - 4.1.4. We offer an application or information online for smartphones, tablets or laptops with all the information on participants and sessions that is fully accessible for persons with disabilities;
  - 4.1.5. The use of notepads and pens is restricted.

Forum materials have a direct effect on the following goal:



### 4.2. Displays and exhibitors

- 4.2.1. We encourage exhibitors to:
  - use recycled and recyclable materials;
  - reuse display booths;
  - use Fairtrade organic cotton bags for use by Forum participants and minimise any other promotional materials such as bags and the number of gifts;
  - select give-aways that are reusable or made from recycled material and not to use packaging;
  - only bring as much printed matter as needed;
  - reuse any packaging material in their exhibits;
  - avoid energy-intense stands and unnecessary lighting, apply energy efficiency measures whenever possible.

Displays and exhibitors have a direct effect on the following goals:



### 4.3. Waste management

- 4.3.1. We avoid generating too much waste, especially single-use plastics such as cups and PET bottles;
- 4.3.2. We encourage all participants to sort their waste (PET, paper and other waste).

Waste management has a direct effect on the following goals:



### 4.4. Energy

- 4.4.1. We only use green energy (electricity from Swiss hydropower installations) at the conference premises;
- 4.4.2. We encourage limiting electricity consumption by turning off unused electrical appliances.

Energy has a direct effect on the following goals:



### 5. Social aspects

- 5.1. Employment
  - 5.1.1. We encourage partner companies to apply eco-friendly procedures;
  - 5.1.2. We encourage employing staff in a socially-conscious manner, avoiding any discrimination for example on the basis of gender, origin or disabilities;
  - 5.1.3. We encourage large sub-contractors to have or develop a sustainability concept.

Employment has a direct effect on the following goals:



5.2. Accessibility for persons with disabilities

- 5.2.1. We ensure that the Forum, including the online platform, and all related premises are accessible for persons with disabilities;
- 5.2.2. We provide International Sign Interpretation for the plenary sessions;
- 5.2.3. We provide real-time captioning for the plenary sessions;
- 5.2.4. We ensure reserved seating with signage for persons with disabilities and their personal assistants/sign language interpreters/captioners;
- 5.2.5. We ensure that personal assistants/sign language interpreters/captioners are able to register and that these assistants are not counted as participants among the reduced number of participants allowed on-site

Accessibility for persons with disabilities has a direct effect on the following goals:



5.3. Gender

- 5.3.1. We ensure gender balance among session speakers, presenters and moderators;
- 5.3.2. We ensure gender balance among the reduced number of participants allowed on spot;
- 5.3.3. We ensure gender balance in the selection process of the participants financially supported by Switzerland or other entities;
- 5.3.4. We provide unisex and single-sex toilets that are accessible for persons with disabilities.

Gender has a direct effect on the following goal:



5.4. Geographical diversity

- 5.4.1. We ensure the participation (physically and virtually) of representatives from all UN regions, with particular attention to supporting the representation and voice of developing and least developed countries among reduced number of participants allowed on spot.

Geographical diversity has a direct effect on the following goal:



## 6. Economic aspects

- 6.1. The event contributes to the economy of the city of Bern and Switzerland;
- 6.2. The event brings around 600 participants to the city of Bern. Hotels, local restaurants, museums, public transport, small businesses, service providers and shops can benefit as well;
- 6.3. The event creates short-term jobs for students and professionals;
- 6.4. The event contributes to the promotion of innovative initiatives and solutions in the field of sustainable development measurement or visualisation of data.

Economic aspects have a direct effect on the following goals:



## 7. Sustainable Conferences

- 7.1. We record all plenary sessions of the 3-days conference to ensure they can be watched later on the dedicated online platform, making them accessible and visible to everyone.
  - 7.1.1. The recorded plenary sessions will be available with International Sign interpretation and captioning.
- 7.2. Through this concept, we strive to provide useful elements for event organisers of future events who would like to focus on sustainability in their event-management. We want to take advantage of the difficult situation and benefit from it in the future, by launching the movement for the organisation of hybrid events rather than purely face-to-face ones.
 

With the United Nations World Data Forum 2021, we intend to take actions on several levels, which we believe will mitigate negative impacts and even have positive ones on the SDGs. The partnerships built and maintained at the Forum involve the transfer of knowledge and experience to the organisers of future events. We are confident that this concept provides actions and recommendations to conduct more sustainable events in the future and that it will be easier for event organisers to put them in place – Together for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Goals!



# Miscellaneous

## Report

This concept lists a number of actions and recommendations, which can be followed for the organisation of events in general, since we wanted it to be a model that can easily be applied in other contexts by event organisers.

At the end of the UNWDF 2021, a report will be published by the Project Team Road to Bern / UNWDF in order to show how each action and recommendation of this concept has been concretely implemented in the context of the UNWDF 2021.

## Partners


This concept was written by the Project Team Road to Bern / UNWDF in collaboration with the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA), the Federal Office for Spatial Development (ARE) and the Swiss Federal Office of Energy (SFOE). This was done in consultation of partners, such as United Nations, Kursaal Bern AG, Swiss International Air Lines (SWISS), Bern Welcome, Switzerland Tourism as well as CBM Global in close cooperation with the International Disability Alliance.

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