

Box 3 The G20 Data Gaps Initiative: Enhancing global economic statistics and its relevance for South Africa

The Group of Twenty (G20) was founded in 1999 following the 1997–98 Asian financial crisis to discuss issues related to international economic and financial stability. To this end, the G20 remains a key international platform that brings together the world's major developed and developing economies to discuss and coordinate policies on global economic issues such as trade, climate change, energy, financial stability and sustainable development. Representing approximately 85% of global gross domestic product (GDP), over 75% of international trade and about two-thirds of the world population, the G20 serves as a key forum in creating the foundation for global economic stability. It also facilitates the implementation of vital mechanisms for economic development and consequential global commitments such as the Pact for the Future and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda).

South Africa assumed the G20 Presidency from Brazil, effective 1 December 2024 to 30 November 2025 – five years before the deadline of the United Nations (UN) 2030 Agenda. The G20 Presidency is held on a rotational basis among the member countries and South Africa's Presidency, the first for an African country, offers a unique opportunity for the country to participate in and potentially help steer global policy discussions, particularly on issues relevant to developing nations. In this regard, South Africa has embraced the theme 'Solidarity, Equality, Sustainability' for its G20 Presidency and, under this theme, prioritised the promotion of strong, sustainable, balanced and inclusive growth.

The policy discussions and decisions of the G20 are underpinned by high-quality macroeconomic statistics that adhere to the fundamental principles of official statistics. Such information plays a pivotal role in driving informed policy decisions by providing evidence-based insights that guide government and private sector action and resource allocation. Furthermore, reliable statistics aid policymakers in understanding economic trends, social issues and environmental impacts, enabling them to make decisions that are both effective and efficient. From a resource allocation perspective, accurate and timely statistics empower governments to monitor progress, evaluate the success of programmes and identify areas that require intervention.

Leveraging on the groundwork laid by the G20 forum in 1999, the G20 Data Gaps Initiative (DGI) was launched in 2009 to close the policy-relevant data gaps identified after the 2008–09 global financial crisis. The primary goal of the G20 DGI is to improve the granularity, quality, timeliness and availability of key statistics for policymaking, especially in emerging areas such as climate change as well as financial technology (fintech) and financial inclusion.

Since its inception, the G20 DGI has evolved through three distinct phases. The first phase (2009–15) focused on identifying key gaps and initiating global data improvement efforts, including recommendations for enhancing financial and economic statistics. The second phase (2015–21) expanded efforts to incorporate more comprehensive statistics across areas such as financial stability and inequality as well as advancing the use of new technologies for data collection. The first two phases spanned almost 12 years and yielded a significant expansion of the macroeconomic statistical suite. The third phase (2022–present) emphasises the continuous monitoring and improvement of global statistical standards and the enhancement of the global statistical infrastructure, with specific focus on four statistical areas, namely climate change; household distributional information; fintech and financial inclusion; and access to administrative and private sources of data, and data-sharing. Owing to the success of the first two phases and the key themes addressed in the third phase, the G20 DGI remains essential in supporting the G20's commitment to better governance through data-driven decisions.





Key recommendations of Phase 3 of the G20 Data Gaps Initiative

Theme	Recommendation	Objective
Climate change	Greenhouse gas emission (GHG) accounts and national carbon footprints	Generate global datasets for the GHG emissions for the G20 economies
	Energy accounts	Expand the availability of comparable energy accounts for the G20 economies
	Carbon footprint of foreign direct investment (FDI)	Generate indicators on carbon emissions in the host economy from both capital formation financed by FDI and from the operations of foreign-controlled firms
	Green debt and equity securities financing	Develop methodological guidance to produce more comparable indicators of green financing and equity securities
	Forward-looking physical and transition risk indicators	Develop forward-looking physical and transition risk indicators for the G20 economies to monitor the impact of climate change on the economy and the financial system
	Climate change mitigation and adaptation current and capital expenditures	Develop first estimates of current and capital expenditures on domestic and national climate change mitigation and adaptation
Household distributional information	Income, consumption and saving distribution	Expand the coverage, frequency, timeliness and granularity of distributional results, thereby strengthening the capacity to closely monitor households' material well-being, inequalities and vulnerabilities as well as assessing the impact of policies
	Wealth distribution	Develop internationally comparable results on the distribution of wealth, to be integrated with results on income, consumption and saving
Fintech and financial inclusion	Fintech credit	Review the potential for collecting data on non-bank fintech credit as part of the FSB's ¹ annual monitoring of global trends, vulnerabilities and innovations in non-bank financial intermediation (NBFi)
	Digital money	Develop a framework and collect test data on new forms of digital money and crypto assets used as a means of payment that is enabled by fintech, including central bank digital currencies (CBDCs), global stablecoins and other types of crypto assets used as a means of payment to improve the measurement of money and liquidity aggregates as well as cross-border transactions using digital money
	Fintech-enabled financial inclusion	Improve the availability of information to assess fintech-enabled financial inclusion, including access to, and usage of, digital financial instruments and services

Theme	Recommendation	Objective
Data-sharing	Access to private and administrative data	Increase access to private and administrative data for the production of official statistics
	Data access and data-sharing, including the possible development of an international microdata standard	Increase access to microdata sources and develop international microdata standards

The four statistical focus areas under the third phase of the G20 DGI are made up of 14 recommendations. Substantial progress has been made with many of these recommendations, such as the measuring of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and the development of physical and transition risk indicators. Several G20 economies are in the process of releasing detailed air emission accounts, which will provide insights into GHG emission intensities by industry. These statistics are crucial for policymakers to understand which industries are making progress in reducing emissions and to assess the effectiveness of climate policies. Significant advancements are also underway in compiling statistics on household income, consumption, savings and wealth distribution. The European System of Central Banks has developed experimental household wealth statistics for the euro area, offering an integrated picture of wealth distribution across different households. However, progress has been slower in the digital economy and financial innovation areas, but concerted efforts are ongoing to develop frameworks and estimates for fintech credit, digital money and fintech-enabled financial inclusion.

Notwithstanding the progress made thus far, challenges remain, most notably in the following areas:

- Lack of input data and differences in the quality of data: Despite the progress, persistent gaps and varying levels of statistical advancement among G20 economies pose significant challenges. Some countries are well advanced and can develop initial estimates quickly, while others require substantial conceptual and source data development.
- Digitalisation and financial innovation: The rapid pace of digitalisation and financial innovation presents challenges in developing consistent and comprehensive target population frameworks from which to source input data. In these areas, close collaboration and guidance between the lead agencies and the G20 economies is necessary.
- Resource requirements: It is evident from many of the task teams that developing new or enhancing existing statistical frameworks requires additional human and capital resources, at a time when many statistical agencies are facing budgets cuts. In addition, developing the skill set to address these challenges in a methodologically sound manner takes time and is likely to cause delays in achieving some of the DGI Phase 3 objectives.

International agencies within the Interagency Group (IAG)² have been instrumental in supporting data improvements by developing and providing methodological frameworks, conducting workshops and facilitating data-sharing efforts among G20 member countries. These organisations have also played a crucial role in coordinating a number of initiatives such as taking stock of the availability of input data, evaluating available statistics and establishing reporting templates, thus ensuring that the statistics are consistent and comparable across countries. Despite the great strides made thus far, there is a need for more concerted efforts among all role players and closer collaboration within the international statistical agencies to meaningfully address the data gaps and support effective policymaking.

Continued collaboration, investment in statistical infrastructure and innovation are essential for supporting sustainable economic development in South Africa. As the country works to address social, economic and environmental challenges, access to reliable and timely statistics is crucial in guiding the design and implementation of policies that can stimulate growth and reduce inequalities. Investments in modern infrastructure, such as digital platforms and analytical tools, would enhance the capacity of government agencies, businesses and civil society at large to make informed decisions. Moreover, collaboration between government, the private sector and international stakeholders can foster innovative solutions that address the complex and interconnected challenges South Africa faces. By nurturing a robust statistical ecosystem, South Africa can leverage these insights to boost productivity, improve public services and support several industries to contribute to sustainable and inclusive economic development.

As a result, the G20 Presidency is expected to propel South Africa to enhance its national statistical system and related outputs through Phase 3 of the DGI. South Africa can significantly improve the quality and availability of statistics, which is crucial for informed policymaking and effective governance. In light of the 'Solidarity, Equality, Sustainability' theme embraced by South Africa, the indicators for measuring household distributional information become essential, alongside other focus areas such as climate change. This is a valuable opportunity to strengthen local data collection and statistics compilation to enable South Africa to better monitor economic, financial and social conditions, and to provide a clearer picture of the country's progress in addressing its challenges.

In addition, the DGI programme will contribute to the 2030 Agenda and is expected to contribute to the overall development of statistics, which aligns with South Africa's broader goals of economic transformation and sustainable development.

² The IAG comprises the Bank for International Settlements, the European Central Bank, Eurostat, the International Monetary Fund (Chair), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the United Nations and the World Bank.

