

# HUMAN RIGHTS INDICATORS

A Guide to Measurement and Implementation

## SUMMARY



UNITED NATIONS  
HUMAN RIGHTS  
OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER

# FOREWORD

The human rights journey from standard-setting to effective implementation depends, in large measure, on the availability of appropriate tools for policy formulation and evaluation. Indicators, both quantitative and qualitative, are one such essential tool.

While the importance of indicators for the realization of human rights is widely recognized, and even enshrined in human rights treaties, as in article 31 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, their use has not yet become systematic. The present *Guide* will help in filling this gap.

In recent years, the critical need for such tools has become increasingly evident. On the eve of the Arab Spring, there were still reports about the remarkable economic and social progress and general improvements in governance and the rule of law that some countries in the region were achieving. At the same time, United Nations human rights mechanisms and voices from civil society were painting a different picture, and reporting on exclusion, the marginalization of communities, discrimination, absence of participation, censorship, political repression or lack of an independent judiciary and denial of basic economic and social rights.

Popular uprisings and demonstrations in other parts of the world, including in relatively well-off countries, remind us of the necessity to place the human being at the centre of our development policy and to adjust our analytical lens accordingly. They compel us to review existing analytical, methodological and legal frameworks to ensure that they integrate real attention to freedom from fear and want, and to discrimination; assess the extent of public participation in development and in the fair distribution of its benefits; strengthen

accountability and embrace methods empowering people, especially the most vulnerable and the most marginalized.

Policy management, human rights and statistical systems are closely interrelated and thus need to be in tune with each other for promoting the well-being of people. Devising a policy or statistical indicator is not a norm or value-neutral exercise. Yet, integrating human rights in these processes is not only a normative imperative, it also makes good practical sense. Failing to do so can have real consequences.

I believe that this *Guide* will represent an important reference and resource from this perspective. There is a long way to go in improving our capacities for human rights implementation. There are numerous challenges in the collection and dissemination of information on human rights. What to monitor, how to collect information and interpret it from a human rights perspective, and the inherent danger of misusing data, are but some of the concerns addressed in this publication. The *Guide* also reminds us of the limitations that are intrinsic to any indicator. In particular, it cannot and should not be seen as a substitute for more in-depth, qualitative and judicial assessments which will continue to be the cornerstones of human rights monitoring. Instead, the indicators and methods described in this *Guide* are primarily meant to inform more comprehensive assessments and are neither designed nor suitable for ranking the human rights performance of States. The primary objective here is to highlight the human rights norms and principles, spell out the essential attributes of the rights enshrined in international instruments and translate this narrative into contextually relevant indicators and benchmarks for implementing and measuring human rights at country level.



I commend the women and men, the countries, State agencies, regional and national human rights institutions, statistical offices, civil society organizations and United Nations entities that were engaged in and have contributed to making this pioneering work on human rights indicators a reality. As illustrated by several national and regional initiatives, this work, which is still in progress and in connection with which my Office continues to receive a growing number of requests for support and assistance, provides useful tools in strengthening national capacity for human rights implementation.

I trust that the continued engagement, dialogue and cooperation among all stakeholders, including the human rights and development communities, will truly help foster human rights-based and people-centred development at country level. Indicators are in this sense a potential bridge between the human rights and the development policy discourses.

I hope this *Guide* will be widely disseminated, within and beyond traditional human rights forums, and invite all users and other stakeholders to share their knowledge and experiences and send feedback to my Office.

Most importantly, we should never forget that behind every piece of statistical data are human beings who were born free and equal in dignity and rights. We must strive to make their human rights stories, especially those of the powerless, visible through robust indicators and to use them in constantly improving our human rights policies and implementation systems to bring positive change to people's lives.

**Navi Pillay**

*United Nations High Commissioner  
for Human Rights*

## Overview

In recent years, there has been a growing demand from various stakeholders, including national and international human rights activists and policymakers, for indicators for use in human rights assessments and in furthering the implementation and realization of human rights. The *Human Rights Indicators: A Guide to Measurement and Implementation* attempts to meet some of this demand by developing a reference resource with operational tools, including an approach to identifying quantitative and qualitative indicators, and the corresponding methodology, to promote objective and comprehensive human rights assessments.

The *Guide* brings together materials covering the conceptual, the methodological and the empirical aspects of the approach underlying the identification of context-sensitive indicators to promote and monitor the implementation of human rights. It also provides elements of a framework for building the capacity of human rights monitoring systems and facilitating the use of appropriate tools in policymaking, its implementation and monitoring.

The *Guide* aims to reach all those who share a commitment to the promotion of human rights and those who are mandated, directly or indirectly, to address human rights issues in the course of their day-to-day work. The publication focuses on the stakeholders engaged in identifying, collecting and using indicators to promote and monitor the implementation of human rights nationally. It is directed at national human rights institutions, the United Nations human rights system in general and the treaty bodies in particular, the State agencies responsible for reporting on the implementation of human rights treaty obligations, as well as those responsible for policymaking across different ministries, public agencies at different levels of governance, statistical agencies, development practitioners, civil society organizations and international agencies with a mandate to further the realization of human rights.

## Why do we need indicators for human rights?

The demand for and the use of indicators in human rights are part of a broader process of systematic work to implement, monitor and realize rights. Together with national human rights action plans, baseline studies and rights-based approaches to development and good governance, the oversight work of United Nations human rights mechanisms, as well as regional and national human rights institutions, indicators provide concrete and practical tools for enforcing human rights and measuring their implementation.

The idea of using indicators in human rights is not new or unknown to international human rights and some treaties explicitly refer to statistical information (see for instance chap. I, section E). Moreover, the use of appropriate indicators is a way to help States make precise and relevant information available to international as well as national human rights mechanisms and can provide a concrete follow-up methodology to the implementation of recommendations adopted by the same mechanisms. Above all, the use of appropriate indicators is a way to help States assess their own progress in ensuring the enjoyment of human rights by their people.

## What are human rights indicators?

In the context of this work, a human rights indicator is defined as *specific information on the state or condition of an object, event, activity or outcome that can be related to human rights norms and standards; that addresses and reflects human rights principles and concerns; and that can be used to assess and monitor the promotion and implementation of human rights.*

Some indicators could be unique to human rights because they owe their existence to specific human rights norms or standards and are generally not used in other contexts. This could be the case, for instance, with the number of extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions; reported number of victims of torture by the police and the paramilitary forces; and the number of children who do not have access to primary education because of discrimination by the authorities. At the same time, there could be a large number of other indicators, such as commonly used socioeconomic statistics (e.g., human development indicators used in the *Human Development Reports* of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)), that could meet (at least implicitly) all the definitional requirements of a human rights indicator as laid out here.

In all these cases it is helpful to consider them as human rights indicators, to the extent that they relate to human rights standards and principles and could be used for human rights assessments.

## What are human rights?

Before developing indicators for measuring and implementing human rights, there is a need for a basic understanding of what human rights are, their main features, obligations, and the international normative framework and mechanisms. Human rights are universal legal guarantees protecting individuals and groups against actions and omissions that interfere with fundamental freedoms, entitlements and human dignity. Human rights are inherent in all human beings and are founded on respect for the dignity and worth of each person. They stem from cherished human values that are common to all cultures and civilizations. Human rights have been enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and codified in a series of international human rights treaties ratified by States and other instruments adopted after the Second World War. There are also regional human rights instruments, and most States have adopted constitutions and other laws that formally protect basic human rights and freedoms. While international treaties and customary law, together with interpretive practice by treaty organs, form the backbone of international human rights law, other non-binding instruments such as declarations, guidelines and principles adopted at the international level contribute to its understanding, implementation and development. A detailed description of human rights, corresponding obligations, international treaties and human rights monitoring mechanism is provided in chapter I of the *Guide*.

## What are the limitations and risks of using indicators?

There are several good reasons for using quantitative and qualitative indicators to assist human rights monitoring, but it is important to keep in mind that an indicator is only a tool. It is not a substitute to qualitative, judicial or quasi-judicial and other comprehensive assessments, and users need to be clear about its limitations. “Many agree with Lord Kelvin, the 19th-century physicist after whom the unit of absolute temperature is named: he reckoned that measuring something provides additional knowledge. And so it does, in the physical sciences. But where humans are involved, more

data sometimes yield less truth”.<sup>1</sup> This may be especially so regarding human rights, where the users and producers of data need to be well aware of the dangers and potential misuses of statistics.

There are numerous examples of data on different population groups being used to support acts of genocide and other human rights violations (see for instance chap. III, box 9). Given these risks, should human rights stakeholders stay away from statistics and data collection? The *Guide* argues, on the contrary, that such risks call for a stronger involvement of human rights stakeholders in human rights measurement and documentation. Besides, statistical information is already being used in human rights reporting and monitoring systems, internationally, regionally and nationally.

### What are quantitative and qualitative indicators? Subjective and objective indicators?

As illustrated in the figure below, indicators can be *quantitative* or *qualitative*. The former are narrowly viewed as equivalent to “statistics”, while the latter cover any information articulated as a narrative or in a “categorical” form. These two main uses of the word “indicator” in the human rights community do not reflect two opposed approaches because given the complexity of assessing compliance with human rights standards, all relevant qualitative and quantitative information is potentially useful. Quantitative indicators can facilitate qualitative evaluations by measuring the magnitude of certain events through numbers, percentages and indices.



<sup>1</sup> “International rankings: Wrong numbers – Global league tables are interesting, but not always reliable”, Economist, 6 January 2011.

Similarly, qualitative information can complement the interpretation of quantitative indicators. Human rights indicators could also be categorized as fact-based and judgement-based indicators, or objective and subjective indicators. Objects, facts or events that can, in principle, be directly observed or verified (for example, weight of children, number of violent deaths, and nationality of a victim) are categorized as objective indicators. Indicators based on perceptions, opinions, assessment or judgements expressed by individuals are categorized as subjective indicators. *Fact-based or objective* indicators, in contrast with *judgement-based or subjective* indicators, are verifiable and can be easier to interpret when comparing the human rights situation in a country over time and across populations.

## What is the background of OHCHR work on human rights indicators?

The work on indicators at the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) was initiated in response to a request from the inter-committee meeting of the treaty bodies. It sought assistance in analysing and making use of the statistical information in the State parties' reports so as to assess their compliance with the human rights treaties they had ratified. In pursuing this request, OHCHR undertook an extensive survey of the literature and the prevalent practice among civil society and international organizations regarding the use of quantitative information to monitor human rights. This was followed by the development of a conceptual and methodological framework for identifying operationally feasible human rights indicators, in consultation with a panel of experts. This framework was presented to the inter-committee meeting in 2006 and revised in 2008, when the inter-committee meeting called for the development of resource materials and tools to help disseminate and operationalize it and to engage further on this work with national human rights stakeholders.

Lists of illustrative indicators were developed for a number of human rights—both civil and political rights as well as economic, social and cultural rights. These indicators were then subjected to a process of validation that involved, at first, discussions with an international panel of experts, including experts from treaty bodies, special rapporteurs of the Human Rights Council, academics, and experts from civil society and international organizations. Subsequently, discussions were held with national stakeholders, including human rights institutions, policymakers and agencies responsible for reporting on the implementation of the human rights treaties, statistical agencies and representatives from civil society. These discussions, which generated feedback on the work, took the form of regional and national workshops in several countries in Asia, Africa, Latin America, Europe and North America.<sup>2</sup> The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Human Rights Committee, which both revised their guidelines for State party reporting, require States parties to identify disaggregated statistics and indicators for the rights of the two Covenants taking into account the OHCHR framework and list of illustrative indicators.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> More details on this process are provided in HRI/MC/2008/3.

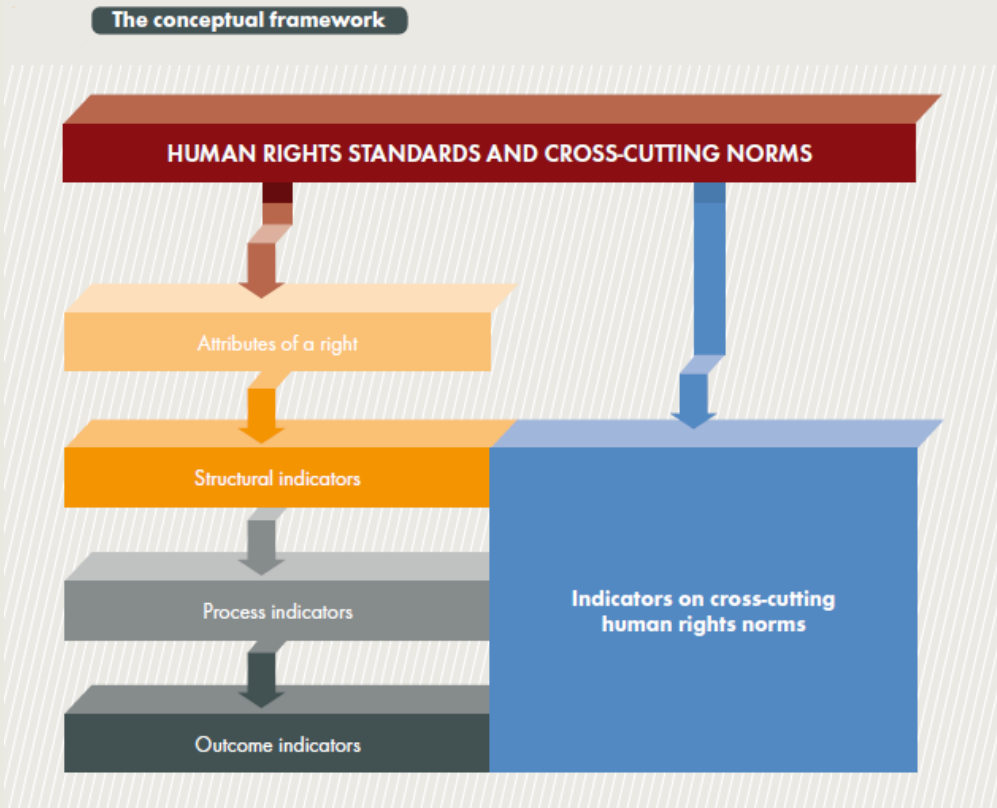
<sup>3</sup> See E/C.12/2008/2 and CCPR/C/2009/1.

# What are the salient features of the conceptual framework for human rights indicators?

The adopted conceptual framework:

- Anchors indicators identified for a human right in the normative content of that right, as described primarily in the relevant articles of the treaties and general comments of the committees.
- Places all human rights on an equal footing, thereby emphasizing the interdependence and indivisibility of civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights.
- Focuses on measuring the commitments of duty bearers, primarily the State, to their human rights obligations and the efforts they undertake to meet those obligations. It also measures the results of the duty bearer’s efforts in ensuring the realization and enjoyment of human rights by rights-holders.
- The framework also recognizes and reflects the cross-cutting human rights norms, such as non-discrimination and equality, participation, access to remedy, accountability, rule of law and good governance and remedy in the choice of indicators and in the assessments.
- Facilitates, for the universal human rights standards, the identification of contextually meaningful indicators. As a result, the framework neither seeks to prepare a common list of indicators to be applied across all countries irrespective of their social, political and economic development, nor to make a case for building a global measure for cross-country comparisons of the realization of human rights.

The articulation of the framework involves a two-part approach that includes identifying the attributes of a human right, followed by a cluster of structural, process and outcome indicators that unpack specific aspects of implementing the standard associated with that right.





## What are the attributes identified on a right?

The enumeration of human right standards in treaties and their further elaboration by the treaty-monitoring bodies and other human rights mechanisms and instruments may remain quite general and many human rights appear to overlap. So human rights treaty provisions are not particularly helpful in the identification of appropriate indicator(s). As a starting point, it is therefore important that the narrative on the legal standard of a human right is transcribed into a limited number of characteristics or attributes of that right. By identifying the attributes of a right, the process of selecting and developing suitable indicators or clusters of indicators is facilitated as one arrives at a categorization that is clear, concrete and, perhaps, more “tangible”. Indeed, the notion of attributes of a right helps in making the content of a right concrete and makes explicit the link between identified indicators of a right on the one hand and the normative standards of that right on the other. Further considerations guiding the identification of the attributes of a human right are outlined in chap II of the *Guide*.

For those human rights for which illustrative indicators have been identified (see chap. IV of the *Guide*), on average about four attributes are able to capture reasonably the essence of their normative content. Thus, for the right to life, taking into account primarily article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, article 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and general comment No. 6 (1982) on the right to life of the Human Rights Committee, four attributes, namely “arbitrary deprivation of life”, “disappearances of individuals”, “health and nutrition” and “death penalty”, were identified. In addition, articles 10 to 12 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, articles 5 (b) and 5 (e) (iv) of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, article 12 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, articles 1 to 16 of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, article 6 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, article 9 of the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, and article 10 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities also informed the selection of these attributes.

## What are structural, process and outcome indicators?

The adopted conceptual framework uses a configuration of structural, process and outcome indicators with a view to measuring acceptance, intent or commitment to human rights standards, and then the efforts required to make that commitment a reality, and the results of those efforts in terms of the increased enjoyment of human rights over time. Each category, through its information sets, brings to the fore an assessment of the steps taken by the State parties to meet their obligations, be it that of respecting, protecting or fulfilling a human right.

Once a State has ratified a human rights treaty, there is a need to assess its commitment to implementing the standards it has accepted. Structural indicators (commitments) help in such an assessment. They reflect the ratification and adoption of legal instruments and the existence as well as the creation of basic institutional mechanisms deemed necessary for the promotion and protection of human rights. Some common structural indicators are:

- International human rights treaties, relevant to the right to adequate housing, ratified by the State;
- Time frame and coverage of national policy on vocational and technical education; and
- Date of entry into force and coverage of formal procedure governing the inspection of police cells, detention centres and prisons by independent inspection entities.

Process indicators (efforts) measure duty bearers' on-going efforts to transform their human rights commitments into the desired results. Unlike with structural indicators, this involves indicators that continuously assess the policies and specific measures taken by the duty bearer to implement its commitments on the ground. Some common process indicators are:

- Coverage of targeted population groups under public programmes;
- Indicators based on budget allocations; and
- Incentive and awareness measures extended by the duty bearer to address specific human rights issues.

Outcome indicators (results) capture individual and collective attainments that reflect the state of enjoyment of human rights in a given context. An outcome indicator consolidates over time the impact of various underlying processes (that can be captured by one or more process indicators). Some common examples are:

- Proportion of labour force participating in social security scheme(s);
- Reported cases of miscarriage of justice and proportion of victims who received compensation within a reasonable time; and
- Educational attainments (e.g., youth and adult literacy rates) by targeted population group.

As briefly illustrated below (see also chap V of the *Guide*), recommendations of United Nations human rights mechanisms are key reference in the process of identifying relevant structural, process and outcome indicators, which are in turn useful tools for assessing the follow-up and implementation of the recommendations.

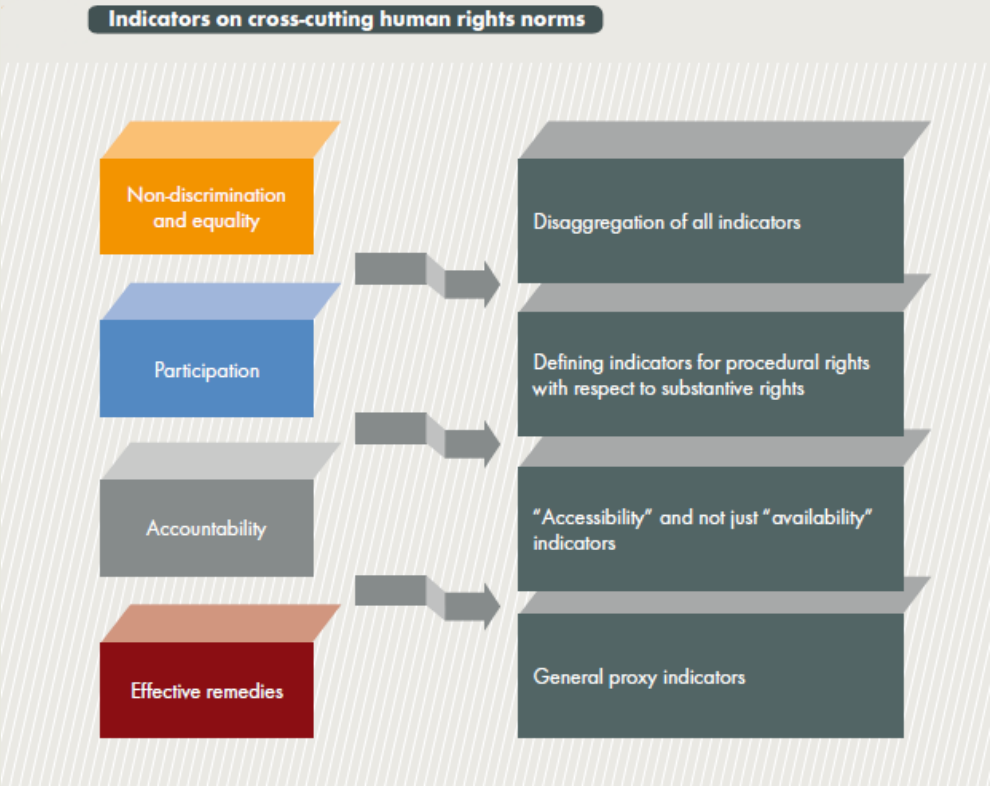
STRUCTURAL INDICATOR	PROCESS INDICATOR	OUTCOME INDICATOR
<p><i>The Committee [on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights] urges the State party to ensure the implementation of <b>the law on sexual and reproductive health</b> in all provinces and guarantee <b>affordable access for everyone, especially adolescents, to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health education and services</b>, with a view to, inter alia, addressing <b>the high maternal mortality rate</b> (E/C.12/ARG/CO/3, para. 22).</i></p>		

STRUCTURAL INDICATOR	PROCESS INDICATOR	OUTCOME INDICATOR
<p><i>The Committee [on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women] urges the State party to do its utmost to ensure the equal participation of women in public affairs, (...) and to <b>establish concrete targets</b> to accelerate the increase of women's political representation, with the use of time frames or increased quotas. It also recommends that the State party continue to <b>undertake awareness-raising campaigns</b> about the importance of <b>women's participation in decision-making at all levels</b> (CEDAW/C/ARE/CO/1, para. 31).</i></p>		

## What are indicators for cross-cutting human rights norms or principles?

The indicators that capture the cross-cutting human rights norms or principles cannot be associated exclusively with the realization of a specific human right, but are meant to capture the extent to which the process of implementing and realizing human rights respects, protects and promotes, for instance, non-discrimination and equality, participation, access to remedy and accountability.

For instance, to capture the norm of non-discrimination and equality in the selection of structural, process and outcome indicators, a starting point is to seek disaggregated data by prohibited grounds of discrimination, such as sex, disability, ethnicity, religion, language, social or regional affiliation. For example, primary education should be available free of charge for all. If the indicator on the proportion of children enrolled in primary schools is broken down by ethnic group or minority for a country, it may reveal disparities between the different population groups and perhaps also discrimination faced by some groups or minorities in accessing education and enjoying their right to education in that country. The situation could then be subjected to a further qualitative analysis to arrive at a more definite assessment of discrimination. In certain instances, indicators like “proportion of employees (e.g., migrant workers) who report discrimination and abuse at work” or especially “proportion of employers choosing the candidate of the majority ethnic group between two applicants with exactly the same profile and qualification except for their ethnic background” allow a more direct assessment of discrimination faced by certain population groups in a society (see chap. IV, table 13 on non-discrimination and equality and box 23). Indicators for cross-cutting human rights are further discussed in chapter II of the *Guide*.<sup>4</sup>



<sup>4</sup> Generally, international human rights bodies have encouraged the disaggregation of data on the basis of the prohibited grounds of discrimination. A non-exhaustive list of these grounds includes: sex, age, economic and social situation, race, colour, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth, disability, health status, nationality, marital and family status, sexual orientation and gender identity, place of residence, and other status.

## How important are context-specific indicators?

The contextual relevance of indicators is a key consideration in the acceptability and use of indicators among potential users engaged in monitoring the implementation of human rights. Countries and regions within countries have different social, economic and political attainments. They differ in the level of realization of human rights. These differences are invariably reflected in their specific development priorities. Therefore, it may not be possible to always have a universal set of indicators to assess the realization of human rights. For example, depending on the social, cultural or religious profile of a population in two different countries, the disaggregation of information by prohibited grounds of discrimination may have to be customized. Nevertheless, it is also true that certain human rights indicators, for example those capturing the realization of some civil and political rights, may well be relevant across all countries and their regions. Others that capture the realization of economic or social rights, such as the right to education or housing, may have to be customized to be of relevance in different countries. Even so, it would be relevant to monitor the core content of the rights universally.

Thus, in designing a set of human rights indicators, like any other set of indicators, there is a need to strike a balance between universally relevant indicators and contextually specific indicators, as both are needed. The adopted framework permits such a balance between a core set of human rights indicators that may be universally relevant and, at the same time, it encourages a more detailed and focused assessment of certain attributes of the relevant human right, depending on the requirements of a particular situation.

Ultimately, the objective of using the conceptual framework is to encourage a practical, transparent and structured approach for a comprehensive translation of the human rights standards into concrete, well-defined, contextually meaningful indicators that help in the promotion and implementation of human rights.<sup>5</sup>

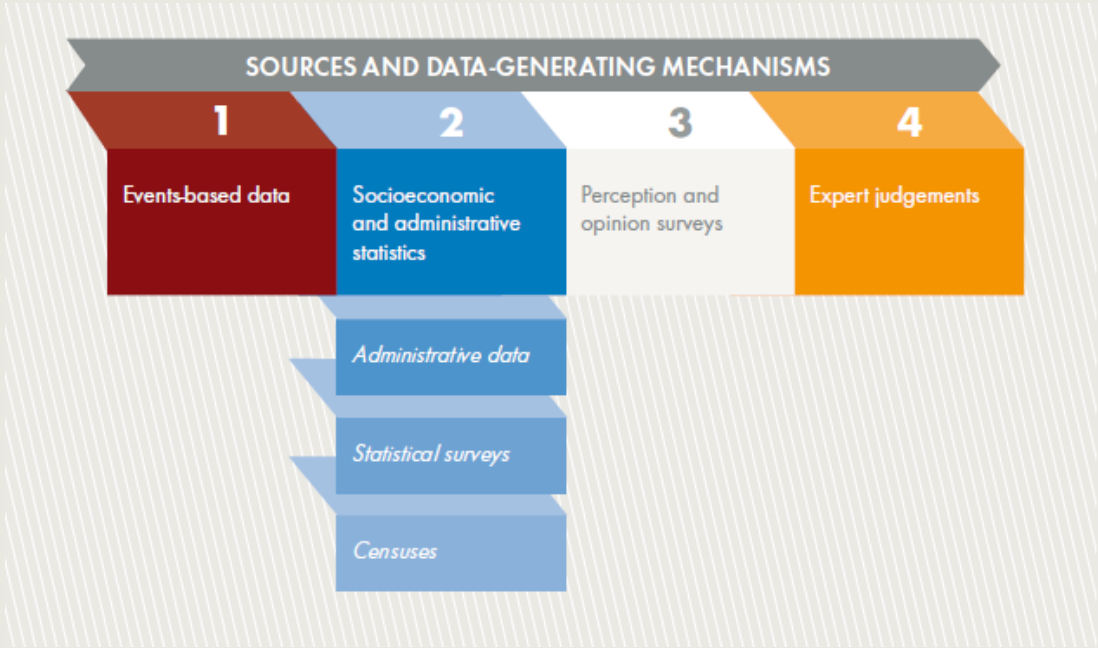
## Where do we find information for human rights indicators?

We can identify at least four broad categories of data-generating mechanisms that could potentially be useful in developing indicators for use in human rights assessments (see the figure below). These are highlighted in the *Guide* (chap III, section B) with representative examples and analysed for the elements that each category of data types could bring to the human rights assessment process and methodology. There are two considerations that stand out in this context. First, the sources and identified data-generating mechanisms should be suitable for assessing the compliance of State parties with international human rights treaties. As a result, the focus should be on indicators that are fact-based or use objective methods of data collection and presentation. Second, there is a need

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<sup>5</sup> There is no intention of using this work to support an index to rank countries according to their human rights performance. Owing to the complexity of human rights, such a tool is neither easy to conceptualize, nor necessarily desirable from the point of promoting and monitoring the realization of human rights. Given that many human rights standards are multifaceted, interrelated and interdependent, it is methodologically difficult to segregate them into meaningful indices for constructing universally acceptable composite measurements for use in cross-country comparisons. This, however, does not rule out that identified indicators can be used to undertake some comparison across countries, but such use is bound to be confined to comparing performance on a few specific human rights standards at a time, and not the entire gamut of human rights.

to combine different sources and data-generating mechanisms to encourage a more comprehensive and credible assessment of any human rights situation.



**Events-based data** on human rights violations (events-based data for short) refer to qualitative or quantitative data that can be linked to events characterized by the occurrence of alleged or proved violation or denial of human rights. The collected information primarily describes acts of possible violations and identifies victims and perpetrators. The information is recorded in standardized fashion, using common definitions and classifications based on the human rights normative framework (see chap. I) that permit the compilation and consolidation of the relevant data. Thus, there could be quantitative data related to the number of victims, their age and weight, or qualitative data that describe category types such as sex and nationality of the victim and the category of human rights violations (e.g., arbitrary killing, arbitrary detention, torture or forced evictions). The data sources in this case include testimonies of victims or witnesses; information provided by the media and reports of States, civil society organizations, national human rights institutions and international human rights monitoring mechanisms, such as the special procedures of the United Nations.

**Socioeconomic and other administrative statistics** (hereinafter referred to as socioeconomic statistics) refer to aggregate data sets and indicators based on objective quantitative or qualitative information related to the standard of living and other facets of life (e.g., maternal mortality ratio, number of deaths in custody, proportion of seats in parliaments held by women) . Such information is compiled and disseminated by the State, through its administrative records and surveys, usually in collaboration with national statistical agencies and under the guidelines of international organizations. At the national level, socioeconomic statistics are often compiled in pursuance of legislation outlining development or administrative needs. At the international level, United Nations and other international conferences and summits have played an important role in the development of socioeconomic statistics. The three sources commonly associated with the formulation and compilation of socioeconomic statistics are administrative data, statistical surveys and censuses.

**Perception and opinion surveys** aim at polling a representative sample of individuals for their personal views on a given issue. The nature of the information collected is predominantly subjective and not directly quantifiable. To aggregate data, as well as transform these perceptions and opinions into indicators, predetermined or closed formats for the responses along with ordinal or cardinal scales are often used. Depending on the circumstances and the theme of the survey, respondents may be consulted through face-to-face interviews, self-administration of the questionnaire or telephone interviews (e.g., proportion of population feeling unsafe).

**Data based on expert judgements** covers data generated through combined assessments of a human rights situation with the help of a limited number (or sample) of “informed experts”. The information generated is essentially judgement-based or subjective and needs to be translated into quantitative form through coding, as with the household perception and opinion surveys. Unlike the latter, it usually involves a more systematic use of diverse sources of information, including the media, government reports and reports from NGOs, by a limited number of experts (e.g., advocacy groups, academic researchers, social scientists, managers) who are asked to evaluate and score the performance of States (e.g., freedom of expression scoring index).

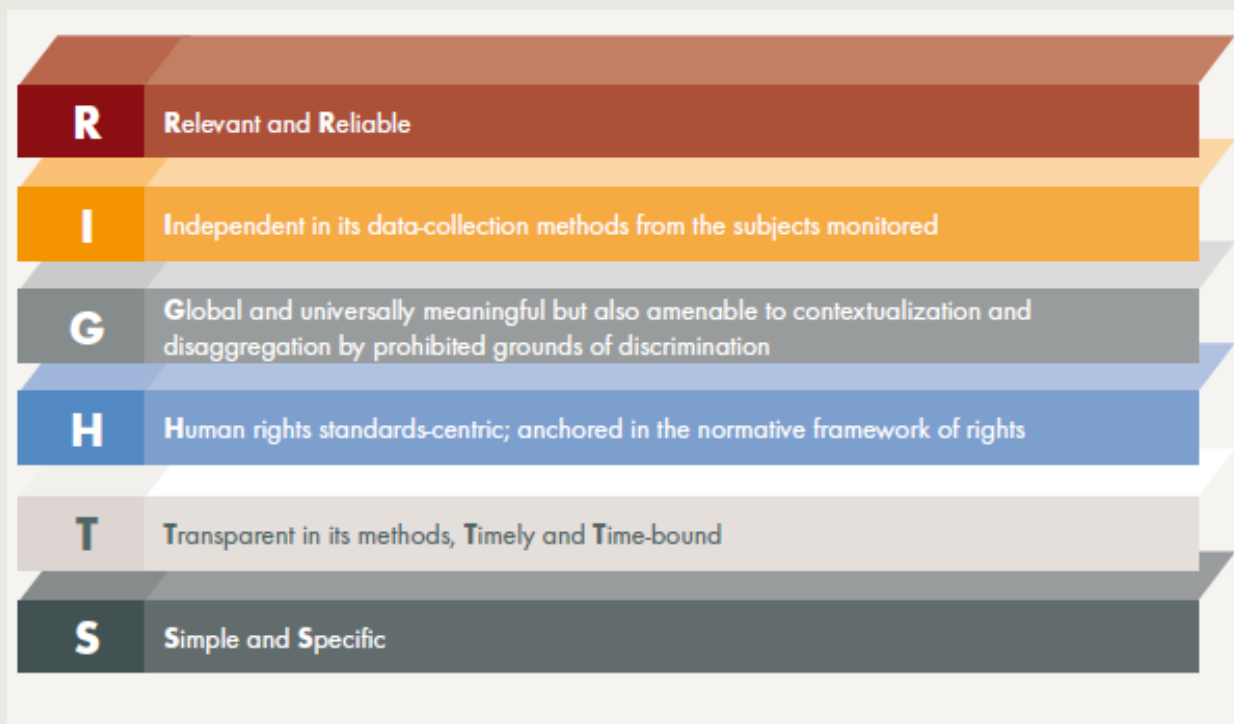
## What are the ethical, statistical and human rights considerations in indicator selection?

There are several methodological considerations that should guide the process of selecting indicators for use in human rights assessments. The collection, processing and dissemination of any statistical information have implications for the right to information, the right to privacy, data protection and confidentiality, and require conforming to legal and institutional standards related to ethics, statistics and human rights (see chapter III of the *Guide*, particularly boxes 9 and 11). The three main human rights principles in relation to data-collection processes are self-identification, participation and data protection.

The principle of self-identification requires that people should have the option of self-identifying when confronted with a question seeking sensitive personal information related to them. In addition, involving the surveyed population groups (e.g., Afro-descendants and indigenous peoples) in the data definition and data-collection processes can help ensure the relevance and accuracy of the data collected. This relates to the human rights principle of participation, which encourages all sections of the population, including vulnerable and marginalized groups, as well as human rights and other relevant institutions, to actively join in decision-making. In other words, the nature of the data to be collected should be based on public participation and understanding of the implications of how such data could potentially be used. In accordance with the right to privacy set out in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (art. 17), the principle of data protection requires that all data-collection activities must respect robust guarantees to prevent abuse of sensitive data.

## What are the RIGHTS criteria for the selection of indicators?

In selecting human rights indicators, the RIGHTS criteria, which take into account the desired statistical and methodological properties in an indicator as well as the principles and human rights concerns, could be useful:



## What are the illustrative indicators prepared by OHCHR on identified human rights?

Chapter IV of the *Guide* presents the analysis that went into the selection of specific indicators and the preparation of tables of illustrative indicators for different human rights, making use of the outlined conceptual and methodological approach. The tables cover selected civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights that are frequently referred to in various human rights treaties. While relating concepts to application, these tables present indicators that can be assessed for their relevance to a given country and not all illustrative indicators developed for a right in this *Guide* need to be used. The natural inclination may be to limit the number of indicators to monitor the implementation of a specific right. However, their number will depend on the context and on the objective of the exercise. At the same time, depending on the human rights concerns in a country, a State party or treaty body may wish to focus on only a few or a subset of indicators identified for a human rights standard. Nevertheless, it is important to have a comprehensive set of indicators on human rights standards, with the actual choice of indicators made by the users in the light of their objective and their national context. Annex I of the *Guide*, which presents the **metadata** on selected illustrative indicators, is an integral part of this chapter. The metadata help to clarify methodological (and some conceptual) concerns in the application of the indicators to national human rights assessments.

## Attributes of the identified human rights

	Arbitrary deprivation of life	Disappearances of individuals	Health and nutrition	Death penalty
<b>Structural</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>International human rights treaties relevant to the right to life ratified by the State</li> <li>Date of entry into force and coverage of the right to life in the constitution or other forms of superior law</li> <li>Date of entry into force and coverage of domestic laws for implementing the right to life</li> <li>Type of accreditation of national human rights institutions by the rules of procedure of the International Coordinating Committee of National Institutions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Date of entry into force and coverage of habeas corpus provision in the constitution</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Time frame and coverage of national policy on health and nutrition</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Number of subnational administrative entities that have abolished death penalty</li> <li>Date of entry into force and coverage of safeguards for those facing death penalty (including minimum age, pregnancy, mother of young children, disabilities)</li> </ul>
<b>Process</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Proportion of received complaints on the right to life investigated and adjudicated by the national human rights institution, human rights ombudsperson or other mechanisms and the proportion of these responded to effectively by the Government</li> <li>Proportion of communications from the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions responded to effectively by the Government in the reporting period</li> <li>Proportion of law enforcement officials and custodial staff trained in rules of conduct concerning proportional use of force, arrest, detention, investigation and treatment of persons in custody</li> <li>Proportion of law enforcement officials formally investigated for physical or non-physical abuse or crime that caused death or threatened life in the reporting period</li> <li>Proportion of formal investigations of law enforcement officials resulting in disciplinary action or prosecution in the reporting period</li> <li>Ratio of persons brought into formal contact with law enforcement authorities (i.e., suspected, arrested or cautioned) for alleged arbitrary deprivation of life / homicides (intentional and non-intentional) to number of reported cases</li> <li>Proportion of persons brought into formal contact with law enforcement authorities for alleged deprivation of life / homicides (intentional and non-intentional) who are convicted</li> <li>Proportion of identified perpetrators of reported cases of arbitrary deprivation of life prosecuted, arrested, adjudicated, convicted or serving sentence in the reporting period</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Proportion of communications from the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances responded to effectively by the Government in the reporting period</li> <li>Proportion of cases where pre-trial detention exceeded the legally stipulated time limit</li> <li>Number of habeas corpus and similar petitions filed in courts in the reporting period, per 1000 persons detained</li> <li>Ratio of persons brought into formal contact with law enforcement authorities for alleged disappearance / abduction to number of reported cases</li> <li>Proportion of persons brought into formal contact with law enforcement authorities for alleged disappearance / abduction who are convicted</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Proportion of population using an improved drinking water source*</li> <li>Proportion of births attended by skilled health personnel*</li> <li>Proportion of population below minimum level of dietary energy consumption*</li> <li>Proportion of targeted population covered by public nutrition supplement programmes</li> <li>Proportion of population using an improved sanitation facility*</li> <li>Proportion of one-year-olds immunized against vaccine-preventable diseases (e.g., measles*)</li> <li>Proportion of disease cases detected and cured (e.g., tuberculosis*)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Number of convicted persons on death row in the reporting period, on a specified date, including by age, sex (pregnancy, motherhood status) and nationality</li> <li>Average time spent by convicted persons on death row</li> <li>Proportion of accused persons facing capital punishment provided with access to a lawyer or legal aid</li> <li>Proportion of convicted persons facing capital punishment exercising the right to have their sentence reviewed by a higher court</li> <li>Reported cases of expulsion or imminent expulsion of persons to a country where they may face the death penalty</li> </ul>
<b>Outcome</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Homicides (intentional and non-intentional) rate per 100,000 population</li> <li>Number of deaths in custody per 1,000 detained or imprisoned persons, by cause of death (e.g., illness, suicide, homicide)</li> <li>Reported cases of arbitrary deprivation of life and death threats (e.g., as reported to the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reported cases of disappearance (e.g., as reported to the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances)</li> <li>Proportion of cases of disappearance clarified, by status of person at the date of clarification (at liberty, in detention or dead)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Infant and under-five mortality rates*</li> <li>Maternal mortality ratio*</li> <li>Life expectancy at birth or age 1</li> <li>Prevalence of and death rates associated with communicable and non-communicable diseases (e.g., HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis*)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Proportion of death sentences commuted</li> <li>Number of executions (under death penalty)</li> </ul>

\* MDG-related indicators

Structural, process and outcome indicators

Disaggregation by prohibited grounds of discrimination (see metadata)

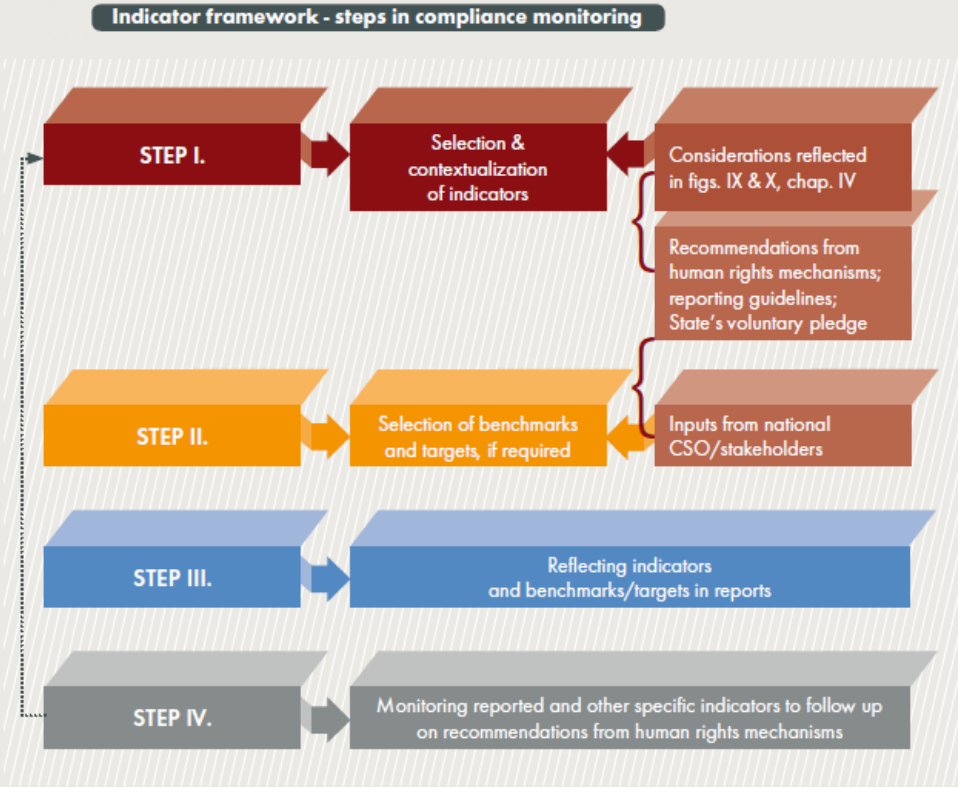
## Where are the different uses of indicators for human rights?

Using indicators to promote and monitor human rights is relevant and fast evolving in different areas and levels of public engagement. The use of indicators is becoming increasingly common at the international level, whether by the human rights treaty bodies, in the universal periodic review (UPR), in assessing the impact of aid flows or in implementing rights-based approaches in policymaking and budget processes at country level. For national human rights action plans, too, the use of appropriate indicators is helping to harmonize such plans with national development plans, thereby contributing to mainstreaming human rights. Moreover, the use of indicators makes human rights advocacy more effective and empowers rights holders and defenders. All these endeavours stand to gain from the work on indicators for human rights presented in the *Guide* (see chapter V).

A structured and transparent approach to applying standardized information or indicators to national human rights assessments will facilitate the implementation of policy measures to secure the universal realization of rights. At the same time, it will help in **compliance monitoring** (see chapter V, section 1) and State parties to meet their reporting obligations under the international human rights treaties. Using appropriate quantitative indicators could help streamline reporting, make it more transparent and effective, reduce the reporting burden and, above all, improve follow-up to the



recommendations from human rights mechanisms, at the international, regional and national levels. In addition, it will enable national human rights institutions and civil society organizations to exercise more effective oversight of the promotion and protection of human rights. When using indicators for such reporting and follow-up, it is instructive to consider the steps outlined in the figure below. Once relevant indicators have been identified, it is useful to have benchmarks to be achieved for those indicators in a given period of time.



By translating human rights norms and principles and the corresponding obligations into concrete indicators, the conceptual and methodological framework presented in the *Guide* shows the possibilities of recognizing and applying human rights standards in **performance monitoring**, namely in the context of specific development programmes and public interventions. Drawing on this framework in these areas helps in putting rights-based programming on a more explicit human rights footing and could also put local programming initiatives in a larger human rights perspective. A comparison of the indicator framework for human rights compliance assessments (structural, process and outcome indicators) and that for performance assessments (input, output, outcome and impact indicators) of development programmes, presented in chapter 5 of the *Guide*, helps clarify these links.

The indicator framework for human rights presented in the *Guide* help strengthen **human rights advocacy and people empowerment**. Some of the experiences (see for instance Chapter V, boxes 28 to 32 on Ecuador, the United Kingdom, Nepal, Mexico and Kenya's initiatives) show how illustrative indicators for different human rights reflected in the *Guide* can be deployed to create a country-owned strategy for improving human rights advocacy and implementation. Civil society organisations working on specific human rights or related issues (e.g., health, administration of justice or gender) and institutions like National Human Rights Institutions, institutions for equal opportunity or minority affairs and statistical agencies could be brought together to be made aware and encouraged to put the tables developed in the *Guide* into context. Putting these tables into context helps in building

ownership and improves their acceptability in different country-level human rights activities. Moreover, the work on indicators undertaken by civil society groups, such as residents of a social housing complex in Northern Ireland with the assistance of a non-governmental organisation (Participation and the Practice of Rights Project), is particularly interesting in demonstrating how a set of indicators related to the right to housing can be effectively developed and used by the rights holders themselves (see chap. III, box 17). At a more macro level, analytical work produced by civil society groups (e.g. fact sheets prepared by the Center for Economic and Social Rights), provided useful insights in assessing the realization of rights and fulfilment of related obligations of countries.

The tables of illustrative indicators on human rights and the approach to developing them outlined in the *Guide* are directly relevant to the preparation and implementation of **national human rights action plans and development plans**. It is, however, particularly important to put the selected indicators on desired outcomes and the underlying strategies (process and structural indicators) in context and to revise them through country-owned processes (see chapter V, section 4).

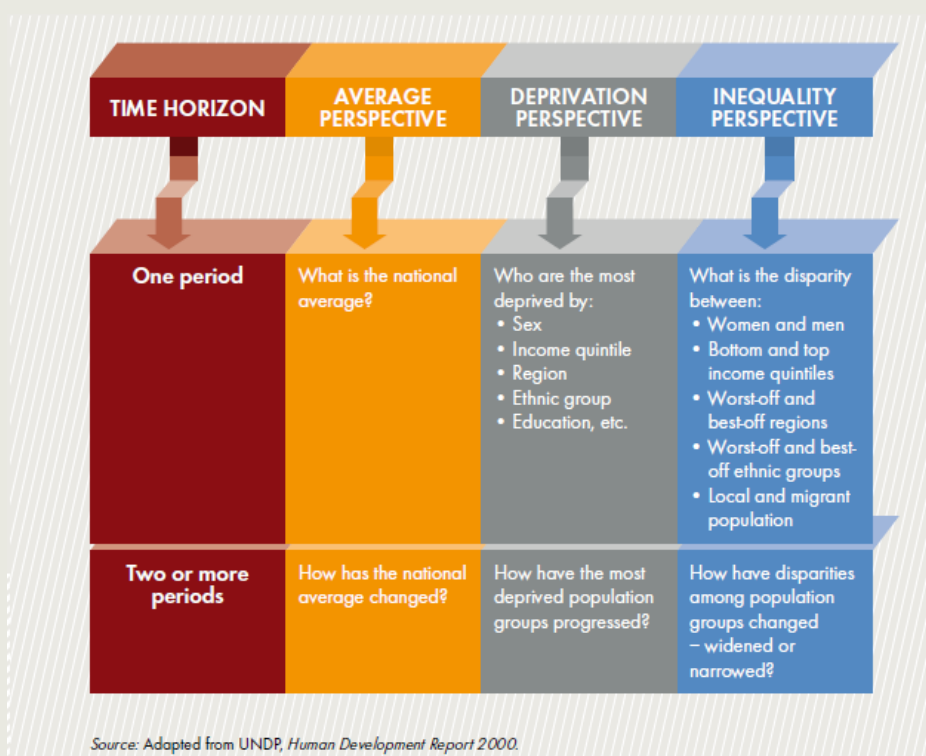
To facilitate the implementation of civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights nationwide it is important for a State's budgetary efforts to be aligned with its human rights obligations, in other words to work towards **human rights budgeting** (chapter V, section 5). This is only logical as budgets are the principal instrument for a State (Government) to mobilize, allocate and spend resources for development and governance. It is a means to create and support entitlements in implementing a State's human rights obligations. There are two aspects to human rights budgeting. The first relates to the budget-making process and focuses on whether it is conducted in conformity with human rights cross-cutting norms or principles. The second relates to the actual content of the budget and focuses on analysing it from the perspective of the State's human rights obligations. In both these aspects the use of appropriate indicators makes it easier to align the State's budget with its human rights obligations. The use of indicators improves people's access to information and makes their engagement and participation in the budget process more effective. Moreover, it helps in making explicit the human rights content of the budget, thereby furthering their implementation.

## How to interpret commonly available statistical indicators for human rights assessments?

Using socioeconomic statistics in human rights typically involves first seeking to disaggregate the available information, from national averages to data for the smallest group of individuals who are bound by common human rights characteristics and on to information at the level of an individual (see for instance chapters I and III, C). However, such data collection, compilation and disaggregation are not always feasible. Indeed, that is where the framework of indicators presented in the *Guide* becomes useful for identifying the critical information which may be necessary for undertaking an adequate human rights assessment. Incidentally, the absence of information on relevant indicators can, in itself, be an indicator of a lack of willingness and commitment on the part of the duty bearers to implement human rights.

When indicators are readily available, an analysis and assessment combining three measurement perspectives can be systematically carried out, especially using outcome and process indicators. The "average perspective" shows the country's overall progress, the "deprivation perspective" shows the progress for its most deprived groups and the "inequality perspective" shows progress in narrowing

inequalities between its population groups or regions (see chapter V, section B, for an illustration of the application of the three perspectives outlined in the figure below):



## What are the steps in setting up systems for human rights monitoring and using indicators at country level?

In setting up rights-based monitoring and indicator systems at the country level, or strengthening existing mechanisms to promote and monitor the implementation of human rights, one can identify, among others, the following steps:

As **step 1**, it is necessary to **identify the monitoring stakeholders** that will be contributing to the monitoring process as information providers, as independent interpreters of the available information or as the ultimate users of that information for articulating the claims and monitoring the realization of human rights. This may involve, inter alia, the administrative agencies, including the relevant line ministries, the national human rights institution, relevant civil society organizations engaged in monitoring human rights, consumer groups, other social groups, including parliamentary committees and rights holders at large. Potentially, the process could also involve and be supported by OHCHR or other United Nations entities.

**Step 2** relates to the **facilitation of country-owned monitoring mechanisms** bringing together the different stakeholders to monitor the human right(s). The process must sufficiently transparent and decentralized, as well as inclusive for the different stakeholders to reflect their concerns. Such a group of stakeholders could be led by an independent institution.

**Identification of major vulnerable and marginalized groups** by population segments and regions should be part of **step 3**. The process of identifying the vulnerable groups using appropriate criteria also has to be consistent with recommendations from international and national human rights

mechanisms. It also has to be based on cross-cutting human rights norms of participation and transparency and, if required, allow for potential self-identification by individuals or groups (see chap. III, sect. A).

In **step 4**, special attention is given to **non-discrimination and accessibility**. In seeking to capture, the extent to which discrimination of individuals and population groups influences the level of realization of their human rights, the notion of “accessibility” (i.e. physical, economic and non-discriminatory) as against mere “availability” has a particular importance in the human rights monitoring framework.

**Step 5** relates to **capacity-building for data collection and disaggregation**. A certain institutional capacity and appropriate methodologies are required for the collection and analysis of data. For human rights monitoring, data could be based on multiple sources and data collection methods, which are used in a complementary manner, such as events-based data and socioeconomic and administrative statistics (see chap. III). Moreover, it would be necessary to develop indicators disaggregated by prohibited grounds of discrimination. When setting up monitoring systems it is therefore important to assess the gaps in the available capacity to provide relevant data and identify the means to address them.

**Reporting periodicity, publication, public access to information and follow-up** are part of **step 6**. Both the protection and the promotion of human rights have to be continuously pursued. It is, therefore, necessary to have data to monitor the human right concerned on a continuing basis, at different times, ideally as an appropriate time series of observations. This would facilitate the monitoring of the incidence of human rights violations over time, the progressive realization and implementation and the follow-up to recommendations from international and national human rights mechanisms. Human rights monitoring also requires access by all stakeholders to information on the realization of the right. This necessitates a framework with a schedule of publication and dissemination of relevant information. As a follow-up to the monitoring process, there has to be a well-appointed process, involving the legislature, the media and other oversight agencies that use the available information as an advocacy tool, to raise awareness on entitlements and duties, to better articulate claims by rights holders and to provide a more sensitive policy response in the discharge of obligations by duty bearers.

## How to use the *Guide*?

The basic structure of the *Guide* described in the introduction is geared towards supporting a systematic and comprehensive translation of universal human rights standards into indicators that are contextually relevant. This approach favours using objective information which is easily available, or can be collected, for monitoring the national implementation of human rights. This requires the reader to:

- Understand the conceptual approach so as to identify indicators, after developing a preliminary understanding of the human rights normative framework;
- Explore the alternative data-generating methods to populate the selected indicators; and
- Apply and interpret the numbers that go with an indicator so as to build an assessment on the state of human rights.

Each of these steps has been dealt with in separate chapters or sections, which are sequenced in a manner that allows a gradual build-up of concepts and methods for use in executing the said steps. Although interrelated, the chapters are sufficiently self-contained that they can be read in a different sequence. A quick reading of chapter II is nonetheless helpful before looking at the other materials in the *Guide*.

For those who are familiar with human rights and are aware of commonly used statistics and indicators in development and governance assessments, it may be useful to start with the tables of illustrative indicators presented in chapter IV. The tables cover selected civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights that are frequently referred to in various human rights treaties. While relating concepts to application, these tables present indicators that can be assessed for their relevance to a given country. The information presented in the metadata of illustrative indicators (annex I), on the operational issues in using the identified indicators, is an integral part of the overall toolkit and facilitates the interpretation of those indicators.

For those who wish to use the adopted framework to identify indicators on certain themes of relevance to human rights, an example has been provided in the form of a table of illustrative indicators on violence against women. With the help of this table, the *Guide* shows how the approach could be applied to addressing crosscutting and thematic issues from a human rights perspective.

Although the publication presents a number of potential indicators for human rights, it is not meant to be static. It is an integral part of an online site maintained by OHCHR with tables, metadata sheets and other relevant documents that are periodically reviewed and updated: [www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Indicators/Pages/HRIndicatorsIndex.aspx](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Indicators/Pages/HRIndicatorsIndex.aspx)

“ We should never forget that behind every piece of statistical data are human beings who were born free and equal in dignity and rights. We must strive to make their human rights stories, especially those of the powerless, visible through robust indicators and to use them in constantly improving our human rights policies and implementation systems to bring positive change to people’s lives.

Navi Pillay

*United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights*

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In step with United Nations efforts to further promote universal standards and better protect people against human rights violations, this publication of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights provides practical guidance for the development of quantitative and qualitative indicators to strengthen the measurement and implementation of human rights, including the right to development. It contains a detailed description of the conceptual and methodological framework for human rights indicators recommended by international and national human rights mechanisms and used by a growing number of governmental and non-governmental actors. Concrete examples of indicators identified for a number of human rights—all stemming from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights—and other practical tools and illustrations are provided to support processes and stakeholders that aim to improve the realization of human rights on the ground. This *Guide* will be of interest to human rights advocates as well as policymakers, development practitioners, statisticians and other key actors who contribute to making human rights a reality for all.

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To download a full-length copy of the Guide free of charge, please go to:  
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