ESPON's SDGs benchmarking tool

ESPON's SDGs benchmarking tool is offering hands on support to regional, and national policy makers and citizens alike in achieving the SDGs. This simple, intuitive and user-friendly tool helps turn a large volume of indicators in insights contributing to providing answers to questions such as:

- Is my region making progress towards achieving the SDG targets?
- Is my region lagging behind or leading in achieving SDGs compared to other similar regions?
- From which regions in Europe can I draw inspiration to progress towards the SDGs?
- Which regions would benefit from targeted support to help step up action to improve their progress and thus contribute substantially to the national progress on the SDGs?

To support policy makers the tool tracks progress along multiple periods in time, displays distance to targets by indicator and benchmarks similar regions to showcase and compare the SDGs.

How to use the SDG benchmarking tool

The SDG benchmarking tool offers support to local and regional governments in achieving the SDGs. The user can select a range of different indicators related to the 17 sustainable development goals. Data at NUTS 2 level are available for comparing and benchmarking one's regions. A practical example of the use of the SDG benchmarking tool is presented below.

Practical example

For instance, let's assume Catalonia is keen on diagnosing and monitoring its performance in Goal 4 "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all".

Step 1 – Select an SDG
In this case, the user selects the Goal 4 from the list of goals presented in the tool (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 Selection of SDG from the tool

Step 2 – Select an indicator

Having chosen the goal, up to five indicators can be selected by a user. In this example, the user can choose the following indicators related to quality of education:

1. Early leavers from education and training
2. Tertiary educational attainment
3. Employment rates of young people not in education and training
4. Participation rates of selected age groups in education
5. Composite indicator

The user selects the composite indicator. This indicator aggregates the performance of all indicators related to the SDG selected

Step 3 – Select your region

Via a drop-down menu, the user can select a specific region to focus on by typing the name of a particular region or numerical identification at NUTS 2 level Cataluña or ES51 (see Figure 2). The region is presented in the map by a dark blue circle and is labelled 'My region'.

Figure 2 Display of SDG benchmarking tool map – Goal 4 composite indicator for Catalonia
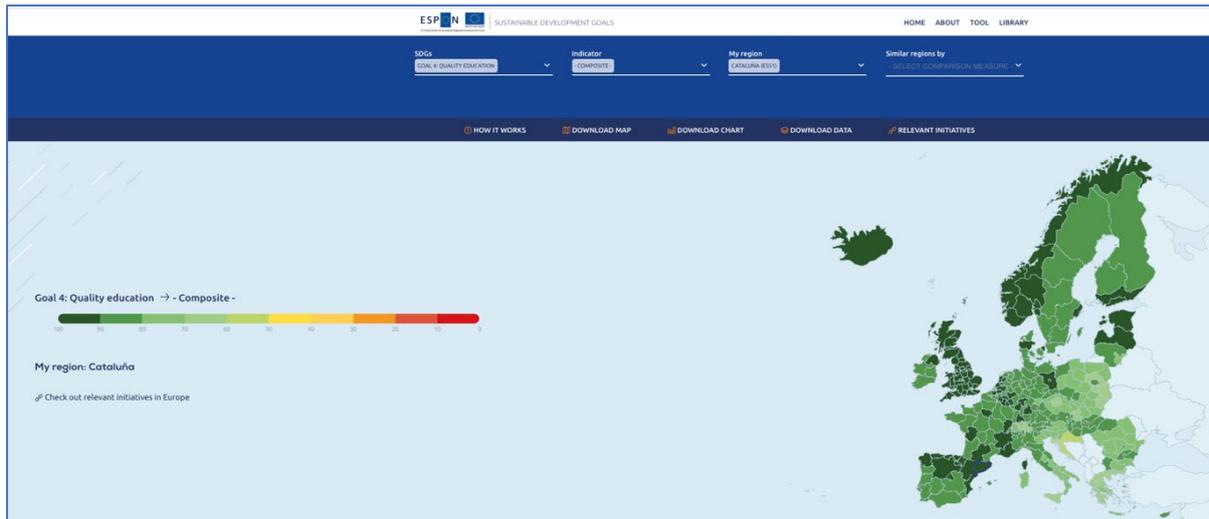

Step 4 – Compare regions

The tool allows to select a benchmark group representing regions with similar territorial characteristics. The user can select multiple benchmark groups by using one or more of the following criteria:

- Population density
- Urban-Rural
- Income criteria
- Metropolitan regions
- Regions in the same country
- Regions with similar results.

In this example, the user wants to benchmark Catalonia to regions that have a similar population density (regions between 213 and 410 persons per km^2), that are also predominantly urban and have a similar income (GDP per capita over 90% of the EU average). This combination of criteria for benchmark regions results in 17 regions that are similar to Catalonia (see Figure 3).

The map in Figure 3 shows Catalonia and the benchmark regions for the composite of Goal 4. The three leading regions similar to Catalonia are Gloucestershire, Cheshire and Stockholm, followed by Catalonia. The top performer in Europe for this indicator is the Inner London – West region.

Figure 3 Display of SDG benchmarking tool map – Goal 4 composite, sorted by similar regions
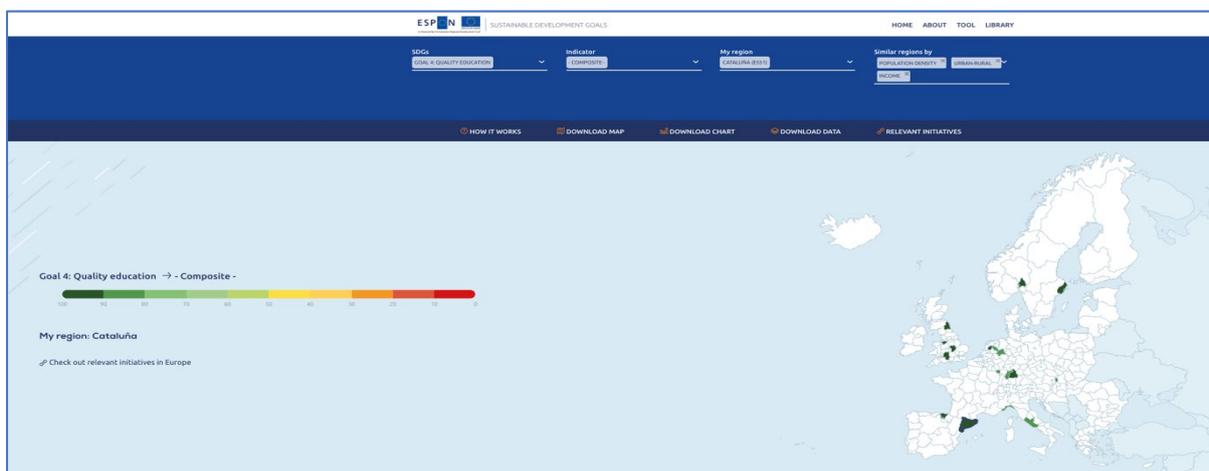
Assess progress in time

The SDG benchmarking tool embeds a progress tracker over time for two periods, 2011-2013 and 2014-2016 (see Figure 4). The blue circle in the tracker indicates a targeted region, while the grey circle is an indication of a benchmark group median.

The progress tracker shows that for Catalonia (blue circle) 'Early leavers from education and training' have been decreased by ca. 20% and 'Tertiary educational attainment' has been decreased by ca. 13%. It has also increased the 'Employment rates of young people' by 4%. 'Participation rates in education' remained stable

**Figure 4 Display of SDG benchmarking tool progress tracker – Goal 4**
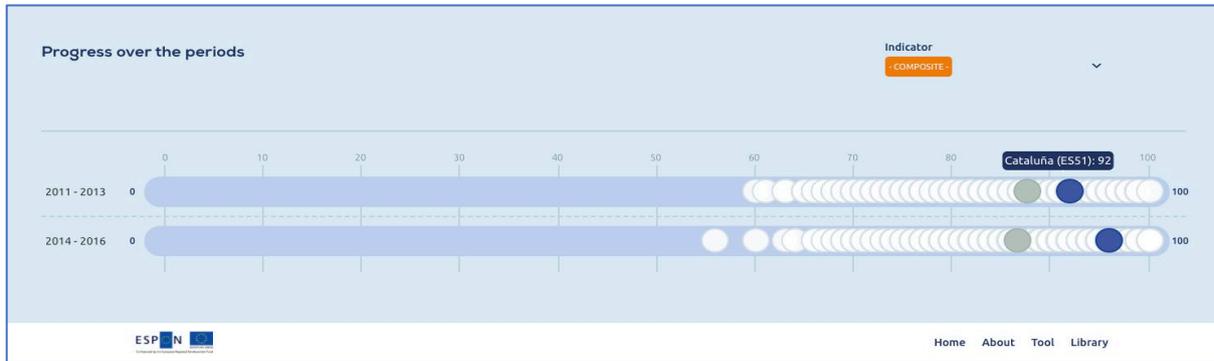
Assess distance to targets

The tool also provides a radar plot displaying regions' distance to the targets associated to each indicator (Figure 5). The targets are defined by indicator and set to 100 to ease interpretation. The radar plot, besides visualising the distance to the targets, also benchmarks regions between them (white circles) and vis-à-vis the median of the benchmark group (grey circle).

The regional benchmarking exercise for Catalonia shows that Catalonia (blue circle) performs above the group median in terms of 'Tertiary educational attainment' and in terms of the 'Early leavers from education and training by sex'. Catalonia meets the target for one indicator 'Early leavers from education and training by sex'.

Figure 5 Display of SDG benchmarking tool radar – Goal 4
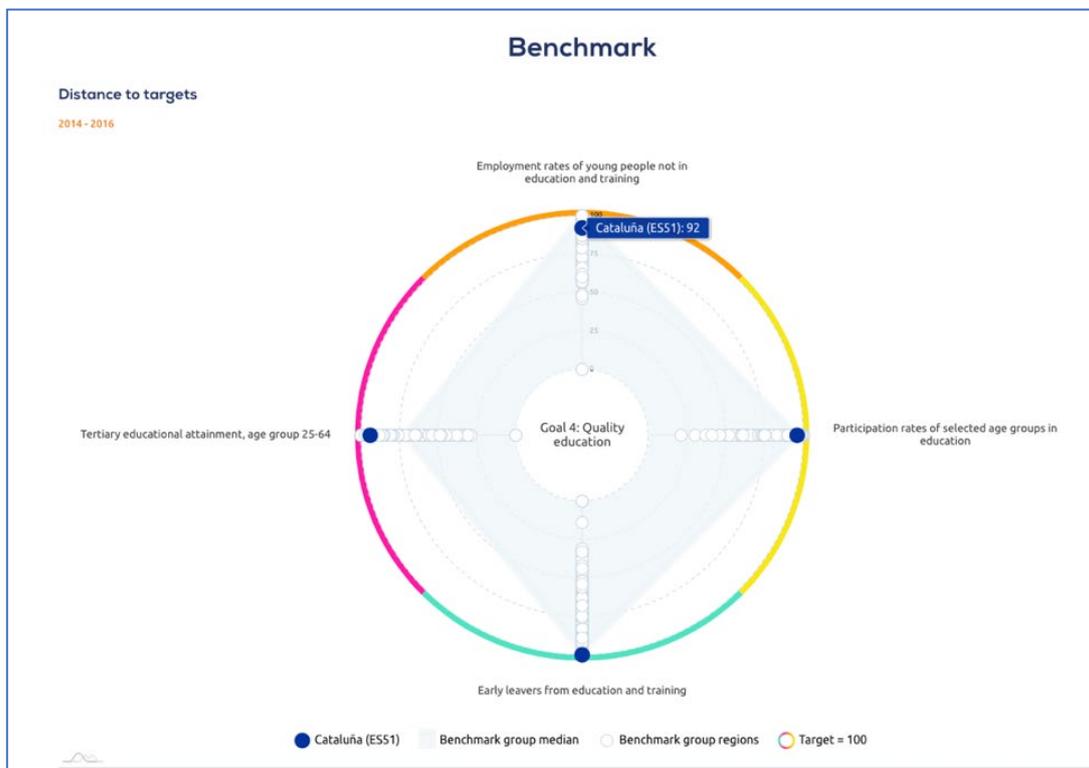
Step 5 – Find additional relevant information

An additional functionality available in the tool is the Library. Here two types of documents are accessible for the user:

- Initiatives of European countries or regions related to SDGs
- Policies on SDGs (namely those of EU institutions and of international organisations).

The Library can be accessed via the map in which case it redirects the user to the initiatives in the library that are related to the SDG selected. The user can also visit the library directly and browse all available material. It is also possible to further narrow down the search by using the filter option, which allows to select a country or particular region.

The Library for the selected Goal 4 shows several sources with initiatives (*Figure 6*) at regional level and several policies on SDGs. Initiatives can be used for inspiration, stimulating knowledge sharing and eventual cooperation.

Conclusion – Monitoring SDGs

Several initiatives are currently being developed to facilitate the adoption of SDGs in plans of local and regional governments. The Global Task Force of Local and Regional Governments (LRGs), UN HABITAT and UNDP have developed a "Roadmap for Localizing the SDGs: Implementation and Monitoring at Subnational Level". The Roadmap aims to support LRGs in implementing and monitoring the SDGs as well as in advocating with national governments to stimulate action at the local and regional level.

The European Union has endorsed and actively supports the global efforts to achieve the SDGs and underlines the role of local authorities and cities, which are considered at the "heart of today's economic, environmental and social challenges" as over 70% of citizens and 85% of GDP is represented in urban areas. Eurostat, which cooperates with the United Nations Statistical Commission (UNSC) and UNSTATS in the framework of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators recognizes the importance of sound statistical data at the global, regional and national level. However, the data in the monitoring report only goes down to national data.

ESPON offers with the SDGs benchmarking tool an opportunity to measure, monitor and benchmark the SDGs at the regional level. The criteria used for selecting indicators are policy relevance, admissibility requirements and quality grading. By following short and simple steps regional and national policy makers and citizens alike can track progress along multiple periods in time, display the distance to targets by indicator and benchmarks similar regions to showcase and compare their own regions in relation to other European regions, according to a range of different indicators. This tool is built on existing statistical information and it will be the base for continuous monitoring of the EU Member States and the Partner States, (Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland) territories.

The ESPON SDG benchmarking tool is available at:

https://sdg.espon.eu/

Figure 6 Display of Initiatives of European countries or regions related to Goal 4