

# Are some SDGs more important than others?

## Revealed country priorities from four years of VNRs<sup>1</sup>

The 2030 Agenda highlights the integrated nature and the indivisibility of the 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs). At the same time, countries set priorities according to their national circumstances. Consequently, the question arises whether countries view some SDGs as more important than others.

Countries report their progress in implementing the 2030 Agenda and achieving the SDGs through their voluntary national reviews (VNRs). To gain some insights into the revealed importance assigned to SDGs, this note analyzes 100 out of the 158 VNRs of the first HLPF cycle (2016-2019)<sup>2</sup> using machine learning. The algorithm measures the relative focus countries assign to the different SDGs by comparing the VNR texts with representative United Nations reports and publications on each of the 17 SDGs.<sup>3</sup> Hence, the SDG scores reported here can be seen as a measure of how well the VNR reports align with the United Nations' understanding of the SDGs.



<sup>1</sup> This note has been prepared by the CDP Secretariat on behalf of the CDP Subgroup on VNRs.

<sup>2</sup> This analysis used all reports available in English language as of 1 July 2019 "from which the text could be extracted.

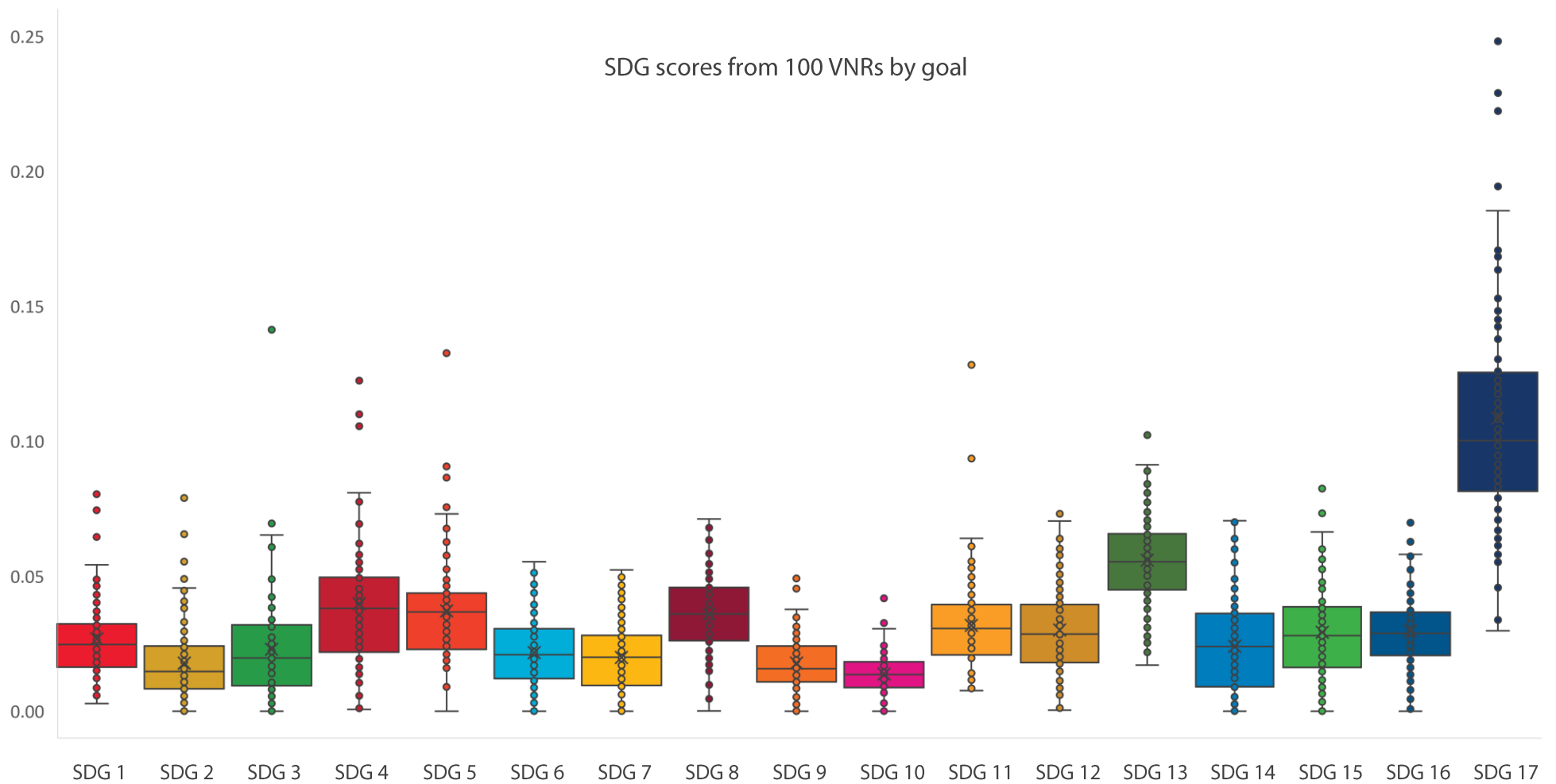
<sup>3</sup> The SDG-scoring algorithm used here is described in Marcelo LaFleur (2019). Art is long, life is short: An SDG Classification System for DESA publications. DESA Working Paper No. 159.

## Which SDGs receive the most and least attention in the VNRs?

SDG 17 on global partnership finds most attention. *This might reflect not only the breadth of SDG 17, but also that countries see global partnership as central to Agenda 2030.*

SDG 13 on climate change is given the second most attention as measured by the SDG scores. *This widespread recognition of the climate challenge needs to translate into action.*

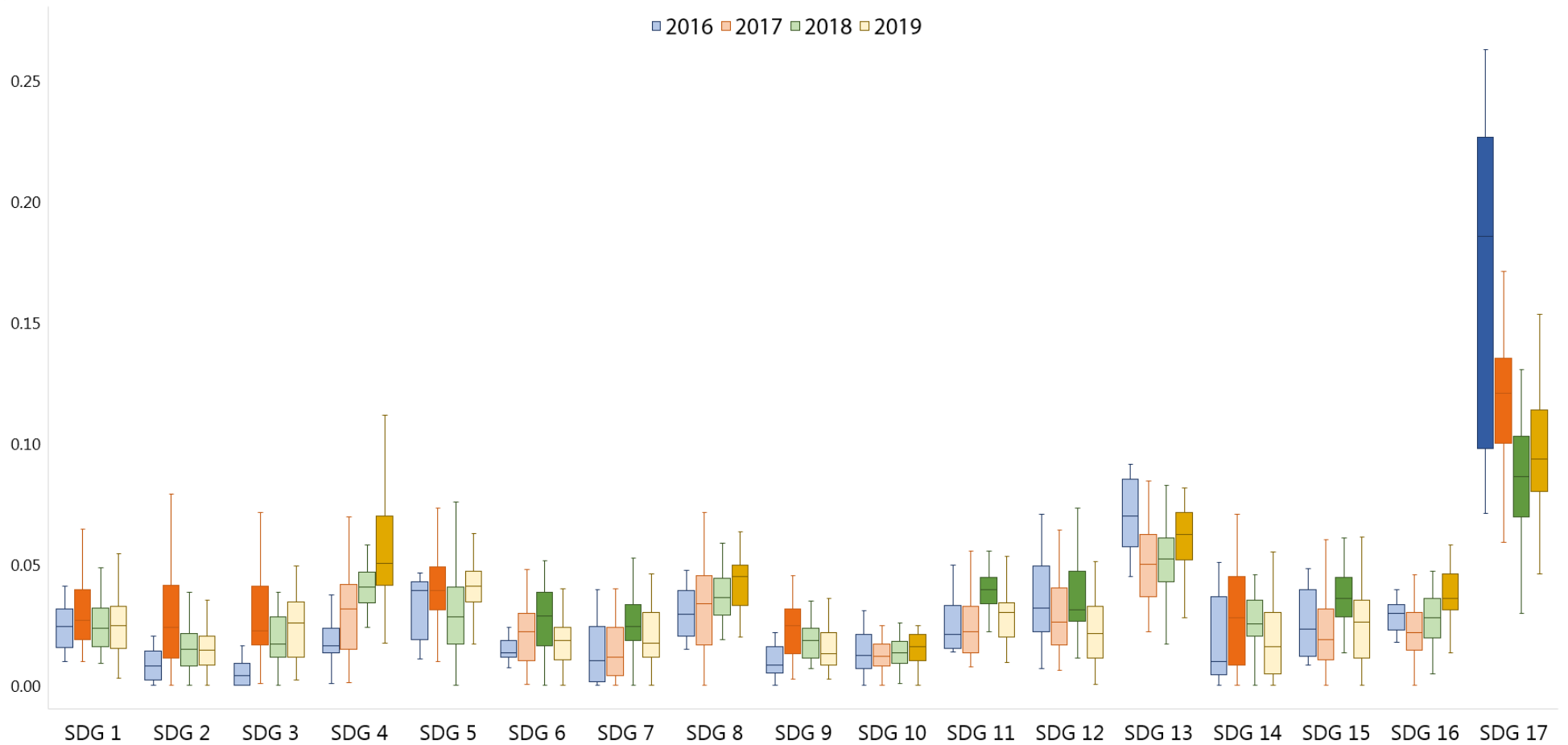
SDG 10 on inequality has the lowest scores. *Given that inequality is a key impediment for Agenda 2030, this is highly concerning.*



# Does the attention given to individual SDGs remain constant over time?

Attention to SDGs varies over time. *Those SDGs in focus at a given HLPF receive more attention than in other years, but no clear trends emerge.*

SDG scores from 100 VNRs by goal and year



In 2017, SDGs 1, 2, 3, 5, 9 and 14 were in focus; in 2018 SDGs 6, 7, 11, 12 and 15; and in 2019 SDGs 4, 8, 10, 13 and 16. SDG 17 was reviewed annually; there were no focus goals in 2016. Goals in focus are shown in darker color.

# Are countries prioritizing the same SDGs?

There is great variation in country reporting. *This reflects the variety of priorities and approaches at the country level.*

