

Chapter 2

Europe's approach to implementing the Sustainable Development Goals

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This chapter summarizes a study by the authors entitled “Europe's approach to implementing the Sustainable Development Goals: good practices and the way forward” (EP/EXPO/B/DEVE/2018/01) commissioned and published by the European Parliament, Directorate General for External Policies of the Union in February 2019.

Introduction

The SDGs are intended to be universal, while at the same time allowing each country to develop its own approach to implementation – and thereby represents an opportunity for change in thinking about domestic and international development and the governance thereof.

In the study, commissioned by the European Parliament, and summarized in this chapter, we take stock of how the EU and EU Member States have responded to the challenges posed by the SDGs. The study analyses and compares the governance frameworks, institutions and mechanisms put in place in EU Member States and at the EU level to implement the SDGs. It in particular captures the roles and activities of national parliaments, and presents a policy-relevant assessment of the ‘readiness’ to achieve SDGs by 2030.

We provide a comprehensive and current (early 2019) overview of the existing and planned governance frameworks in all the 28 EU Member States based on a clear methodological approach present an in-depth overview of these governance frameworks through the lens of seven governance elements, highlight examples of good practices, and provide observations and reflections. For the EU level, we present an overview of the steps taken by the EU institutions for Agenda 2030 implementation, and an overview on how the seven governance elements feature at EU level. The report also takes stock of the activities by national parliaments in EU Member States.

It should be noted that we did not analyze the substantive decision-making or even specific policies rather focused on the architecture of governance for implementing and integrating the SDGs into national governance.

The study is based on desktop research, on existing surveys and studies at the country level, and performed interviews at national and EU level (altogether around 45). It also builds on our existing intelligence gathered on SDG matters in all EU institutions since the adoption of the Agenda 2030, on previous studies on internal governance mechanisms in the European Parliament, on experience in the Multi-stakeholder platform on SDGs of the European Commission, on a very good network of sustainable development (governance) experts and stakeholders in governments, civil society and academia, and on country level research and experience in sustainability governance by all team members, both in the domestic and external dimensions of the SDGs.

Methodology

We developed a unique analytical framework, collected data from a variety of sources, and assessed each Member State, and conducted our own empirical research by analyzing original data, surveys and reports and enhanced and verified this with the input of relevant experts and practitioners through interviews. For this empirical research, we developed an analytical framework (Table 1) which integrates various perspectives on governance for sustainable development, and elaborated an assessment scheme for the governance elements. These steps move beyond previous work on this topic as it offers both a comprehensive comparative overview of each Member State as well as an aggregated perspective and assessment of institutionalization.

The framework integrates five key governance elements and principles for sustainable development, corresponding Agenda 2030 principles and the OECD's building block for policy coherence, hence offering a comprehensive approach to understanding governance for sustainable development. Our analytical framework uses the seven key governance principles of commitment, horizontal and vertical coordination, participation, knowledge, monitoring and continuity and links them with Agenda 2030 principles: universality, interconnectedness, leave no one behind, and partnerships. Improving policy coherence for sustainable development ('PCSD', SDG target 17.14) across policy sectors, between internal (domestic) and external/international policies and law, as well as between levels of administration is essential to achieve the SDGs.

For the national level, a first round of desktop research on all 28 EU Member States took stock of the governance arrangements that have been put in place, both in terms of institutions as well as processes. Desk research was complemented by at least one interview in all Member States, including e-mail exchange about the analysis in many cases. This resulted in country fiches for each Member State (see Annex 1 in the original study) through which we mapped out governance mechanisms and procedures at national level.

At the EU level, the study applied the same assessment framework and was based on desktop research and interviews, and builds on information shared in the Multi-Stakeholder Platform on SDGs, including direct exchange with the Secretariat-General of the European Commission that serves as secretariat, as well as with other involved Commission services (e.g. DG International Cooperation and Development (Devco), DG Environment, and Eurostat).

Desktop research – We conducted desktop research focussed on three main data sources with broad coverage across all or many Member States about national level governance and implementation of the SDGs, as well as additional secondary data. These main data sources are the Voluntary National Reviews (VNR) of EU Member States, the European Sustainable Development Network (ESDN) Country Profiles and related reports, and the OECD Country Profiles for Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development (PCSD). We also used the SDG Index and Dashboard Report 2018's chapter on G20 countries by Bertelsmann and SDSN for three countries. A note on the VNRs: By the end of the 2018 High Level Political Forum, most EU Member States had published a Voluntary National Review (VNR) during any of the HLPF sessions. These reports constitute important input for the study, but they should be seen in context: self-reporting usually does not highlight the weaknesses of national approaches hence needed to be complemented and corroborated with other sources.

Interviews – The desktop research has been accompanied by interviews with one or two individuals per Member State, who are experts on the process nationally and capable to have a

balanced view. These semi-structured interviews were initially conducted with one government representative from each Member State. A second round of interviews was conducted in four of the national parliaments that have mechanisms in place for mainstreaming the SDGs, as well as in the European Parliament with respect to cooperation with national parliaments.

Constraints: It is generally understood that there is no one-size fits all approach to implement the SDGs at national and subnational level, but there are lessons to be learnt between countries. While it is outside of the scope of this study to include detailed contextual considerations, the interview process and the background knowledge of the researchers allowed for some considerations of contextual information, such as how public administration and governance are organized, how parliaments, subnational governments and stakeholders are involved, how reforms are decided and implemented, and what might be typical strengths and pitfalls of SDG approaches chosen in each country. It is also beyond the scope of this study to provide a comprehensive picture of the vertical coordination with sub-national government across all Member States in order to identify coordination mechanisms or tools for policy coherence.

Assessment Scheme – Following the data gathering at the country level, the findings of the country fiches are captured and summarized by theme and across all countries, i.e. for the seven governance elements for sustainable development that structure this study. The assessment scheme for this is based on the assumption that a higher degree of institutionalization is positive for the implementation of the SDGs. This assessment scheme provides an indication only for where a country stands with respect to the governance elements analyzed in this study. Note that the scheme assesses, at a high granularity, the design of the governance framework. It does neither assess the effectiveness (functioning and quality) of the governance framework, nor the impact.

SDG implementation in EU Member States

Commitment, Strategy and its Monitoring and Review Process

The SDGs need a translation into the national context, which requires a strategic understanding of what the SDGs mean in that context. We looked at how countries integrate the SDGs in their national plans and strategies and their respective starting points, including previous commitments. We defined assessment criteria in which countries with currently no overarching, cross-sectoral strategy were graded with 0 points (UK and Portugal), countries which have some cross-sectoral long-term strategy in place, more or less linked to sustainable development graded with 1 point (Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, France and the Netherlands). The countries that have recently updated their sustainable development strategy or development plan or adopted a new one were graded with 2 points (Belgium, Greece, Lithuania, Malta, Slovakia and Sweden). The countries that signaled visible measures of operationalization of the adopted strategy or plan received three points (Czechia, Germany, Estonia, Italy, Latvia, Luxemburg, Romania, Slovenia and Spain) and those that in addition linked their strategy to the national budget received four points (Denmark and Finland). About half of the Member States are about to take measures to operationalize their strategies or to link them to the budget: Croatia, Estonia, France, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Slovakia, Spain and Sweden.

The robustness of the monitoring and review framework has been assessed along the following criteria: Countries with no or no clear monitoring framework so far (Bulgaria, Austria, Greece

and Spain) received 0 points. The countries that reported regular progress report but none of the other elements of a robust monitoring framework (Belgium, Croatia, Hungary, Malta, Portugal, Romania) received 1 point, and the ten countries that have regular progress reports and have updated their indicator sets since the SDGs (Czechia, Estonia, France, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Sweden and the UK) were graded with 2 points. In addition, a few countries have quantified and time bound targets. Those were graded with 3 points (Denmark, Latvia, Luxemburg, the Netherlands, Slovenia), unless they also have recently conducted an independent peer review of their strategy in which case they received 4 points (Finland, Germany).

The majority of EU countries has or did have at some point in recent history a sustainable development strategy. Eight countries adopted their sustainable development strategy in the years 2002 or 2003 as a result of the 2002 Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development (Germany, France, Italy, Poland, Austria, Slovakia, Lithuania and the Netherlands). Other countries followed between 2004 and 2007 (Finland, Estonia, Czechia, Malta, Portugal, Spain). The Portuguese SD strategy expired in 2015 and has not been updated yet. There are a few Member States that have a tradition of sustainable development strategies dating back even longer. Sweden, adopted a first sustainable development strategy in 1994, Ireland in 1997, Luxemburg and Romania followed in 1999, and Belgium in 2000. The UK is an interesting example because it was among the very early countries, adopting a sustainable development strategy in 1994 and 1999. They then changed the approach towards mainstreaming sustainable development into sectoral policies in 2011 after closing down the sustainable development commission. Bulgaria has a National Programme for Development that is linked to the EU 2020 strategy, and is planning a VNR in 2020, which might align this more with the SDGs.

We see that there are great discrepancies between the countries. The sometimes limited political weight of sustainable development strategies was and is a widely shared challenge, often because environment ministries were leading the efforts. A connected challenge is that too often sustainable development strategies lack clear measures of operationalization and have only limited impact on sectoral policy choices and budgetary arbitrations. Many countries integrate the SDGs into existing strategies rather than to create a new one. Some countries links the SDGs to national development plans (Croatia) or (green) growth programs (Greece) and these plans are often linked to the EU 2020 strategy. The majority of countries uses the SDGs to revise their sustainable development strategy (Finland, Germany). For some countries, the SDGs were an occasion to broaden their sustainable development approach that was very environmentally focused so far (Italy).

A robust monitoring and review framework is also crucial for an effective and operational strategy. Most of the countries (around 23) have revised or updated their indicators with the SDGs. The 2030 Agenda encourages countries to add national indicators to follow up on SDG implementation, so countries often mix UN indicators and EU or national indicators. Some countries only use Eurostat indicators, either because of a lack of statistical capacity or because they find them more relevant. A few countries based the selection of national indicators on a participatory approach (e.g. France, Finland). Although the 2030 agenda emphasizes 'leaving no one behind', only very few countries (Denmark and Romania) have specifically mentioned efforts to take measures to implement this principle and a few countries attempt to improve the

measurement of spillover effects (Germany, Spain). Only Finland and Germany have an independent review mechanism.

A number of countries have underlined the need of an EU wide SDG implementation approach, especially for the areas where EU competence is concerned or where competence is shared. A few countries seem to be waiting for an EU 2030 strategy as a follow up of EU2020 and that integrates the SDGs. Such a strategy would make it easier to steer the national dynamic.

Leadership and Horizontal Coordination

In order to have a truly integrated and indivisible approach to sustainable development, policy coherence must be a cornerstone of governance of sustainable development. Two important entry points for understanding, analyzing, and assessing policy coherence in EU Member States are to look at how and where leadership on this agenda takes place in government, and the mechanisms for horizontal coordination across government.

Leadership at the center of government has been promoted as beneficial for sustainability governance. Leadership and coordination are in themselves important aspects of sustainable development governance, but are inextricably linked. We have therefore evaluated these two aspects together. The assessment scheme awarded 0 points to countries with no ministerial lead or ownership, 1 point to leadership by 1 or 2 Ministries, 3 points to countries with leadership at the center of government, 4 points to those countries that in addition have coordination mechanism with clear engagement across ministries, and the full five points to those who also show improved coordination between external and internal implementation.

In 13 Member States we found leadership for the implementation and governance of the SDGs to be with the Heads of State and Government (Austria, Bulgaria, Czechia, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania and Slovakia). While this is an important indicator of the SDGs being a political priority, this level of leadership needs to be supported by sufficient coordination mechanisms at the working level in the Ministries. In every case of central leadership, such a coordination mechanism exists. In states where there is no central leadership on the SDGs, the coordination mechanisms which link ministries horizontally across government are the main mechanisms for policy coherence at the political level. Visible coordination mechanism with clear engagement across all ministries existed in 17 Member States (Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Netherlands, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden). In addition, every Member State except for the United Kingdom utilizes some kind of coordination mechanism, even where it does not engage with all ministries. In some cases, such as Ireland, Netherlands, Poland and Sweden, a new coordination mechanism has been created to specifically address horizontal coordination and policy coherence for the SDGs. There are a number of countries with designated focal points within Ministries to support internal mainstreaming of the SDGs and collaboration (France, Slovenia and the Netherlands, Germany).

An additional aspect of coordination, which is a key part of policy coherence for the SDGs is the way in which coordination between external and internal implementation of the SDGs takes place. Few states had an explicit focus on bridging the gap between the domestic and international aspects of the 2030 Agenda. In some countries, steps to ensure coherence are taken through the coordination mechanism itself, or it is tackled as specific task.

Not all Member States have leadership at the center of government, and for some, leadership and ownership of the SDGs remains divided between environmental aspects and the development aspects, to the corresponding Ministries, even when there is a clear coordination mechanism in place. In such cases the division usually is between environmental ministries (or similar) dealing with internal aspects and the ministries of foreign affairs (or similar) dealing with external and international aspects. This is the case in 12 Member States (Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, France, Greece, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia and Sweden). In the United Kingdom, no leading ministry has been identified. One way to address this, is through a coordination where all ministries participate. However, some countries, such as Croatia, Malta, Poland, Portugal and the United Kingdom, do not require all ministries to participate in horizontal coordination.

While every Member State, except the United Kingdom, features some kind of coordination mechanism, not all are designed to overcome the longstanding rift between environmental policies and economic development policies – a schism that Agenda 2030 seeks to overcome.

Stakeholder Participation

Participation of stakeholders is integral to the implementation of Agenda 2030. Participation and inclusion of stakeholders is important to create ownership and hence foster that policies and targets are pursued across multiple levels of society. Aligning stakeholders and non-state actors with governmental policies, through meaningful participation, can be a way to ensure policy and goal coherence beyond the national government. In our assessment scheme, the higher the degree of involvement the higher the rating. Countries with just a consultation get 1 point, with an enhanced process and/or regular participation some kind of coordination mechanism, forum, or dialogue get 2 points, and countries with an institutionalized mechanism for multi-stakeholder participation, including those linked to or mixed with governmental coordination bodies, get 3 point. Countries that take additional step, such as direct involvement of CSOs in the HLPF, were assessed with 4 points.

Almost all Member States have some form of participation mechanism. Overall, we identified four different kinds of mechanisms for stakeholder participation: 1) through a – sometimes one-off – consultation, 2) through an enhanced process of participation, as forum or other informal body, 3) through an dedicated body, either established as independent sustainable development council, or as body intertwined with the government structure which also includes stakeholders. Some states have additional elements for participation, often in relation to a specific venue (like the VNR or HLPF) or aspect of policy. The difference between an independent council and an integrated body is not necessarily a sign of further institutionalization, as the difference between the designs of these two different kinds of mechanisms is often the result of contextual factors.

Four countries do not have specific mechanisms for stakeholder participation (Cyprus, Malta, Spain and the United Kingdom, with Spain and Malta having plans). There are 18 countries where the national sustainable development strategy, before or after the SDGs, was done in consultation with society, and 12 countries who completed the VNR's with stakeholder participation or consultation. We found that a consultation process was not a precondition for other participation mechanisms. Some countries that do not have a specific consultation process for the development of their sustainable development strategies or policies, or for their VNRs, but have other forms of participation (Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Lithuania,

Netherlands). Some have other participation mechanisms in the form of a bottom-up stakeholder led initiative, while others have institutionalized steps such as a committee or forum which exists either integrated within the national government context, as an independent council or advisor connected to the national government.

There are two ways in which more formalized participation mechanisms are designed to facilitate stakeholder participation: The first is through an independent council or forum and the second is through a body, which is integrated into the governance setting and includes government actors. These kinds of specialized institutions, indicating a deeper level of institutionalization of participation, do not all function in the same way, and the impact of these is largely dependent on contextual settings and governance norms. Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Germany, Portugal, Poland, and Sweden all have independent bodies, but no institution that is integrated within the government. These are councils or forums, which are independent of government, but participation is based on collaboration or advice to government bodies, rather than integration in decision making or planning. Sometimes this can be less, in particular in the case of Poland and Denmark, where the connection to government activities is not systematic. Alternatively, Czechia, Latvia and Slovakia, have integrated councils but not independent ones. Seven Member States have developed dual approach with on one hand a formal institutional setting for participation processes and is integrated with the national government as well as an independent body (Luxembourg, Lithuania, Ireland, Hungary, France, Finland and Croatia). Half of the Member States have complementary mechanisms to facilitate inclusion of diverse groups or further integration of stakeholders (Belgium, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal and Slovakia). Some of these mechanisms include participation in Development Cooperation councils (as in Czechia), or youth participation mechanisms (as in Denmark and Finland). The decision to involve stakeholders has become a somewhat mainstream norm across Member States.

Knowledge input via science-policy interface, SDG budgeting and impact assessments

Integrating knowledge from different sources can foster reflexivity and learning, as well as evidence-based policymaking. Knowledge on interlinkages between SDGs is especially relevant in the context of the 2030 Agenda. We evaluated three key tools for policy-making: 1) mechanisms to strengthen the science-policy interface, 2) SDG budgeting, and 3) impact assessments for sustainable development. In our assessment scheme we did not value one of these tools higher than the other. Instead, we based our assessment on the accumulation of tools. The more tools for evidence-based and coherent policymaking a country has put in place, the higher it is ranked. We also accounted for more detailed aspects in the degree of institutionalization. For example, a country that involves science representatives in its sustainable development council is graded with a point, whereas a country that has developed a dedicated science-policy interface mechanism for sustainable development gets 2 points.

Four countries are most advanced in terms of the number of tools in use or in a pilot phase (Denmark, Finland, France and Latvia). They are followed by Germany, Greece and Italy. Six countries have at least one advanced tool in place (Belgium, Cyprus, Czechia, Slovakia, Sweden, United Kingdom). Most countries have a rather light version of tools in place (Croatia, Estonia, Hungary, Ireland, Lithuania, Luxemburg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain). Finally, Austria and Bulgaria have not signaled any of the three strategic tools. Altogether twelve countries are currently developing new tools and could

potentially rank higher soon (Croatia, Czechia, Denmark, France, Ireland, Malta, Netherlands, Romania, with Slovakia and Spain planning the most comprehensive reforms).

Looking at our results, it seems that many countries recognize the important role science can play to inform policies towards sustainable development. Nine countries have specifically mentioned that they include representatives from science and academia in their sustainable development councils, commissions and other participatory mechanisms and two others plan to do so. In only a few countries, we observe a more institutionalized science-policy interface mechanism for the SDGs (Germany, Finland).

In terms of impact assessments for sustainable development it seems that, an increasing number of countries seize SDGs as an opportunity to better assess the impacts of policies. Nineteen countries mention that they use some kind of impact assessment as a tool for sustainable development, ranging from a broad (sustainability) impact assessment (SIA) across all dimensions of sustainable development (as in place at EU level) to a lighter sustainability checks as part of a system of regulatory impact assessment (RIA).

Integration of SDGs into budgetary processes is taken up by ten countries directly or indirectly (Croatia, Denmark, Finland, France, Ireland, Italy, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, and Sweden). There are several ways in which countries use or plan to use the SDGs as a tool for a more coherent budgetary process. The first method by which governments integrate SDGs is that they include qualitative—and more rarely quantitative—elements on SDG implementation in the budget documents they propose to parliament. However, very few countries signaled that they were using the SDGs in concrete way. Nevertheless, this idea is also gaining momentum globally. Of the 64 countries that submitted a national voluntary review during the 2016 and 2017 sessions of the High-level Political Forum, 23 mentioned ongoing or planned measures to link the SDGs to the national budget.

Long-term perspective

While a long-term perspective is a core principle underpinning governance for sustainable development, and the concept of sustainable development itself, this is not always explicitly incorporated in governance architectures. We looked for a diverse range of strategies or policies, or new institutions that were understood to address this issue. Institutions, which deal with a long-term perspective, can be either 'future-focused', as in designed specifically about the future, or 'future-beneficial', related in some way to the future.

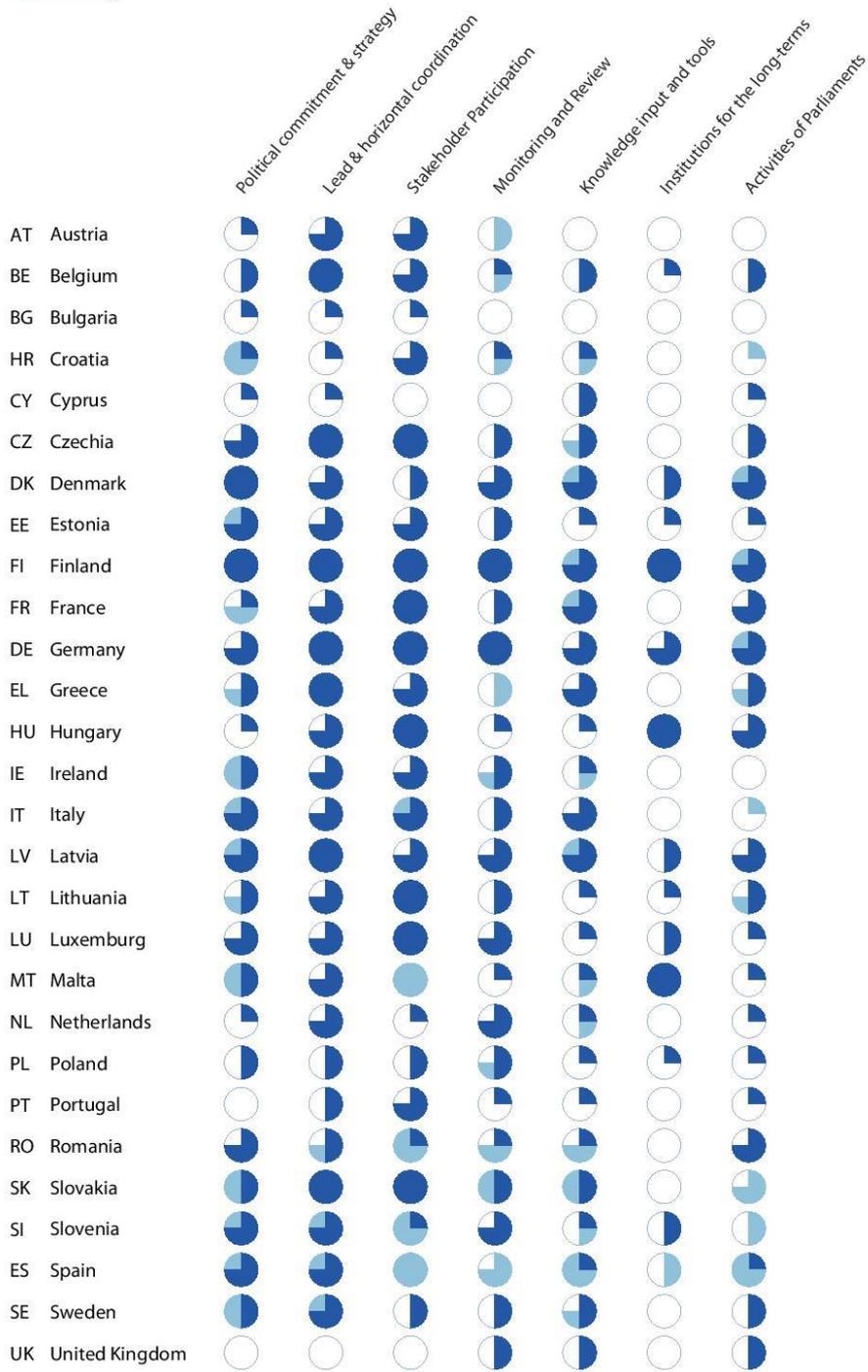
Graded with 0 points were such countries without any priority on future issues, a 1 point was awarded to those that stated a priority but undertook no steps. The 3 points went to countries that took measures but without an institutionalization and 4 points to countries with an explicit institutionalization of long-term future dimensions.

We identified that 13 Member States use a diverse range of mechanisms to try to account for the long-term perspective. These ranged across a wide spectrum of institutional settings and demonstrate varying amounts of institutionalization. Out of these, 4 (Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia and Poland) recognized the importance without further action taken, 4 others (Belgium, Denmark, Luxemburg and Slovenia) have developed at least one additional measure to facilitate a long term perspective. Germany has an institution with a specific remit, focus, or explicit priority for the consideration of a long-term perspective within an existing mechanism or structure in its Parliamentary Advisory Committee for Sustainable Development. This

example demonstrates the way in which a long-term perspective can be anchored within the governance system without designing new institutions which might be too politically sensitive or require too many additional resources. Three Member States have developed institutions, which hold the specific remit of facilitating a focus on the long term in governance and sustainable development (Malta, Hungary and Finland).

One of the fundamental problems in governance is how to overcome the typical political short-termism of democratic systems to be able to sufficiently adhere to the underlying principle of sustainable development. This problem is crucially for policy coherence because we consider short-term targets for some sectors (economic, labor, etc.) and long term targets for others (environment). And one conclusion is that while specific institutions, can help to raise the priority of long-term thinking and inject some amount of influence on the policymaking process, as long as institutions such as this remain siloed their impact will remain limited.

Summary



Concept Ingeborg Niestroy | Design Katja Derr

■ implemented ■ planned

SDG implementation at EU level

In the full study for the European Parliament, we look at EU level activities and processes related to Agenda 2030 by the European Commission, Council of the European Union, European Parliament, and their main advisory bodies, the European Economic and Social Committee, and the Committee of the Regions, and provide a comprehensive overview per institution on a timeline from 2014 until 2018/2019. In this summary, we skip this, and refer to the original study. We do however present here the analysis of governance mechanisms at EU level for which we used the analytical framework as applied for the Member States.

Horizontal coordination and lead responsibility

The Commission is often commended for its explicit horizontal coordination approach which is more elaborated than in some Member States. The fact that the Commission is a College with makes joint decisions is favorable in this regard. In addition, the Commission is less political than national governments, hence less prone to short-termism and more time is dedicated to fact-finding. There is a clear lead role in the Commission (Note: we refer her to the Juncker Commission that was in function at the time of the study) with the First Vice-President assigned as horizontal coordinator for sustainable development at the political level. The Commission's coordination approach is hence more centralized than in most Member States where sectoral Ministers tend to have more a decision-making. The strong central control has the advantage of clarity of responsibility, but typically such situations are not beneficial to creating ownership in the policy departments, and there might be less of a balancing of interests. At the working level, so-called interservice groups are set up for cross-sectoral topics, which are led by the responsible directorates-general (DG) and open to all others. The Impact Assessment system helps ensuring that – and structuring how – different policy objectives can be weighed, made compatible and where conflicts arise, are reconciliated. Such an interservice group was also formed for the SDGs, with the Secretariat-General in the lead, which meets infrequently

In November 2017, the Council established an institutional innovation for horizontal coordination to bring together the external and domestic dimension in the form of a dedicated Council Working Party on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It aims to ensure proper follow-up, monitoring and review of the implementation at EU level, across internal and external policy sectors, of commitments under the 2030 Agenda. Its recommendations are forwarded to the General Affairs Council (GAC).

Since 2006, the EESC has an institutional arrangement for sustainable development in the form of the Sustainable Development Observatory. This body is more deliberative and does not have a horizontal coordination function – although there may be scope for such a function. The chair of the SDO participates on behalf of the EESC in the Commission's Multi-Stakeholder Platform. In the CoR, opinions on sustainable development issues are generally coordinated by the Commission for Economic Policy (ECON), which participates on behalf of the CoR in the MSP.

Vertical coordination

Agenda 2030 calls for a partnership approach to implement the SDGs; not only between public administration, business and civil society, but also among public institutions. The latter implies that the traditional coordination between different levels of administration should be

supplemented with collaborative mechanisms. The EU and its Member States are a multi-level configuration with the 'acquis communautaire' including the Treaties providing a governance framework. For areas with limited EU competences, but the desire or need to coordinate and collaborate, coordination mechanisms are typically more inspired by soft law partnership approaches. A meanwhile well-established approach is the Open method of Coordination (OMC) as introduced in the Lisbon Strategy of the EU (2000) for economic policies. The key examples of SDG-relevant OMC-type two-level collaboration are the European Semester cycle of economic and social governance and the biannual Environmental Implementation Review process, together covering the three dimensions of sustainable development.

Stakeholder engagement

The European Commission has a long-standing tradition and experience with organizing public consultation on new policy and legislative proposals, even more extensive and earlier in the process since the introduction of its Impact Assessment mechanism some 15 years ago. In general, the Commission's level of public consultation is probably higher than in most Member States. The involvement of the public usually takes the form of online consultations, while broad dialogue meetings and alike – as have been conducted in Member States on Agenda 2030 – are missing.

Stakeholders are also involved in Commission expert groups in personal capacity or representing their organisations. Besides the many expert groups focusing on a specific policy area or piece of legislation, there are high-level expert groups advising on more strategic and cross-cutting themes (such as the High-Level Group on Sustainable Finance). Also the Commission's Multi-Stakeholder Platform on SDGs is an example of the latter category. It is meant to support and advise the Commission on SDG implementation, as well as to promote exchange of best practice between different stakeholders.

The EESC, an EU institution that is established as 'the institution of organized civil society', offers a venue for broad debate and is very active in sustainable development, in particular through its Sustainable Development Observatory (SDO). The SDO is a cross-cutting body that aims to tackle sustainable development policies in a horizontal way and brings together people and organizations from a wide variety of interests and backgrounds that would otherwise seldom meet, in order to connect and explore new ways to address sustainable development issues.

The CoR represents the interests of regions and municipalities, who are essential links in the multi-level governance chain that prepares and implements EU policies and legislation. The members of the EESC and CoR are appointed by the Member States according to nationally determined processes. The institutional design of both advisory bodies does not ensure an effective exchange of good practices and encountered obstacles. Besides EESC and CoR, there are multiple networks of cities, regions, capitals, environmental and social NGOs, and business organizations advocating for their concerns and interests in the Brussels arena. EESC and CoR offer a welcome venue and platform.

The European Parliament has established the good practice to invite stakeholder representatives to hearings, which precede the political debates on draft resolutions - and similarly many national parliaments. If this is done in a transparent way, it is a good practice for two reasons:

it brings together specific expertise and ideas, and it creates an inclusive culture of dialogue on the SDGs.

Monitoring and review

Monitoring of SDG implementation at EU level is so far done with the Eurostat's annual indicator reports. Civil society groups, the EESC, the European Parliament, and the Multi-Stakeholder Platform criticized some key methodological aspects of the Eurostat report. The main deficit of the report, however, is rooted outside of the remit of Eurostat, namely in the fact that for many areas there are no EU targets.

Monitoring is best organized in a cyclical process and embedded in a dedicated governance framework. This is the case for the European Semester, which enables the EU member countries to coordinate their economic policies throughout the year and address the economic challenges facing the EU. While it was created for monitoring the implementation of the Europe 2020 strategy, which covers in principle the three dimensions of sustainable development, it has become increasingly narrow and focused on macro-economic aspects. There have been (repeated) attempts from several sides to widen it again, but the success has remained limited (inter alia, as it has been used as tool in the efforts to overcome the financial crisis). Since 2017, the economic focus of the Semester is broadened with a social dimension.

As it is a well-established governance mechanism, the Semester is an obvious instrument for monitoring the implementation of the SDGs. All involved actors, apart from the Commission, are recommending this and preferably would like to see it to be transformed into a Sustainability Review. There are also proposals for the formation of a new Sustainable Development Council to be placed between sectoral Councils and the European Council and composed of Ministers who are domestically in charge of SDG policy coherence.

Knowledge and tools

All three aspects of knowledge and tools considered in this study are relevant at the EU level. The EU's Impact Assessment (IA) system, which was introduced after the first EU Sustainable Development Strategy, is a globally appreciated merge of regulatory IA and sustainability IA. The EU is still considered a global leader on sustainability, but its own IA guidelines and IA practice are now lagging behind: economic impacts and considerations dominate environmental and social impacts and considerations.

An opportunity at the EU level to link the SDGs with the budgeting process is the ongoing negotiation on the Multi-Annual Financial Framework (MFF) 2020-2027. The High-Level Expert Group on Sustainable Finance, a temporary expert group established in 2016 to provide advice to the Commission, recommended to apply a 'think sustainability first' principle for EU policy-making and in impact assessments. On the NGOs side, the 'People's Budget' campaign also asks for such a sustainability check in the budget process. None of this has materialized so far.

Efforts to improve the science-policy interface are partly covered under stakeholder participation, with the various high-level groups advising the Commission. The Commission also has its own 'in-house think tank', the European Policy Strategy Centre, which provides the President and the College with strategic, evidence-based analysis and forward-looking policy advice. Furthermore, the Commission has its in-house research service, the Joint Research

Centre, which conducts applied research and tools on demand of the policy DGs and on its own initiative, with the motto: 'We are doing science for policy'.

Long-term orientation

There are no dedicated institutions or mechanisms to guard the long-term at EU level, but there is a tradition to work with comprehensive 10-year strategies such as The Lisbon Strategy and the Europe 2020 Strategy. Scenario techniques are increasingly used during policy preparation, with the JRC having developed supporting tools and expertise. Political discontinuity is a challenge for long-term orientation. Similarly, as was argued for the horizontal coordination, the Commission has a benefit over most Member States in that it historically – also because of institutional arrangements – has been significantly less prone to frequent or radical shifts in policy directions.

Role of Parliaments

In our study, we undertook an extensive review of the role of parliaments in relation to Agenda 2030 and present findings from the country level analysis on the activities of national parliaments to integrate Agenda 2030 in their work, and address what the European Parliament has done so far. We also discuss how the inter-parliamentary collaboration could be used and improved for Agenda 2030, and how the European Parliament could support national parliaments in their role in SDG implementation.

Parliaments in light of Agenda 2030 have three key roles and powers: A legislative function, budgetary power, and scrutiny and monitoring. The integration principle of the SDGs is more challenging for parliaments than for governments. This because the hierarchical structures within political groups or parties in parliament and the role of 'party whip', is much less forceful in comparison to hierarchical structures in the executive branch – although this differs quite much in different political cultures. In addition, the institutional setup and processes of parliaments is in general not structured in favor of overarching issues as the ones needed for sustainable development. Parliaments are typically structured around two axes: One along the political groups / fractions, and a second along the thematic committees, which more or less mirror the structure of the government.

Dealing with overarching issues requires leadership, and horizontal and vertical coordination. The 'problem' in parliaments (incl. European Parliament), is that they do not have a leadership on substance. There is typically a President or Speaker, but that role is representational and managerial. While substantive coordination mechanisms exist, these are often rather on procedure than on substance, different from comparable mechanism in government.

As in the analysis of Member States and the EU, our assessment of the parliaments follows the same approach and grades the three most relevant functions of parliaments: Putting the SDGs on the agenda and organizing a debate, often as one-off (1 point), placing one or two committees in charge of SDGs (2 points), establishing new institutional arrangement (3 points), and applying tools for one or more functions (scrutiny, legislative, budget) in a systematic way (4 points).

The systematic 4 points approach is currently only undertaken or planned in Germany, Finland, Denmark (and previously Latvia). In 22 national parliaments there have been efforts, in three countries there are planned activities (Croatia, Slovakia, Slovenia), and the three remaining

national parliaments have no recognizable activities or plans (Austria, Bulgaria, Ireland). Overall, it can be said that the activities of parliaments have clearly increased since the adoption of the SDGs. The lowest degree of institutional response to Agenda 2030 by parliaments was found in six countries (Cyprus, Estonia, Luxemburg, Malta, Netherlands, Portugal), and one with plans (Croatia). Some countries mentioned that, for example, the VNR was discussed in the parliament, in plenary (Denmark), explicitly in two chambers (Czechia, and Spain), or in joint committee meetings (Belgium). More steps are taken in about seven countries (and planned in Slovenia). The case of one or more existing committees taking responsibility for Agenda 2030 applies to five countries (Czechia, Finland, France, Sweden, and UK), and more regular joint committee meetings or an explicit obligation to integrate the SDGs in all policy areas in two (Belgium and Greece).

There are clearly more activities of parliaments on Agenda 2030 than was the case for sustainable development before the adoption of Agenda 2030 and the Hungarian example for instance confirms the hypothesis that a certain degree of institutionalization provides for some continuity. There is little systematic approach to dealing with the SDGs in parliaments throughout the three functions of parliaments but parliaments also have, if they want, room for innovation and experiments.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Europe's approach to implementing the Sustainable Development Goals: good practices and the way forward" is the first study that not only compares but also assesses SDG implementation processes and governance mechanisms in all EU Member States. One of our main findings is that most EU countries have launched new strategies, coordination mechanisms and stakeholder participation processes for SDG implementation but that they need to go operational now and link strategies to their national budget. When it comes to monitoring, many countries have revised their indicators with the SDGs but only very few countries go as far as organizing an independent progress review.

We have also looked at parliament activities. An increasing number of parliaments have special committees or initiatives related to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Challenges remain when it comes to overcoming the silos of Committees and more tools could be invented to improve scrutiny and monitoring to advance SDGs.

At the EU level, we can say that the European Commission has not fulfilled its intention to mainstream the SDGs in all policies. As we have originally recommended in our study, the European Semester for economic monitoring presents a useful two-level governance mechanism that could be harnessed for advancing the SDGs in a holistic manner. It is therefore a welcome development that the new Commissioner for the Economy is now in charge of coordinating the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in the context of the European Semester cycle of economic governance.

When we look at all the governance dimensions, we have analyzed and assessed in this study, we see a mixed picture when it comes to SDG implementation processes in the Member States, with an overall positive impression.

When it comes to commitment and strategy, only two countries have no overarching cross-sectoral strategy, six countries have one but without a recent update. Most of these countries plan to revise their sustainable development strategies or development plans with the SDGs.

Seventeen countries already have updated national strategies. Only in around half of all the Member States, these strategies appear to be actually operational. And so far, only a few countries go as far as to link their overarching strategy to the national budget or to a financing plan.

Regarding leadership and horizontal coordination, half of the countries have put in place visible coordination mechanisms with clear engagements across all departments and often have moved SDG implementation leadership to the center of government. Most countries still struggle, however, to put in place effective coordination mechanisms between the external and internal dimension of SDG implementation.

Stakeholder participation varies widely between Member States. At the same time, it is the governance element where the highest number of countries, namely 8, rank in the highest category of the assessment scheme, i.e. where stakeholder participation is highly institutionalized and frequent. Extensive efforts are done to make SDG implementation processes inclusive in most countries. However, there are still two countries that show no signs of stakeholder participation (for Agenda 2030).

Concerning monitoring and review, most countries rank in category 2, which means that they have regular progress reports, and that they have updated their indicator set with the SDGs. Only a few countries have defined quantified, time bound targets to achieve the SDGs nationally (category 3), and only two countries have put in place an independent, external review mechanism. The independence of review mechanisms would be an important improvement of quality and an opportunity to stimulate public debate around SDG progress.

Knowledge and tools and Institutions for the long term seem to be the areas where countries are the least advanced. When it comes to the input of scientific knowledge through science-policy interface and tools like sustainability impact assessments or sustainability checks for national budgets, only a few countries have put more than one tool in place and most countries have only created very light versions of it. Institutions for the long term are not a priority in the vast majority of countries.

Finally, regarding activities of parliaments for the 2030 Agenda, we again see quite a variety. There is about an equal number of countries that have so far only organized parliamentary debates on SDGs, and those that have one or two committees dealing with the Agenda 2030 or have created new institutional arrangements. To include the SDGs in all core parliamentary functions - to scrutinize implementation of the SDGs, to integrate them in legislation and in the budget, is still the exception.